

Wales Council of the Blind

R.E.S.E.T.

Incorporating Sylw bulletin.

Education

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Hello,

The Covid landscape is changing quite quickly in terms of the restrictions that are put in place, and this is made more problematic by the differences in their application both between England and Wales, and between areas within Wales. At the time of writing we have moved into a phase where England is applying a new lockdown for a month and Wales has emerged from one. Wales' short 'circuit breaker'

lockdown came immediately after a county-specific lockdown that was growing in coverage in the period leading up to the full one.



It is unsurprising, therefore, that people are generally confused and exercise their own versions of the

restrictions in, broadly speaking, a spirit of common sense.

However, limitations on movement between locations obviously raised problems for students living away from home – currently those from Welsh homes studying in England. Do they return to their family homes and work remotely or do they remain in student accommodation and continue with limited attendance at the university? How do these variegated teaching structures help or hinder disabled people?

These questions are looked at in the following pages. We are not giving a comprehensive view of this complex scene - nor can we - but we hope this will go some way to improving understanding and giving some useful pointers.

If you have any questions about this information or our RESET Project, you can contact Wales Council of the Blind in the first instance on 029 20 473954.

Wales Council of the Blind is at Unit 2.2, Hastings House, off Fitzalan Road, Cardiff CF24 0BL. Tel 029 20473954.

WCB's Lottery-funded RESET project aims to inform people with sight loss of changes to services and facilities as a result of Covid-19 measures. It will issue guidance on the following areas: Retail, Education, Social care and health, Employment, and Transport.

Please contact us for more information on 029 20 473954.

Challenges for VI professionals in the new school settings.

This article from the Welsh Association of Vision Impairment Educators explains the situation as it stands for VI services supporting school pupils with sight problems.

For Vision Impairment (VI) services across Wales the initial difficulties in navigating the guidance from Welsh Government and our local

authorities were met. The way that VI services operate currently depends on how this guidance is interpreted and followed by each local authority. Risk assessments and agreements with schools have had to be put in place and schools interpret the guidance differently, even in the same local authority at times.

Risk assessments and agreements were drafted to share with schools and families and PPE, wherever necessary, had to be considered if we were permitted to meet for an essential in-person visit. For some services any essential in-person visits would be limited to one contact group per day. This would certainly impact on the capacity for the delivery of in-person support and has led to a move to online support more frequently than was previously the case, and often in preference to in-person visits.

The delivery of some services in person, such as Habilitation support for mobility, has been facilitated with careful risk assessments outdoors and in areas where social distancing can be guaranteed. However, travelling on public transport and visiting public areas would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis rather than routinely as part of a programme. The delivery of cane skills training has been particularly affected by the difficulty in getting out and about safely. There are additional risks related to public transport and areas in the community that are almost impossible to control and therefore are deemed too great a risk to be acceptable when risk assessed. Prior to the pandemic, many Habilitation lessons would involve taking a learner in a car to the place that the lesson would start from. VI specialists are not currently allowed to be within such a confined space as a car for such periods of time and this has limited Habilitation lessons to local and school areas only for the time being.

In the past few months we suspect that independent living skills may not have been maintained and whilst the 'recover and catch up' in schools is currently focused on wellbeing and the core curriculum, Habilitation Specialists are preparing to target independent living skills. It is recognised that Habilitation is not only about mobility; learning how to look after yourself is what will lead to an independent adult life.

There is much evidence for the benefits of early intervention and with the risks of home visits making them an option that is not currently available to VI Specialists, attempts to find other ways to offer crucial

early intervention are being explored. Local and national lock downs have meant that even when restrictions started to lift, VI specialists could only deliver garden visits in place of home visits. Many services have delivered activities either virtually or as activity packs, for families to deliver to their child with the guidance and support from VI specialists. The need to concentrate on a screen and be limited to only that which you can see on your screen, can sometimes hinder the development of relationships between VI specialists and families, as there is no opportunity for VI specialists to focus their direct attention on young children and vice versa, as we would normally occur in person. There is therefore no opportunity for the family to observe the VI specialist in action, only to attempt to follow their instructions and recreate the work that the VI specialist would usually do in person. Additionally, when VI specialists are able to work in person, risk assessments will dictate that face coverings must be worn and PPE if within two metres. Whilst these are essential, they can often represent barriers to access facial expressions that young children need to learn up close. The importance of the relationship between VI specialists and parents is vital to successful learning and development of young children with VI. Without access to the home in person, VI services may offer remote support to families in how they can engage with their child and support their development. VI specialists are currently considering how they may work more closely with children whose parents may not be able to deliver intervention to their child in this way or don't have the digital setup to engage with the VI specialist remotely. For children of school age VI services have been able to liaise closely with schools to consider the needs of the child with VI. However, for babies and pre-school children, support that would often have been delivered in the home, has now required some rethinking.

Earlier this year braille learners who are usually supported by VI specialist staff in school, found themselves at home during school closures and may have found it difficult to maintain or develop their braille skills. Often parents are not braillists and VI services appreciate the difficulty for them to support their child with their learning at home, when they are using braille. VI services explored opportunities to support braille learning and teaching virtually. However, safeguarding issues around the use of video conferencing platforms and the need for more than one professional on the call made this difficult to manage, even when possible. The answer to this for VI services was usually sending embossed materials through the post and liaising well with the

school regarding the learning materials that needed to be provided. VI service staff supporting lessons in braille sent the learning materials ahead of the video conference call. The learner could then produce hard copy embossed materials to use during online lessons with their class teacher and did not need to rely solely on electronic learning materials.

In schools that would ordinarily have teaching support staff who work with more than one child with VI in the school, the need to have contact groups has meant that support from one person across contact groups can no longer continue. Schools are having to change their priorities and this has sometimes meant that school staff have been redeployed to other tasks or contact groups, sometimes resulting in a different distribution of support for a child with VI. This dilemma is not easily resolved without increasing staff numbers. Thankfully schools often liaise well with VI services to consider new priorities and solutions that have come into existence since the pandemic.

During the national lockdown last [summer] term, it became evident that some families have experienced digital exclusion. For instance, we may have been told by a family that they have access to the internet, yet this may simply mean that they have a mobile phone with mobile data. Hardly a digital setup that means a learner is able to access their teaching and learning easily. The experience of home learning for children and young people has been extremely varied and some of the issues are not VI-specific. Family engagement for all children in some cases has been questionable and ensuring that catch up for those with VI has been tricky for VI services and schools, as we are no longer able to operate in our usual way (i.e. seeing the numbers of children we were able to see each week and working in all environments without social distancing or the need for PPE).

VI services regularly deliver training for schools so that school staff gain the skills to support those with VI. Changes to school staff will almost certainly mean that VI services will need to retrain school staff more than once. However, in schools where trained school support staff remain with the pupil they support, this consistency has been more successful in terms of continuity of support for the child and reduced need from the VI service to retrain school staff. In addition to delivering direct support to children and staff in schools, VI service staff have focused on the highly skilled activity of the production of modified

learning materials and higher level VI learner outcomes. Whilst digital materials may be accessible for children with VI, visual fatigue can become an issue caused by using the screen excessively. For one pupil visual fatigue by the delivery of all learning via a screen, led a VI service to provide a printer for home use. This way the learner could choose to print out modified enlarged print worksheets and reading materials that were more comfortably accessed. This reduced the learner's headaches and meant that they had a better balance of screen time and offline learning. It was more comfortable for the learner to highlight the printed sheets and read them in a comfy chair with the right lighting. The availability of hard copy, modified enlarged print or embossed braille materials for learners can be a welcome respite from the screen. VI services have liaised closely with schools regarding the production of modified learning materials and this has been most successful when schools have forwarded these to the VI service with the requested minimum one week's notice, as modification of materials is quite a time and labour intensive task.

One of the most significant learning points for those who support children and young people with VI is the importance of digital competence. Children who would previously choose to refuse the use of a laptop or assistive technology have learnt quickly that, during lockdown in particular, they were reliant on the use of technology to keep in touch and up-to-date. Even without considering specialist assistive technology, simply the ability to touch type and use keyboard shortcuts will speed up the process of writing for all learners (not only those with VI). For young people with VI the time saved by not having to look at the keyboard or locate the mouse on a screen is invaluable. Learners who previously may have chosen to handwrite rather than type, may now have realised the benefits of mastering digital skills that improve their chance to keep up rather than having to catch up.

*-Sarah Hughes, WAVIE
Twitter @WAVIEWales*

VIEW, the UK organisation supporting QTVIs, has produced the "VIEW survey of the VI education workforce: How support for children and young people with VI is being provided during the Covid-19 schools shutdown". This survey included a response from Wales and is at <https://viewweb.org.uk/covid19-survey/>

Low Vision Service Wales Referral Guidelines for Children and Young People.

The Low vision service Wales can provide specialist visual aids, magnifiers, lamps and advice, free of charge, to those who struggle to see clearly when using prescribed glasses or contact lenses. Accredited Low Vision opticians provide this free NHS service in local communities throughout Wales. Whilst the service caters predominantly to adults there are many children and young people who are equally eligible to access the service. We are keen to encourage more children and young people to access the service. The criteria and what can be expected from the Service is laid out below.

Criteria

- Must live in Wales
- Must have had a recent eyesight test (or be prepared to have one) that evidences best corrected visual acuity of 6/12 or worse or N6 or worse.
- Referrals accepted by phone (no forms required) from optician/ophthalmologist, a wide range of health and social care professionals, education providers or family members. Parental/guardian consent should be obtained

What to expect

- Up to an hour long annual assessment with a specially trained Low Vision Service Wales practitioner in local high street opticians
- Two sets of specially prescribed low vision aids (one set for home and one for school/college) trialled from a wide range of specialist visual aids, magnifiers and lamps as needed
- All assessments, prescribed items, repairs and/or replacements completely free of charge.
- Prescription low vision aids can be exchanged or added to over time, in order to keep pace with any changes in vision/activities/goals and interests through life.
- Onward referrals, signposting, and advice as necessary

Where to go

To find contact details for your nearest high street Opticians/Optometrists offering the Low Vision Service Wales visit

www.eyecare.wales.nhs.uk and search by area or simply pop in the child's postcode. Alternatively contact the Low Vision Service Wales admin team on 01267 248793 for help.

Welsh Government issues guidance on students returning home for Xmas.

The Welsh Government has been working closely with the university sector to agree a set of principles that will allow all students living in term time accommodation to move home if they wish at the end of the current term.

Firstly, universities will conclude the majority of in-person teaching in the week leading up to December 8th. Welsh Government is encouraging students who are planning to travel to make arrangements to move from term time accommodation by 9th December at the latest.

Secondly, they will be asking students who wish to return home at the end of term to follow a simple set of guidelines. These will help students consider what they should do and allow them to take actions, having assessed the risk, based on their individual circumstances.

There will be the opportunity for all our universities to take part in an asymptomatic mass testing pilot that explores the use of new lateral flow devices within Higher Education settings. These tests enable quicker results and could prove invaluable in testing large volumes of people, finding positive cases faster and preventing and reducing transmission in the community. Students are encouraged to sign up for the asymptomatic testing in order to support their return home at the end of term.

There is a steady decline in cases amongst students and evidence shows transmission is not taking place in the teaching and learning environment. Universities are operating COVID-secure campuses and adhering to strict social distancing.

Our universities have agreed to develop a phased exit from campus and university towns to reduce pressure on public transport and travel infrastructure.

No person should travel if they have symptoms, a positive test or have been asked to self-isolate by a contact tracer.

<https://gov.wales/written-statement-supporting-students-travel-home-safely-ahead-christmas>

Lived experience: an overview of some personal stories.

Guide Dogs: Sophie's story

(Source: www.guidedogs.org.uk)

The Guide Dogs website gives a case study on how the challenges of lockdown appear to guide dog users. (Please note, Sophie's story relates to services offered in England. In Wales, contact Guide Dogs Cymru on 0345 1430195 for support).

Sophie just wants to complete her schoolwork at home like all the other children in her class. And her mum, Georgina, just wants to help her. But home schooling during lockdown has been full of challenges for the family.

Sophie, age seven, was born with a sight condition called Aniridia, which affects her iris, and Nystagmus, which causes involuntary movement in her eyes. To access her schoolwork, Sophie uses size 64+ font, an electronic magnifier and she's also learning braille.

Sophie's mum, who has the same condition and is registered blind, has found it extremely difficult to support her daughter's learning at home. Unable to see large print, Sophie's mum has found all the school's documents inaccessible, and was spending hours online everyday trying to find learning resources that she could read with JAWS, her screen-reading software. She was feeling exhausted and stressed.

Sophie was receiving daily reading lessons with her teaching assistant via video call, and twice-weekly braille lessons with her QVTI, which the family say have been brilliant. But the rest of the school day was a constant struggle. The worksheets provided by the school weren't accessible with JAWS software, and the staff didn't seem to understand the family's unique requirements.

After Sophie's mum called the Guide Dogs Advice Line, our Education Support Officer was able to speak directly with the school.

We firstly suggested that worksheets be provided in a more accessible word format. Then, after speaking with the school's SENCo and explaining the challenges, they suggested increasing Sophie's daily video link teaching to include an additional hour for maths. The school also agreed to arrange a loan of tactile equipment, such as plastic numbers and symbols to help with the maths lessons.

We were also able to advise Sophie's mum on other helpful resources and provided information on specific SATS requirements for children with a vision impairment, such as the standards required around cursive handwriting.

The school also later arranged for Sophie to come into the school each day for a morning of one-to-one lessons with her teaching assistant and twice weekly visits from her QTVI, which has made Sophie happy.

Sophie's mum said "I was in communication with my daughter's school during lockdown and the QTVIs and the school were saying different things and neither was listening to what I wanted to happen for my daughter.

"I saw your post on FB about helping parents so I got in touch as I needed someone who understood the legal side to support me in my communication with both parties. Guide Dogs helped me to understand the legal stance, but also backed me up in my dialogue with the school to make things happen".

Nell's story.

Nell had lost her sight completely in one eye and had little vision in the other. Consultants said the complexities of Nell's eye condition made her one in six billion. They were also told they didn't know how stable Nell's eyesight would be as she grew up.

Nell was just one-and-a-half when she met Branwen Jones for the first time, a habilitation specialist from Guide Dogs. This was the first specialist support the family received.

Lockdown.

Like many parents, when schools closed due to Covid-19, Rachel, Nell's mother, was naturally worried about the impact on Nell's development.

But with their regular sessions on hold, Branwen has instead been at the end of the phone to advise the family on activities they can try at home and signposted them to new online resources from Guide Dogs so they can keep learning new and relevant skills, such as fun activities to help Nell envisage and understand the two metre social distancing rule.

During lockdown, Nell has learnt to read her first words in Braille. As the family still don't know what Nell's vision will be like in future, they have been focusing her education on touch. "She has continued learning braille in lockdown – both English and Welsh, and it's a fantastic achievement! She's officially a child reader," says Rachel.

"We were worried Nell might lose some of the new skills she's developed, but she's actually soared. Guide Dogs provided us with lots of resources so that we could continue to develop her skills. We've been playing games as a family to help Nell understand how far two metres is, but actually they've been really useful for all our kids."

The family have also been helping Nell understand how social distancing might change going out in the future, and they practise at the village shop by encouraging Nell to speak up if she needs some help or can't hear the shopkeeper through the new screens at the tills.

"Nell has always been fiercely independent. She surprises us every day; she's amazing. She wants to do a lot for herself, and we've really harnessed that. Because Guide Dogs were there early for Nell, she's got a really positive relationship with her cane. And we've always encouraged her to do things for herself and speak for herself."

Back to school in the wake of COVID-19.

"Nell and her siblings will be going back to school in September and I have worries for them all. But much of Nell's learning is tactile and I'm unsure how this will be supported in a COVID-19 environment. There will also be new routes for her to learn, one-way systems and social distancing rules to observe. Nell is hugely adaptable but, like all children

with a vision impairment, she will need extra support to make sure she's ready and can cope,' says Rachel.

Nell and her family feel fortunate that they have a great network of support around them. But Rachel is very aware that this isn't the case for other families like theirs.

"We feel so lucky that we've had this support since Nell was little – Branwen is fantastic, as is Nell's learning support assistant, and her QVTI. As parents we feel really supported. But we've had to fight for that support, it didn't just come to us," says Rachel.

Nell's full story at <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/inspiring-stories/children-and-young-people-inspiring-stories/nells-inspiring-story>

WCB Storm.

This section is written by young people with sight loss. Here we have some experiences of university from Eddie and Megan.

Fighting the barriers.

Having a visual impairment is hard enough to live with, but when you want to try to better yourself through going to Uni to broaden your prospects and to try to get work at the end of it, you would think there would be an even playing field with non-visually impaired people.

Unfortunately, I found it to be not the best experience. Firstly, there was an uphill struggle to get everything in place. I had none of my DSA equipment prior to starting education and I had zero support on my first day and was told it would take many more months. This meant I had to defer for a year. They did say this time everything would be in place for next year. So a year already wasted.

Upon re-starting this time, thankfully, support was in place and I had some but still not all of my equipment needed to undertake my course. It was going extremely well, but things were starting to unravel. I was not told I would need to complete a maths module and exam which of course being visually impaired, doing algorithms and complex maths without being able to read what was on the exam paper and not being

able to work out your equations on paper, was impossible. So of course I basically failed the maths exam due to not being able to see. I found it quite ableist in a way, not being put onto an even footing with, let's say, "normal" students.

Another thing universities and education providers do not take into account is added time with assignments. If it took a normal student 40 hours to do a project, for a visually impaired person it would take 140 hours to complete it if not longer, since I needed to deal with very complex tasks. Also, another thing that would have helped me which I didn't have was a person who is fully sighted outside of hours to help visually impaired people to "be their eyes".

I also faced Disability Equality discrimination where I was being made fun of by other students. I would report it but it was swept under the rug. I did mention police action, which would still be achievable even now, according to the police, against those students. This is because it is classed as a "hate crime" – due to the fact that it was only happening due to my disability. But I was told "It would not be in your best interests to do this". So I was even warned off taking it further and that the university had "dealt" with it internally.

I even had a lecturer ask me, "Why am I chasing this? Why did I want to put myself through this?" My reply was "Why not? Everyone should have the same opportunities in life".

I think that all education staff training should include what ways they can offer support to visually impaired people. The training should be flexible and have the ability to customise a module, so it is much more accessible to do, as the current system is just too rigid in my opinion. Was I on an even playing field? No.

Despite all this, all the barriers, all the hoops I had to jump through. The countless hours I had to study, work hard and keep myself motivated. I still passed the course. And not only that, but I achieved a First Class Degree. And even moreover, I was the only student on that course to graduate with honours. If I can do that with what I had to work with, you can do it too. Hard work pays off.

- *Eddie Brock*

The ups and downs of student life.

I had never desired to go to University. None of my immediate family had ever been, so it's not something that I had ever considered as a potential pathway. However, long story short, I was somewhat persuaded to look into it, and thanks to a very good friend I found a really interesting course that did really intrigue me and spark my interest.

I ended up attending an interview and got a conditional offer. So I decided why not, I had nothing to lose. Plus, I already had lots of experience on my CV, so why not add some super sexy degree to it too?

I'm not gonna lie, my three years of uni were tough. Like every uni student, it brought its ups, its downs, its hardships and its rewards. Overall, I did find it difficult, but that doesn't mean there weren't good times.

On the academic side, the course itself was extremely fun. This was because it was a heavily practical course. I think it is important to note when you're thinking of uni (or at uni), is it the right fit for you? I'm a hands-on learner and do best when doing practical things, so a practical course for me was perfect. I was also lucky to have some incredible lecturers, the best lecturers I could ever have wished for – patient, empathetic and friendly. But of course, with great visual impairment, comes great hard work. Ugh. Reading! My dreaded Achilles heel! As you can probably understand, a lot of reading is a huge thing for me. It's tiring for the eyes, it's tiring mentally and it can be all round hard work trying to get it accessible, to ensure that it's just right for you. However, to combat this, I requested through DSA a one-to-one who would be a note taker and a reader for me. These one-to-ones were able to come to the library with me in our off-time and help me look for books, find them on the shelves and we would then find a quiet room, where I would lounge around but with ears wide open and mind working seriously hard not to get distracted or start wandering into my own thoughts. And it's tiring. It is. 3 maybe even 4 hours (if not longer some days), sat there actively listening the whole time, trying to match up what was being read, to something I was talking about in an assignment. It might not have been the most academic method, but it was the method that worked for me.

On the social side, this was EVEN harder. Now I'm a very social person, but when you're working with a group of people that have never come across visual impairment before; and you're in a university that had no idea of VI; and you're in a county which was very under-aware of disability – well, let's just say it presented its challenges. But hey, at least I can't say uni was boring! Anyway, I tried my best with socialising, and I managed a small amount, but I just couldn't fit in completely with my course mates. Now in the lectures and seminars, I would happily talk to the others, and we'd joke and have fun et cetera. But outside of academics, I had no social life at all. Which I guess, on the positive, is what contributed to me achieving such a good grade. Though a friend to walk on the beach with from time to time would have been nice too haha.

Keep in mind, I'm not trying to put anyone off uni. In fact, my point is the direct opposite. I enjoyed uni overall, and I'm over the moon that I went. To be able to say, I have a FIRST CLASS degree with honours is still incredible to me even to this day. But that's the thing - I can say it. And I'm proud, I took the challenge - yeah there were days were I lay in bed and wondered what the point was but I pushed through it, because I find it very difficult to give up on something. Once I've started something, I have a need to finish it, no matter what.

Thanks to university:

1. I met some incredible people, met some of the loveliest and most helpful lecturers I could have dreamt of and met some amazing one-to-ones who had some sensational experiences and stories.
2. I now have lots to talk about at job interviews – in regard to overcoming adversity and challenges.
3. With there being no Goalball clubs in the county, that pushed me to run my very own taster events,
4. I managed to live independently for 3 years almost completely cut off from all family, friends and support structures, and guess what - I survived!
5. I had to speak up for myself even more than normal, I had to teach lectures about accessibility and visual impairment, I helped to raise money for charities through uni projects.

The list goes on and on.

The university life isn't for everyone. And if you don't want to go or don't feel it's right for you, that doesn't mean anything other than it may not be for you. Don't let anyone make you think or feel otherwise. The one thing I'd recommend is: look for something that really interests you or that you're passionate about. This will really help you through those tough days.

- *Megan Price*

Danielle's audio diary of university life and more from The UCAN PodSquad.

The UCAN PodSquad is a brand new podcast created and produced by members of UCAN Productions. It's a podcast produced by young visually impaired people for young visually impaired people.

The pilot project aims to entertain, inform and inspire young visually impaired people during these dramatic times of world pandemic and lockdown, and to bring us together during these isolating times.

Aided by UCAN's very own sound guru Alex Rees it does this by producing podcasts on topics which the audience will find entertaining, or through providing a platform for visually impaired people who want to create or produce their own unique content. The PodSquad has so far covered issues which specifically affects the lives of its audience. These include topics such as visually impaired sports (for example Megan P's talk on Goalball) and the effects that lockdown has had on health and fitness and how to turn those problems in to positives.

Also covered have been issues important to all young people such as employment, for example Rob's interview with a Digital Accessibility Engineer, and Danielle's audio diary of her experiences of being a visually impaired student currently studying at university, which is developing into its own regular feature.

However, the PodSquad is also committed to UCAN's core principal of producing unique creative content. Episodes have so far included comedy sketches, such as the greatly anticipated return of the Grumpy Old Gits - as well as songs and readings by members such as Kiel, with the aim going forward to produce new and original material.

While the PodSquad has plans moving forward, it hopes to rely on you the audience to tell us what you want to hear about, and what subjects and content you want podcasts to include, or never cover again as the case may be. To request topics, add content or give feedback please either send us a message via social media or email us at: pod squad@ucanproductions.org

You can listen to existing episodes on Apple podcast, YouTube, Spotify, Podbean and other mainstream platforms as well as Facebook and Twitter.

Squad links: pod squad@ucanproductions.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ucanproductions.org/

Twitter: twitter.com/UCANProduction

- *Carwyn Price*

Resources.

If you would like to know more about these resources but don't have access to the internet to view them, please contact WCB on 029 20 473954 and we shall find a way to make them accessible to you.

CORONAVIRUS INFORMATION AND ADVICE.

Current Welsh government advice.

The Welsh Government has produced an FAQ current guidelines: <https://gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance>

The main things Welsh Government are asking people to do are:

- Stay out of each other's homes, except in very limited circumstances
- Limit the times you leave your home, and the distance you travel
- When you do leave home, please try and be restrained in how many different people you see. It is better to see the same one or two people regularly than to see lots of different people occasionally
- maintain **social distancing**, including outdoors
- meet people outdoors rather than indoors where possible, even in circumstances where the law allows you to meet indoors
- Work from home if you can
- Wash your hands regularly and follow **other advice on hygiene**

- Self-isolate if you show symptoms of coronavirus

SCHOOLS and COLLEGES.

Welsh Government guidance on how vulnerable and disadvantaged learners can be supported in a school environment which has changed in response to the coronavirus pandemic:

<https://gov.wales/guidance-supporting-vulnerable-and-disadvantaged-learners>

General advice on coronavirus and schools:

<https://gov.wales/back-school-plans-september-coronavirus>

RNIB information for education professionals as schools re-open:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/education-professionals/coronavirus-how-we-can-help-you>

Henshaws' 'Top tips for an accessible classroom':

<https://www.henshaws.org.uk/shop/ebook/top-tips-for-a-vision-friendly-accessible-classroom-ebook/>

(This information is from Henshaws' Knowledge Village which has other information for children, young people and families.)

Nystagmus Network resources for teachers, support staff and QTVIs:

<https://nystagmusnetwork.myshopify.com/collections> ,

Education Resource Hub:

<https://nystagmusnetwork.org/education-resource-hub/>

New College Worcester runs events for parents and teachers. Check website for the latest information:

<https://www.ncw.co.uk/event-directory/>

Sarah Hughes (A QTVI who wrote our leading article) has a website which signposts families and professionals supporting children and young people with vision impairment to suggested resources and services:

<https://sites.google.com/view/qtvisarah/home>

LOOK has produced a resource and podcast 'Supporting your visually impaired child during their transition to High School':

<https://www.look-uk.org/supporting-your-vi-child-during-their-transition-to-high-school/>

VIEW has information for education professionals during the pandemic:
<https://viewweb.org.uk/coronavirus/>

Guide Dogs has advice for any parents who must continue home schooling:

<https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/getting-support/information-and-advice/education-support/learning-at-home-and-activities-for-children-and-young-people/advice-on-home-learning>

Their top tips are:

- Try creating routines with boundaries but also with flexibility.
- Involve your child in the discussion around routines
- What do they feel is suitable for them?
- How would they like to structure their day?
- Encourage your child to continue a morning routine which includes getting dressed, having breakfast and being ready to learn.
- Set your child targets around expectations, such as one piece of English, Maths and science work respectively to be completed each day.
- The length and difficulty of each exercise is up to parents and carers to establish.
- Allow flexibility in their learning to take a break and occupy their mind with a different activity and then they can return to their task.
- Choose the routine which works best for your child. Some children are more productive in the morning, others in the afternoon.
- Create a variety of learning activities, such as written work, online learning and practical activities like baking.

Royal National College for the Blind

This year, like so many other organisations, our staff are unable to travel around the UK to recruit students in the normal outreach way. So in line with government guidelines and UK-wide Lockdown restrictions we are holding a virtual parental Open Day and Visually Impaired young persons fun Have-a-Go day on Saturday 28th November 2020.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RNCHereford/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/RNC_Hereford

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/rnc_hereford/

TikTok: https://www.tiktok.com/@rnc_hereford?lang=en

RNC is the leading College for young people aged 16-25 with a Visual Impairment in the UK and are assessing for September 2021 applications now, more information on our provision can be found at www.rnc.ac.uk or contact me on info@rnc.ac.uk alternatively please call one of the team on 01432 376 621.

UNIVERSITIES.

Welsh Government has a range of information and guidance on further/higher education and coronavirus:

<https://gov.wales/further-higher-education-coronavirus>

LOOK Student Handbook:

<https://www.look-uk.org/the-students-handbook/>

VICTA Student Helpline:

<https://www.victa.org.uk/young-adults/student-helpline/>

Pocklington Trust

Student Support Service (including a helpline and section on the coronavirus situation):

<https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/Pages/Category/student-support>

Life in Higher Education:

<https://www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/pages/category/life-in-higher-education>

VIP@UNI

This blog relates the experiences of various students with sight loss:

<https://www.vipatuni.com/blog-1>

ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION.

This advice on **communication needs** has been compiled for health workers in Word and PDF. Additional material from Welsh organisations can be found in Word format at [communications_needs_wales.docx](#)

Making meetings accessible for people with sensory loss.

WCDP and WCB have teamed up to provide guidance on making meetings accessible, including on-line meetings.

- Contact WCB on 029 20 473 954 for a copy

Transcriptions

Pia Publishing are continuing to produce Braille. www.pia.co.uk

Wales Council of the Blind is able to produce Audio CDs as usual. We will be focusing on materials that are critical for vulnerable people for the time being. Contact Richard Bowers richard@wcb-ccd.org.uk. We shall, when print versions of Sylw and Roundup are produced, distribute Audio CDs as normal.

PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELLBEING

How to cope if you're feeling anxious about Covid-19:

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/2020/28-february-coronavirus-anxiety-how-to-cope-if-you-re-feeling-anxious-about-the-outbreak/>

Looking after your mental health during the outbreak:

<https://mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/looking-after-your-mental-health-during-coronavirus-outbreak>

Mental health tips for young people (docx):

https://www.pavo.org.uk/fileadmin/PAVO/Policy__Partnerships/H_SC/Related_Files/Mental_Health_and_well-being_Tips_for_young_people.docx

Guidance for better mental health from rehab4addiction:

<https://www.rehab4addiction.co.uk/coronavirus/mental-health-coronavirus>

Mental health impacts of remote working (from People Managing People):

<https://peoplemanagingpeople.com/general/facts-remote-work-mental-health/>

TECHNOLOGY

Social Distancing help.

Sodar is a social distancing app for Android and Chrome.

<https://sodar.withgoogle.com>

Connect by Tech.

Would you like to get more out of being online? Macular Society **Connect by Tech** is a brand new service to help people make the most of things like tablets, smartphones and smart speakers to stay connected.

They can help you do the things you want to do, or help if you are curious about trying. Perhaps it's a video call, joining a chat group, online shopping, finding health advice, exercise ideas or listening to the latest best-seller. Just let them know what you want to do and one of their friendly volunteers will be in touch to help.

Email your name, and what you would like to be able to do to techtalk@macularsociety.org or call **Advice & Information Line** on 0300 3030 111.

Dolphin.

To ensure their customers have all the help and support they need now and in the coming months, Dolphin has put together a series of video trainings, phone-ins and live action webinars.

If you're not technical, you just need to be able to make a phone call. And if you're a little more computer or app savvy, they've got webinars and online meetings.

Browse the complete list or find out more at: www.YourDolphin.com/webinars. Their support and sales teams are all open and fully operational. Call 01905 754 577 or email dave.salisbury@yourdolphin.com.

Be My Eyes.

The 'Be My Eyes' app is reminding vi people that their volunteers are available to help: <https://www.bemyeyes.com/>

Be My Eyes is a free app that connects blind and partially sighted people to sighted volunteers for visual assistance through a live video call. The app is available on iOS and Android devices.

Sylw bulletin.

News.

Travel advice from Guide Dogs Cymru.

Now that the 'firebreak' has ended, there are no travel restrictions in place within Wales. However, the Welsh Government is asking everyone to think carefully about the journeys they take and the people they meet because the more places we go and the more people we meet, the greater the chances there are of catching coronavirus. If you do need to travel, Guide Dogs Cymru has advice on how to do this as safely as possible:

'If you do need to use public transport, including taxis, remember you must wear a three-layer face covering. Sharing taxis with anyone outside your household is to be avoided. We know that many people with sight loss will still need to travel, so carry hand sanitizer at all times.

'Services, especially off-peak, may be reduced and prone to cancellation. You should ring TraveLine Cymru free on 0800 464 0000 to check that your bus is running as usual, and Transport for Wales on 0333 321 1202 for rail.

'Where possible, book your travel online through your transport provider's ticketing app or website, and consider contactless payment to buy tickets. You should also dress warmly, as efforts will be made to ensure that fresh air is flowing through vehicles and carriages. Keep your distance from others at bus stops, railway stations and taxi ranks.

'If you need assistance when travelling and would normally contact your transport operator ahead of time, continue to do so, so they can prepare. If you have problems queuing, moving through a concourse or

accessing public transport vehicles, speak to your transport operator in advance to get advice and explain what assistance you need. If you have a problem or feel ill during your journey, tell a member of staff.'

Macular Society launches 'Winter Warmer' calls to raise spirits.

The Macular Society has started a series of weekly group telephone calls to raise people's spirits during this difficult period. The calls, which will feature entertaining discussions with people from many walks of life, are particularly aimed at those feeling lonely and isolated during the current coronavirus restrictions.

Every Wednesday, in the lead up to Christmas, guest speakers will join the call, which will be open to all members, to provide entertainment to those who need it most. The calls will be informal fun, interactive and at times educational.

The calls will take place from 6-7pm. The number of callers will be limited, so if you are interested in participating please contact the Macular Society as soon as possible by phoning 01264 326 622 or emailing befriending@macularsociety.org, making sure to put "Winter Warmers" in the email subject line.

Vision Support receives National Lottery funding.

The National Lottery Community Fund is giving £86,688 to Vision Support, which will be used for their Community Information Service.

The funding will help to provide a mobile information service providing people with sight loss in Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Gwynedd and Wrexham with accessible information including a knowledge of adaptive aids and assistive technology.

Welsh Pavement Parking Task Force produces report.

The Wales Pavement Parking Task Force Group was formed by the Welsh Government in July 2019 to address an issue which is a major concern for vision impaired people. The Task Force has now produced a report, which recommends that 'parking on pavements should be tackled by changing driver behaviour through raising awareness that

pavements are for pedestrians and not for vehicles, backed-up by the deterrent of effective enforcement'.

It is proposed that work should start on preparing the necessary legislation, with the aim of commencing civil enforcement of pavement parking by July 2022. Members of the Task Force include representatives from Guide Dogs and Disability Wales.

Consultations and Surveys.

Welsh Government Consultations.

Here is our list of Welsh Government consultations of potential interest to the disability sector:

- A digital special health authority for Wales (closes 30th November)
- Draft Tertiary Education and Research Bill (closes 4th December)
- Tackling fuel poverty 2020 to 2035 (closes 31st December)
- Carers' national plan for Wales (closes 20th January 2021)
- Access to Elected Office Fund (closes 20th January)

The 'Access to Elected Office Fund' consultation seeks views on the introduction of a fund to help disabled people to stand for elected office in Wales. Disability Wales will be delivering online workshops to consider this consultation in the next few weeks. Anyone wishing to participate can email info@disabilitywales.org.

For information on how to receive any of these consultation documents in an accessible format, call 0300 0604400.

Still time to take part in landmark study.

As reported in the previous edition, RNIB, Guide Dogs and the Thomas Pocklington Trust are researching the realities of life for blind and partially sighted people in the UK. There is still time to sign up for the study, which will be conducted through telephone interviews that could take up to 50 minutes. All data will be anonymous, and participants can withdraw at any point.

You can register your interest by calling 0161 507 7360 or visiting the website

<https://survey.researchopinions.co.uk/index.php/998153?lang=en>.

Events.

Although the pandemic has inevitably led to the cancellation of face-to-face events, many organisations are now running telephone groups.

Glaucoma Support Groups

Glaucoma UK is running digital support groups – but if you don't have internet access, you can still ring in and listen to the event. Latest dates are:

- Tuesday 17th November, 7 pm to 8 pm, Glaucoma eye tests - How they work and what they tell us. (Telephone 0203 481 5240 or 0330 088 5830)
- Thursday 26th November, 5.30 pm to 6.30 pm, Disaster response in glaucoma, the COVID story. (Telephone 0203 901 7895 or 0208 080 6591)
- Wednesday 16th December, 7 pm to 8 pm, Communication in the glaucoma clinic - How to get the most out of your appointment. (Telephone 0131 460 1196 or 0203 481 5237).

To join any of these sessions by telephone, dial in to the number shown above at the start time. Please note, if joining on the phone you will only be able to listen to the verbal presentation. You will not be able to ask questions or view the supporting presentation slides.

If you have internet access, you can find out more on the Glaucoma UK website, <https://glaucoma.uk/get-involved/glaucoma-uk-events/> .

If you need any further information, Glaucoma UK's Helpline is 01233 64 81 70.

Sight Life Telephone Groups

Sight Life are continuing to run telephone groups for people in Cardiff, Swansea, Neath and Port Talbot. With just a simple landline call, you can be connected to a group of others with sight loss to have a general chat, have some fun or learn something new. Participants can dial in to calls themselves or if they find dialling in difficult, they can be dialled in by the group facilitator. Participants need a telephone number and a code to join the calls.

Christmas activities are also being planned, so do get in touch with your local contact if you want to get involved:

For Cardiff, contact Jane on 07864 964 833 or email:

jane.mccann@sightlife.wales

For Swansea, contact Anita on 01792 776 360 or email:

anita.davies@sightlife.wales

RNIB Connect Groups

As reported in the last issue, the RNIB Community Connection team in Wales runs a wide range of telephone groups. The following new groups have recently been added:

- Technical peer support for young people: Fourth Friday of the month, 11am
- Non-Fiction Book group: second Monday of the month, 2pm
- Rugby group – chat about all things rugby. Second Wednesday of month, 2pm

Coming soon:

- West Wales group
- Blind and partially sighted parents support group
- Horse-riders group

All groups last 1 hour.

Please contact Connect Community Coordinators Eleanor Rothwell, Carol McKinlay or Izzy James if you would like to join any of these groups:

Eleanor: 0770 282 1915, email eleanor.rothwell@rnib.org.uk

Carol: 0786 496 8859, email Carol.McKinlay@rnib.org.uk

Izzy James: 0776 8503050, email izzy.jones@rnib.org.uk

Deafblind UK Social Group Telephone Calls

If you would like an opportunity to talk to people who are also living with deafblindness, why not join Deafblind UK's social group telephone calls? To find out more, please get in touch by emailing info@deafblind.org.uk or call 0800 132 320.

Macular Society Support Groups continue by telephone

There are Macular Society Support Groups across Wales, offering practical and emotional support for people with macular disease.

Although physical meetings have been suspended during the pandemic, groups are continuing to meet via the telephone, and are continuing to provide vital support, helping to ease feelings of loneliness for people with macular disease.

For more information on the telephone groups and to book a place, please call the Macular Society's Advice & Information Service on 0300 3030 111. This is also the number to call for any questions or information about macular disease.

Events via Zoom

Many organisations now hold events online, for example via Zoom. You can find the latest information on our website: <http://www.wcbccd.org.uk/news.php#events>

Other Resources.

Befriending scheme for people with aniridia

Aniridia Network UK is reminding people with the condition that they run a befriending scheme for members that seeks to link people who are affected by it, whether as individuals or parents, for support, to discuss experiences and share knowledge.

Aniridia is a rare congenital eye condition causing incomplete formation of the iris. This can cause loss of vision, usually affecting both eyes. For more information about the befriending scheme, including a short film, visit the Aniridia UK website, <https://aniridia.org.uk/befriending/> , send an email to info@aniridia.org.uk or telephone 07792 867 949.

Vision Support Rehabilitation Services

During the pandemic, Vision Support is continuing to provide services over the phone. They are also reminding people in North Wales that they have eight fully qualified Vision Impairment Rehabilitation Officers, who help people remain independent. Whether you are newly diagnosed, or lost your sight some time ago, a rehabilitation officer can help you build your confidence and learn new skills, which could include cooking, travelling safely and use of low vision aids.

If you would like to get in touch with your local Rehabilitation Officer to have a chat about training and support, please call Vision Support on 01244 381515.