

## **A qualitative study into the experiences of Higher Education for learners who are visually impaired**

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### **Abstract**

*Much has been written about the experiences of students with disabilities in Higher Education (HE henceforth), although little research draws upon students who are visually impaired (VI henceforth). Therefore, this research draws upon the topic 'the experiences of HE for learners who are VI' and it has three research aims:*

- *Inclusivity of HE for those who are visually impaired.*
- *Emotional well-being of those who are visually impaired.*
- *Support provided by school/college during students' transition to university.*

*Reference is made to previous research within this field. This has informed the content of the data analysis. The methodology section provides an understanding of the research design and justification, including reference to ethical considerations in relation to this paper. The data analysis employs illustrative quotes to represent fully the views and opinions of the participants regarding their experiences of HE and enables the researcher to flag up any limitations and recommendations regarding disability policy and practice. Insights into the areas of support, which have contributed to an inclusive HE experience, are recognised and those areas which have worked less well are uncovered.*

*This paper reflects on the findings from research into the experiences of students who are VI at HEIs within the UK. When support was provided, students were able to engage in their course successfully alongside their peers. However, one of the major issues concerned DSA support not being in place at the start of the participant's course, which resulted in missed academic and social opportunities. Questionnaires of an open-ended nature enabled a whole host of perspectives to be drawn upon and critically analysed.*

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study has been based upon figures provided in 2005 by HESA, which indicates that 0.13% of undergraduate students in the UK are blind/partially sighted (HESA, 2006). Since these figures were produced in 2005, very little research has been carried out in this field, and, as a result, the title used seemed appropriate. The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of students with VI, by examining the three areas noted within the abstract, namely; inclusivity of HE for those who are VI, emotional well-being of those who are VI and support provided by school/college during students' transition to university.

Previous research was drawn upon, particularly that put forward by Richardson and Roy (2002), which gave an insight into the experiences of students who are blind/partially sighted in HE. This study was undertaken on the premise that, 'it has

traditionally been assumed that students with a visual impairment are under-represented in HE because of their poor achievement in secondary education'. The authors anticipated the information gained would be used to develop support services for students with a VI. Meanwhile, Bishop and Rhind (2011) suggested that there are various factors that provide barriers and enablers to students with a VI in HE. Four barriers were identified: attitudinal, institutional, environmental and physical. The identification of these four barriers was important in 'informing the future plans of UK HEI's to enhance the HE experience of all students' (Bishop & Rhind, 2011), so all students may have a positive experience of HE. However, very little research followed this, the most recent research being published in 2011, indicating that this may not fully reflect current policies and practices regarding inclusion. Therefore, it was appropriate to provide more up to date research. This research has drawn upon the lived realities of students with a VI and their university experiences, re-evaluating the above studies and drawing upon the three aims, in an attempt to put some perspective on the areas which have proved successful.

Based upon my previous work in SEN which discusses disability and education, through developing inclusive practice and delivering inclusive education as well as deconstructing SEN combined with my continuous research into the experiences of HE for learners who are VI, it was important to refer to the choice of language used to represent the participants. 'Students with a VI' was the title chosen to describe my participants. Bolt (2014) asserts 'there is no fixed solution to the problem of debating about words and their meanings, although people who have visual impairments is adopted as a compromise'. This choice of language explicitly takes on the ethos of the cultural model of disability and the person-first strategy.

In order to gain feedback to the research title and aims, questionnaires were distributed to participants via Google Docs. From this research, change could be implemented, particularly at a local level, to ensure that students with a VI are able to engage in a university experience, which is inclusive of their sighted peers. Therefore, it only seems logical that they will ultimately experience integration into the university environment.

## **Methodology**

Questions of an open-ended nature were used to address the research aims and to gather data, as mentioned in the Research Ethics Form (figure 1). Participants consisted of individuals with a VI from the MACS Charity (Micro Anophthalmic Children's Society), OnThisRoc para-climbing team and an online forum for people with visual impairment studying at Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in the UK. The questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to complete and was shared with participants via the researcher's Google Docs. account. The use of a questionnaire via Google Docs. was the chosen method of data collection as it was more accessible for screen reader users than a word document per se and 'allow[ed] participants' responses to remain anonymous, it encourage[d] greater honesty and due to time constraints it [was] more economical than the interview in terms of time and money' (Cohen et al, 2007).

The research question used a normative case study approach, which involved 'gathering facts and also pointing out in which respects the object of study could be

improved' (Routio, 2007). This purports to find out methods to ameliorate the issues surrounding negative experiences of HE for students who are VI. In order to reach conclusions from the research aims and question, information was sought from individuals with a VI who were studying at HEIs in the UK. Participants' ideas and values were collected relating to the research aims and questions. They were made aware of this at the start of the questionnaire. Comparisons were then drawn relating to participants' experiences of policies and practices concerning HE students with a VI within the UK. Facts were collected about the participants' university experiences regarding the quality of support services accessed.

This research took a qualitative approach as it used 'the resources that one has at hand (such as literature, analytic concepts and distinctions, common sense assumptions, research design) as a means of directing the interrogation of data' (Gibson in Hartas, 2010). In order to carry out this research, evidence was drawn not only from questionnaires, but also from literature and previous research carried out in this field. With regard to the questionnaires, it was anticipated participants would provide honest answers, which accurately reflected the research aim and questions.

A questionnaire was employed as that allowed the researcher to 'reach a large number of respondents in geographically dispersed areas with the minimum cost' (Hartas, 2010). A copy of the questionnaire has been provided (figure 4) to enable readers to see how the structure of the questionnaire and the questions asked of participants are relevant to this research. However, as that particular method did not provide direct contact with participants it was anticipated that there could be a reduced commitment of those completing and returning the questionnaire, resulting in a low response rate. Therefore, a short questionnaire with clear, well-worded questions and an information sheet explicitly outlining the research and what was required from participants was provided.

Throughout this research ethical considerations were strictly adhered to in accordance with the BERA Ethical Guidelines. According to standard practice the following key areas were addressed throughout: informed consent, the right to withdraw, privacy, anonymity and confidentiality and disclosure. According to the BERA Ethical Guidelines (2013) 'informed consent is the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway'. Therefore, it was the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that all participants fully understood how they were involved and how their information would be used. For this reason a research information sheet was provided to participants prior to the consent form. The research information sheet (figure 2) provides an outline of the research, stating its aims and the method of data collection, my university contact details and what participation in the research will involve. This is coupled with any benefits and risks which may arise. The final section of the research information sheet discusses withdrawal – what happens if participants no longer wish to take part in the research, and anonymity and confidentiality, which sets out how I will ensure participants' information is not shared with others, apart from my research supervisor.

Participants were able to withdraw from the research at any point, and they were informed of this undertaking while completing the consent form. This understanding was to be respected at all times by the researcher. If a participant chose to withdraw

from the research in full, or in part, this was something which would need to be examined to determine whether the 'researcher contribute[d] to the decision to withdraw and whether a change of approach might have persuaded participants to re-engage' (BERA, 2013). The participants had every right to re-engage with the research even if only partially.

Throughout the research, privacy was maintained at all times. This was in accordance with normal practice for the conduct of any research. It was incumbent upon the researcher to 'recognise the participants' entitlement to privacy and must accord them their rights to confidentiality and anonymity, unless they specifically and willingly waive[d] that right' (BERA, 2013). Equally, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), participants were, 'entitled to know how and why their personal data [was] being stored, to what uses it [was] being put and to whom it may be made available' (BERA, 2013). As the researcher, it was my responsibility to keep all data in a secure environment (password protected computer) and ensure that any publication resulting from the research did not lead to a breach of anonymity and confidentiality.

Any disclosure would be addressed throughout the research. However, if it came to light at any point that any illegal behaviour or behaviours harmful to the participant or others were evident, this would be disclosed to the appropriate authorities. 'The decision to override agreements on confidentiality and anonymity must be taken after careful and thorough deliberation' (BERA, 2013). Participants were debriefed at the conclusion of the research and copies of the final document made available to them upon request.

### **Analysis of data**

Content analysis in the form of systematic sampling was chosen as the method of data analysis. This follows a logical procedure: firstly, 'an appropriate sample of text is chosen. Using systematic sampling this adheres closely to the principle of random selection, the researcher selects items in a systematic way, picking every *n*th item from an appropriate list' (Denscombe, 2010). The text is broken down into smaller component units, and participants' whole answers from the selected question are analysed' (Denscombe, 2010). This was achieved by condensing the 12 raw data themes into 5 subordinate themes: level of study/university, whether participants were encouraged to go to university by teachers/tutors, support received at university, inclusivity, and effects of VI upon university experience and emotional well-being. This resulted in a culmination of participants' answers and 'the text has been analysed in terms of the frequency of the units and their relationship with other units that occur in the text' (Denscombe, 2010). Links were made between the participants' answers as to why they occur in a particular way. These subordinate themes allowed me (as the researcher) to establish what participants really thought about different aspects of their university experience. Illustrative quotes have been included to represent the views and opinions of the participants as fully as possible.

The sample employed for this research consisted of 13 participants, 8 of whom are known to me through the MACS Charity where I am a young persons' advocate. This role involves mentoring young people and adults who have the eye conditions microphthalmia and anophthalmia, specifically on young person's activity weekends,

but also providing advice on accessing support at university via phone conversation. However, for purposes of this research I did not engage in a mentoring role with the young people so as not to afford to them any bias. The remaining participants were sought through OnThisRoc para-climbing club, and the Association of VI Students UK – an online forum bringing students who are blind/VI together. From this relatively broad sample it was anticipated that a cross-section of experiences from several areas of the country could be gained. This enabled conclusions to be drawn on the students' experiences and on which universities appear to be providing a more inclusive experience for students who are blind/VI.

### Data analysis

#### Level of study / university

The first question to be analysed was that regarding participants' level of study and university.

- 9 out of 13 participants were studying at undergraduate level.
- 4 out of 13 participants were studying at postgraduate level.

The participants were then asked at which university they were studying. These consisted of various locations throughout the UK. Student 9, although studying at a university within the UK, had previous experience of three different universities in France during postgraduate studies.

The data provided is similar to research provided by Richardson and Roy (2002) in: 'The Representation and Attainment of Students with a Visual Impairment in Higher Education'. The current study is on a much smaller scale than Richardson and Roy's and comparisons can be drawn concerning the levels of study of students who are blind/VI. Within Richardson and Roy's study, 0.11% of undergraduate students (nationally) were reported as being blind/VI. This compares with 9 out of 13 students studying at undergraduate level in the current study. Again, drawing comparisons with Richardson and Roy's study, 0.1% of postgraduate students (nationally) were reported as being blind/VI. The current study found that 4 out of 13 students were studying at postgraduate level. This data indicated that there have not been significant changes in the representation and attainment of HE students who are blind/VI. However, modifications must be made, such as raising awareness of the support available to students who are blind/VI, during their time at school or college, to encourage such students to undertake an HE course.

#### Inclusivity of HE for those who are visually impaired

Participants were asked 'How inclusive would you consider HE to be for students who are VI?' 10 out of 13 participants indicated that they felt HE is inclusive (in terms of their disability). Four participants provided an explanation, while 3 participants indicated N/A in response to this question:

*'I feel more included now, but when I first started I felt like the first person ever to go to uni with a VI'*  
(participant 8).

*'I would say yes, absolutely. But my comparison is to the French system, which is not good at all for that...So yes, I am really happy in this university'*  
(participant 9).

*'To a degree, although I feel this is primarily due to me having a moderate VI. I'm now settled and support is in place. I am involved with the disability students association etc the University does seem to be fairly inclusive, although improvements can be made e.g. access to support'*  
(participant 11).

*'Yes, I think my tutors on the whole do what they can to make the course accessible for me, however I do not think this was the case when I was at [...] uni'*  
(participant 13).

The responses provided by participants 8, 11 and 13 indicate that until relevant DSA support was in place participants felt excluded. However, DSA support and the willingness of tutors to create an accessible learning environment ensured that participants felt HE was inclusive. The response provided by participant 13 draws the conclusion that not every HEI is inclusive to the needs of students with disabilities. Transition to another university could provide a more inclusive experience. Taking an international perspective, participant 9, who studies at a university in France, feels that, without making a comparison with the UK system, HE is inclusive.

The university referred to in Bishop and Rhind's (2011) study indicates that, 'the university's central provision for disabled students was very highly regarded [...] The support workers provided were an indispensable resource [...] and many students are engaged (to an extent) with the disability service' (Bishop & Rhind, 2011). This compares with the current study and the concept that the majority of students received support through DSA and their tutors to enable them to experience an inclusive university environment. The comparison between both areas of research confirms the notion that without DSA support, students who are blind/VI would not offer such positive responses regarding the inclusivity of their university and indeed their course.

Fuller et al (2004) highlight the significance of this research question, regarding the inclusivity of HE. Their paper presents a clear perspective on 'reducing barriers to learning and participation for all students' (Fuller et al, 2004). This has been achieved by 'considering legislative change and staff making physical and attitudinal adjustments in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities' (Fuller et al,

2004). Comparisons can be made between the current study and that published by Fuller et al (2004). Students in both studies have indicated that equipment such as dictaphones and human support in the form of note-takers have significantly contributed to their inclusive HE experience. Equally, experiences of assessment and their alternatives, such as extra time, positively contributed to an inclusive education. In summary, each student has differed in their readiness to ask for support in relation to their disability and as a result has received contrasting levels of help.

The next question to be asked of participants was 'what support do you receive at university?' Participant 1 did not receive any support while studying at university. As discussed prior to the research, this participant indicated:

*'My disability does not affect my education in any way'*  
(participant 1).

Meanwhile, participant 12 indicated that they received support through 'Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)'. The remaining participants listed the support they received.

The responses provided by participants enabled me to identify some similarities in terms of the support received:

- 7 out of 13 received note-taking support.
- 8 out of 13 received mobility training; two of these were also guided to and from classes.
- 4 out of 13 received extra time in exams.
- All 13 received various pieces of equipment such as: laptops, scanners, dictaphones, screen readers and braille displays.
- 5 out of the 13 participants indicated that the support detailed above was not in place at the start of their course. As a result they had to rely upon others to provide support on a voluntary basis.

Participant 8 commented that:

*'I received no mobility [training] for almost 2 months and no accessible resources for the first semester'*  
(participant 8).

Perhaps this is an area that could be investigated in future research. As seen in the current research, delay in support often means participants feel socially and academically isolated. Participants felt that they were unable to gain full benefit from their course until the relevant support and equipment was provided. Consequently they missed several weeks of teaching.

The support provided through DSA and the university compares with research provided by Owen-Hutchinson et al (1996) working in partnership with RNIB. The researchers indicated that various methods of support are relevant to the student who is blind/VI, when accessing their HE course. Examples of support recommended by the authors, which participants have also benefitted from, include: a tour of the campus, concentrating specifically on areas which the student needs to be familiar with, and full access to equipment, such as handheld/ desktop CCTV, text

to speech software – JAWS, braille embossers and dictaphones are also beneficial, as seen in the quotes. Universities should be willing to provide adaptations to learning materials: 'some materials are readily accessible, others can be partially adapted and others have to be used in different ways/alternatives considered' (Owen-Hutchinson et al, 1996). This can be achieved, as the participants have indicated, by providing resources in electronic, audio, braille or large print format. 'A book list should be made available to allow material to be made accessible. This applies at any time before or during the course' (Owen-Hutchinson, 1996). While the research published by Owen-Hutchinson et al, in partnership with RNIB, is relatively out-dated, it is still relevant - as much of the support recommended has been made available to participants.

The work of Gray and Morley-Wilkins (2005) indicates that 'larger HEI's offering more diverse subjects have more partially sighted students'. This resonates with this research, since the larger HEIs often have more specialist provision and presumably more funding to provide better access requirements and support to a wider range of disabled students' needs.

### Emotional well-being of those who are visually impaired

Participants were asked, 'how do you think having a VI affects your emotional well-being at university?' 11 out of 13 participants responded to this question, providing both positive and negative experiences. In studying these responses, it became apparent that this question links in with the subsequent question provided within the questionnaire – 'is/was the support you receive at university beneficial to your emotional well-being?' For purposes of the data analysis, these questions were analysed together.

*'It can hamper your social life as people don't want to be friends with you. You can't really join the sports teams as there's no disabled teams which is a great shame'*

(participant 5).

*'I feel excluded socially, this is due to missed opportunities during the first few weeks [...] I felt excluded for the first semester academically [...] due to lack of accessible resources. Support is great when it appears, but the stress involved in actually achieving it is very damaging emotionally; knocked my confidence, decreased my motivation etc'*

(participant 8).

*'Yes, because I would panic if I could not complete my work! To achieve this objective as stated above I do need additional support'*

(participant 13).

From an academic perspective, participants indicated that once tutors were aware of their VI, they felt that university was inclusive of their needs. However, this differed when analysing the responses regarding the social aspect of university. Eight

participants used phrases such as, 'odd one out', 'hampered social life', 'exclusion', and 'socially isolated' amongst others. Despite these factors, students also provided the following reflections:

*'When mobility support is not provided, you have no choice but to mix with other students, this can result in friendships being formed'*  
(participant 4).

Conversely, as participant 8 indicated:

*'When support is not in place it can be very damaging, knocking my confidence, motivation, etc.'*  
(participant 8).

The responses provided by participants 4 and 8 link in with the experiences of John Hull in his book, 'On Sight and Insight: A Journey into the World of Blindness'. The author describes how getting lost can be a frequent occurrence for the blind person. The person becomes reliant upon asking passers-by for the right direction. 'The blind person needs position in order to discover direction. This is such a profound lostness that most sighted people find it difficult to imagine' (Hull, 1997). This directly relates to participants 4 and 8 who have indicated that without the relevant support, they are forced to mix with others – this allows them to make friends, but can equally be detrimental to their emotional well-being, particularly their confidence. When a student is reliant upon support to enable them to complete their studies, and this is not in place at the most appropriate time, students can feel isolated and lost and experience other negative emotions.

Disabled students are likely to spend significantly greater time studying in university than their non-disabled peers. Therefore, it is important that the necessary support is provided to ensure participants' VI does not have a detrimental effect on their HE experience, and thus their emotional well-being. Owen-Hutchinson et al (1998) have taken this point further: 'the implementation of support services to meet the needs of VI students must be effective to ensure they can enjoy social, cultural and personal activities and fully participate in non-academic activities'. Once support was provided to participants, they were able to experience positive emotional well-being associated with inclusion.

#### Support provided by school/college during students' transition to university

The final question to be analysed concerns whether participants were encouraged to go to university by teachers/tutors, or whether this was something they had to decide for themselves. When analysing the responses, it was found that some participants more than others were encouraged to embark upon a university course. However, it was ultimately the choice of the participants whether they decided to pursue university course. Participants 3 and 11 reflected this well, outlining that this was something they themselves wanted to do, but encouragement from teachers and tutors gave them much needed support. Four of the 13 participants provided reasons why they considered encouragement to go to university was not provided by teachers/tutors and the remaining participants wrote N/A in response to this question.

*'I'm sure we were, but I didn't feel it applied to me so I took no notice [...] uni was always something I was going to do as a matter of course, so I didn't need persuading'*

(participant 6).

*'I decided this for myself because I knew past family members had gone, but I knew in order to become a teacher I would need to gain a degree [...] the support from my family has pulled me through'*

(participant 7).

*'I was given the impression that it was the only option'*

(participant 8).

*'I was in France, [...] I have the feeling that we were not really encouraged to go to university. We knew a lot of things about specialised courses post high school, but not that much about university.'*

(participant 9).

The quote provided by participant 8 reflects the opinion that many young people feel university is the only option. Further explanation from this participant would have been beneficial to understanding the reasons behind their opinion. The response provided by participant 9 draws upon an international perspective and the notion that they attended specialist school/college provision in France. This participant was not encouraged to pursue a university education, but instead emphasis was placed upon specialised post-high school courses. This international perspective provides an alternative insight into HE provision, but equally suggests that this student was thought not to be capable of undertaking a university degree in this context. However, as discussed previously, and contrary to the views held by their school/college, participant 9 was able to enjoy a university course that was inclusive and equal to that of his/her sighted peers.

The views provided by participants 6, 7, 8 and 9 resonate with research provided by Richardson & Roy (2002). The authors indicate that 'VI school-leavers were more likely than sight school-leavers to seek out opportunities in full-time post-secondary education'. This differs from the responses provided by half the participants, who were not encouraged to pursue a university education. The literature also confirms that 'students with a VI had been admitted to HE with scores similar to their sighted peers. Admittedly, these students did tend to be older than students with no reported disability' (Richardson & Roy, 2002). Each of the participants has achieved success in undertaking a university education, whether through encouragement by teachers/tutors, or something they decided for themselves. In doing so, they have shown that students with a VI are more than capable of studying at degree level.

Although it has not been explicitly identified that the parents of participants had an influence in their child's transition to university, the four barriers identified by Bishop and Rhind (2011) 'attitudinal, institutional, environmental and physical, as well as

others' attitudes' could have potentially impacted upon the transition period, as can be seen by participant's 7 and 8 responses. In this case, parental influences have had a positive impact. However, for some participants this was not the case, and they had already decided that university was something they wished to pursue.

## Conclusion

This research set out to explore the experiences of HE for learners who are VI. Three aims were identified at the beginning of the study: inclusivity of HE for those who are VI, whether emotional well-being has an impact upon a student with a VI's university experience and the support provided by school/college to during students' transition to university. The participants gave a lot of information about what they considered a positive and, conversely, negative university experience. There are significant outcomes from this research concerning the areas of HE which would benefit from changes being made, in order that students with a VI are able to engage in an inclusive education alongside their peers. In relation to the research question and aims, this research found that:

Eight out of 13 participants were encouraged to go to university by their teachers/tutors.

Four participants provided reasons why they consider encouragement was not provided by teachers/tutors. The remaining participant did not answer this question.

Nine out of 13 participants felt that HE is inclusive in terms of their disability. Four of these participants gave an explanation in response to this question. Participant 13 drew comparisons between their time at one university, which they subsequently dropped out of, and their experiences at their present university:

*'I think tutors on the whole do what they can to make the course accessible for me, however I do not think this was the case when I was at [...] University'*  
(participant 13).

Two of the participants felt that HE was not inclusive in terms of their disability. One participant although studying at HE indicated that they did not know what HE was, so did not answer this question and a further participant did not answer this question.

Eleven out of 13 participants responded to the question regarding the effect of VI upon experience at university and emotional well-being, describing positive and negative experiences. The majority of participants indicated that having a VI often had a negative impact upon their social life. However, the support provided through DSA enabled participants to engage in their course alongside their peers.

It is apparent that participants have had a range of positive and negative experiences of university. Negative aspects were generally related to DSA support not being in place at the start of the course, resulting in missed opportunities. However, participants also saw positive aspects in their time at university such as: 'university presents a different perspective on life' and 'people got talking to me and I was able to make friends'.

To summarise, this is a small-scale study in comparison to a similar study carried out by Richardson and Roy (2002). Twenty participants were contacted prior to the research and 13 responded. While this is a relatively high response rate, an increase in participants would have provided more reliable and comparable results. Where participants specified the name of their university, such as participant 13, omissions were made to achieve anonymity. My experience working with the participants enabled me to reflect on their lived realities, but reminded me that this was only a small-scale and limited study. Therefore, future research could involve contacting HEIs throughout the country, by providing questionnaires to all students who are blind/VI. This would offer a broad cross-section of experiences, and comparisons could be drawn as to whether some universities are more inclusive than others.

Teachers/tutors within school/college should ensure students who are blind/VI and considering university are aware of DSA funding and other support available to meet their needs and that support and assistance in completing the relevant paperwork is provided.

## References

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Routio (2007) Normative Point of View.  
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**Figure 1.**

**Liverpool Hope University**  
**Faculty of Education**

**Research Ethics Student Form (Education)**

All students conducting research projects must sign this declaration to confirm that they have considered the ethics of conducting their research. It should then be passed to the course/module tutor for approval. It is the responsibility of the tutor to provide a copy of the form to the Administrator for Research and Graduate Studies.

Students must not begin field work until the course/module tutor notifies them that approval has been granted. The research consent form and research information sheet should be completed as appropriate. <b>Student Name:</b>	Harriet Rose Dunn.
<b>ID Number:</b>	11001413.
<b>Subject:</b>	Education (SEN).
<b>Course/Module code &amp; Name:</b>	EDARESH001AZ2013/4.
<b>Research project title:</b>	A qualitative study into the experiences of Higher Education for learners who are visually impaired.
<b>Research question or aim:</b>	Recent figures (2005) show that 0.13% of undergraduate students in the UK are blind/partially sighted, although this is likely to have changed in the 8 years since the above data was collected. This study aims to explore the experiences of students by looking at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How inclusive Higher Education (HE) is for students who are visually impaired.</li> <li>• Whether emotional wellbeing has an impact upon a student with a VI's university experience.</li> <li>• What support did school or college provide to enable students with a VI to enter higher education?</li> </ul>
<b>Will your project involve (tick one):</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Field work not including research with young people/vulnerable adults.
<b>Please indicate how your</b>	<b>Research design</b> – for this study I will

<p><b>research design accommodates the ethics guidance offered by BERA. This should include issues such as anonymity, confidentiality, and protecting young children and vulnerable adults.</b></p>	<p>conduct qualitative research on students who are Visually Impaired in HE. This will be done in the form of a questionnaire over the course of 45 minutes to one hour via email or face to face contact with each of my participants.</p> <p><b>Research ethics –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed consent – for this I will provide a consent form and information sheet outlining what will be involved in the research, allowing participants to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason for doing so.</li> <li>• Anonymity and confidentiality – when carrying out research and during the writing up process, I will maintain anonymity of the participants by using pseudonyms of the participants' actual names. In terms of confidentiality I will store data on a computer not accessible to the public in password-protected files on a password protected computer.</li> <li>• Protection from harm – while there is no risk of harm to participants, I would give them the option to opt out if they felt it was necessary.</li> </ul>
<p><b>I confirm that I have considered and understood the ethics of completing the above named research.</b></p>	
<p><b>Student Signature:</b></p>	
<p><b>Date:</b></p>	<p>November 2013.</p>
<p><b>Course/Module Tutor Name:</b></p>	<p>David Bolt.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Referred to Course/Module Leader* <input type="checkbox"/></b></p>	
<p><b>Date Approved:</b></p>	
<p><b>Date received by Administrator for Research and Graduate Studies</b></p>	

## **Figure 2.**



### **LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **Outline of the research.**

This research aims to gain some insight into the experience of Higher Education for learners who are visually impaired (VI). In order to gain this information, I have provided one research question and three key areas I wish to explore in more depth, these are:

1. Inclusivity of Higher Education for those with a visual impairment.
2. Emotional wellbeing for those with a visual impairment.
3. Support provided by the students' school/college during their transition to university.

I will be carrying out questionnaires on participants lasting around one hour to understand first hand whether their initial experiences of Higher Education have been positive, negative or a variety of experiences.

#### **Who is the researcher?**

Name: Harriet Rose Dunn.

Institution: Liverpool Hope University.

Contact details: 11001413@hope.ac.uk.

#### **What will my participation in the research involve?**

As the researcher, I will be responsible for collecting all the information from my participants in the form of a questionnaire lasting approximately one hour. Participants will be required to provide accurate and concise answers to each of the questions where possible, drawing upon and reflecting on their lived realities of the Higher Education environment.

#### **Will there be any benefits in taking part?**

As the participant you will have provided me with the key information needed to complete my dissertation. The information you will provide will be compared and contrasted with previous statistics relating to the numbers, proportion and experiences of Higher Education as learner with a VI. This should be a rewarding and stimulating experience, as very little research has previously been carried out into students with a visual impairment in Higher Education. The information you provide could potentially allow positive change to be made in terms of university attitudes and support services provided in Higher Education to enable students who are visually impaired to complete their degree course alongside their sighted peers.

#### **Will there be any risks in taking part?**

Participants may be subjected to some minor emotional and/or psychological risks when taking part in this research, as it is based upon their lived realities which, for some individuals, may be a difficult area to discuss. If participants feel that they are

being subjected to anything which they think is a risk or likely to cause them emotional/ psychological harm and distress, they are more than welcome to discuss this with me during or after the research. This feedback is beneficial in improving how future research could be carried out.

**What happens if I decide I don't want to take part during the actual research study, or decide I don't want the information I've given to be used?**

If a participant decides they do not wish to take part in this research once it is underway, there is the option of withdrawing from the research without giving a reason for this withdrawal. The right to withdraw has been discussed in more detail in the ethical statement and also within the consent letter provided to participants, before they chose to take part in this area of research. If participants decide that they do not want the information they have provided to be used in the actual findings/write-up part of this research, they will also have the right to withdraw in line with the guidelines provided in the ethics statement and consent form. This information is provided according to the BERA Ethical Guidelines.

**How will you ensure that my contribution is anonymous?**

For purposes of anonymity and confidentiality, participants' names will be changed to pseudonyms throughout this research, so they cannot be easily identified by members of the public.

Please note that your confidentiality and anonymity cannot be assured if, during the research, it comes to light that you are involved in illegal or harmful behaviours which I will have to disclose to the appropriate authorities.

Questionnaires will be carried out via email and stored on a password protected computer only accessible by myself. These will be stored for a maximum of 12 months before being destroyed

**Figure 3.**



**LIVERPOOL HOPE UNIVERSITY  
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM**

**Title of research project:** A qualitative study into the experiences of Higher Education for learners who are visually impaired

**Name of researcher:** Harriet Dunn.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. I agree to take part in this research project.

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Sign.....

Date.....