

1. Over the past few years as a Vision Teacher in NSW I have supported students with a vision impairment through their final high school years.
2. The questions of where to next?
3. What will happen when I leave school?
4. How will I manage a life after school swam just under the surface of day to day communications with students.
5. It became evident that while peers were getting their driver's licence, or flipping burgers at McDonald's after school, students with vision impairments were not sharing these experiences, were not likely too and had different aspirations and perhaps no aspirations for the future.
6. "What about going to university?" I'd say.
7. No response.
8. Then, "Do you think?"
9. So while studying my Masters of Special Education in 2013, I decided to research what was happening for students with vision impairment specifically about entering university.
10. This is what I discovered.

“I’d Like to work in film or something arty maybe making props”

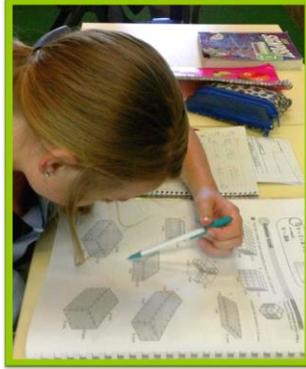
year 12 student with VI



Student uses large print paper exams and produces responses digitally accessing ZoomText™ magnification software

Firstly.....some images of senior students in their schools and their goals and achievements.

“I need to be good at measurements to be a fashion designer,” year 9 student with low vision.



Student accesses an A3 math text book

**“Not my best angle,
but I did it!”**



Participating in a year 10
outdoor achievement
camp for students with VI

“ I balance by focussing on a bright blurry spot on the wall...ah!”



Expecting to achieve pays off.

1. What's common about these students...?
2. It's their can do attitude.
3. They expect to achieve...
4. Because significant people in their lives set high expectations, and provide supported steps to achieving their goals.

“do my colours look realistic or are they a bit out there?”



5. The making of the student's year twelve Art portfolio.

1. What are the plans aspirations and dreams for their future of students with whom you work?
2. And my point
3. Whatever we are doing, it's all about supporting the student, but in the day to day tasks the bigger picture sometimes goes AWOL.
4. A Term, a semester, a year, goes by and we feel we are doing a good job. And we are.
5. We are amazing teachers, educators, colleagues.
6. But did we plan in sessions to develop those needed life skills or discuss the students' plans for next year, and the next, for study and work after school life?
7. Did we model high expectations
8. give them the germ of an idea that there is always the possibility of something more?
9. Openly in planned communication and subliminally in our positive attitude toward their abilities...
10. So here's that research I unearthed to give meat to your thinking and planning for your students' futures...

7 Findings...

Students with Vision Impairment and university study...

International Findings

- youth with sensory impairments are more than twice as likely as youth with other disabilities to have enrolled in a postsecondary school and are likely to complete four years of study, Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza and Levine (2005).

1. So history tell us, other students have trail blazed the way,
2. Post –school settings are ready for student’s vision needs
3. Pathways are open...

Australian Findings

- Australian students with a single sensory disability have the highest study outcomes among people with disabilities in tertiary education, Win and Hay (2009).
- HOWEVER...
- too few vision impaired students successfully enter the labour market or go onto further study in Australia compared to other nations, (Meadows, 2009).

9 Findings...

- Winn and Hay (2009) believe the fragmented approach of transition services by Australian providers for students with disabilities is partly to blame, but...
- other compounding factors include a lack of expectation and knowledge about options for the future.
- **Enter Stage Left....**
- Vision Educators can drive student knowledge and expectation!

1. Does it seem to you as it does to me that the opportunities are available
2. But students with vision impairments are not getting the message
3. What's missing in their educational preparation that leaves them with these lower expectations?

10 Message

My main message...

- All teachers, parents and professionals need to be talking up the expectations for students with vision impairments, so that they come to see university study as a viable option ([Kohler & Field, 2003](#)), ([Winn & Hay, 2009](#)) and ([Davies, 2011](#)).
- As alternate significant others in students' lives, vision professionals have the opportunity and the responsibility to broaden horizons and grow expectations, ([author assertion](#)).

1. question your thinking about post school options for all the students you support and broaden your attitudes and expectations for them.
2. When we talk the talk about the positive transition to university life; the options are floating around in their psyche.
3. I am not suggesting inappropriate expectations;
4. we all know the possibilities and abilities of the students we support in context.

Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia.

- A five year performance review by ([COAG Reform Council, 2013](#)) shows fewer young people are fully engaged in work or study after school, with placements into full-time work decreasing.
- **Enter Stage Right:** Implication? Within this social climate students with vision impairment are the invisible minority.

1. Given this social and economic climate globally, the students you support need an environment bathed in positive affirmations,
2. can do statements that build their resilience to try.....
3. and guided systems to support them in their quests.

So what's happening in Australia?

- Students do experience successful transition to post school options in Australia- if **not** selecting university entry: Vocational Education and Training programs.
- And federally funded service providers tailor community participation or transition to work programs. HOWEVER...
- Students with vision impairments gaining university entry do not receive transition support or funding.
- They struggle to negotiate through inaccessible information systems to apply for funding and course supports prior to beginning university.

1. I open this for discussion...
2. The students we support who choose to use the path to university are expected to do so independently, along with their school leaver peers.
3. There are no formal transition support processes outside of the high school careers advisor systems available to all students.
4. A vision impairment is so small statistically, and yet has such an encompassing impact on all levels of accessing further education.
5. It appears that these students' needs have been overlooked in their final step toward life after school.
6. The adage SINK or SWIM, comes to mind. You go it alone if you have worked hard, followed a rigorous study pattern and apply for university entry.



13 Hurdles

Hurdles to university entry

- Firstly, students require readiness skills to be self-determining young adults who can negotiate their needs, speak out for themselves and time manage. Dr Karen Wolffe (2013) describes these attributes as 'Transition Competencies'.

Jumping this Hurdle requires parents and professionals reflecting a shared expectation to the student about their independence and achievement and planning for success at early secondary years.

14 Hurdles

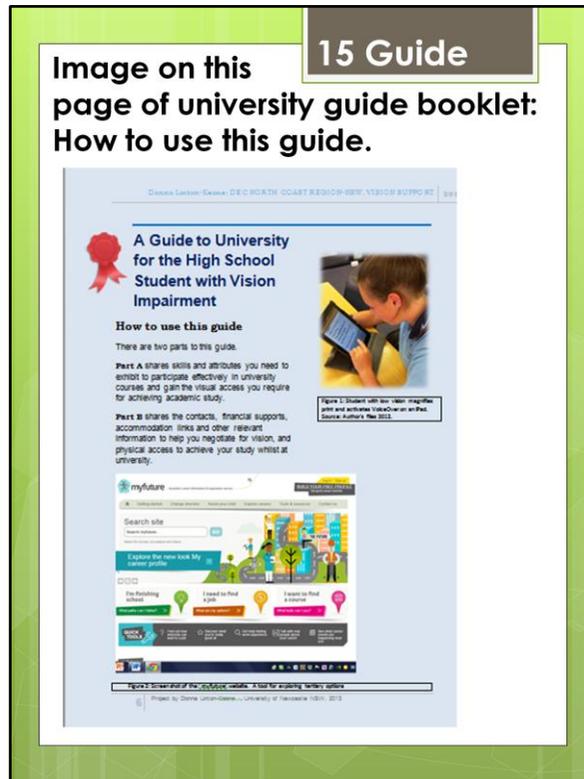
Other hurdles

- students with vision impairment making informed choices need ready access to information.
- The hurdle of print access and digital media for students with vision impairment ranging from low vision to blindness becomes critical.

Jumping this hurdle requires a collaborative approach to disseminating information in a predictable and accessible manner by all stakeholders.



1. Colleagues and I have spent this last year supporting students with VI who chose a path to university. It has been difficult, exhausting even emotional, ...the student's felt the same!
2. But they will realise their dreams later this year.
3. To date I believe one HSC graduate has a university place studying psychology and another fine arts.
4. Back to my research
5. My research needed to culminate into a practical project.
6. It seemed clear to me that students with vision impairments in Australia needed a forum or guide to unlock all the options for post- secondary life including pathways to university.
7. Stakeholders, government bodies and private community liaison services all have developed systems in place for all students with disabilities for access to work participation and training
8. But the links to transition to university are missing
9. Individual universities do promote their services...but of course it's from a single mined view point.
10. My response was to produce a guide for students with VI about university entry. We trialled this and refined the information pathways as we approached each hurdle.



1. The initial guide is a print version and can be delivered digitally for reading with access technology.
2. I am currently refining my initial prototype and am looking for feedback from you.
3. Topics covered include:
 1. Know your vision
 2. What's an ATAR?
 3. Enrolment
 4. scholarships- living allowances, etc.
 5. early entry to university
 6. on-campus disability support services
 7. reasonable adjustments
 8. deferment or part time study options.....

Image on this page of university guide booklet: Research your options.

Discrete Learning Resources DEC NORTH COAST REGION-NSW VISION SUPPORT 2013

iii. Research your Options

There are some general websites that share good tips about life after school to get you thinking about further study and career path. These include concepts about work versus study, taking a gap year (a year off before university), subject selection and what sort of employment leads on from them... and much more. Visit some of the sites listed here.

<http://www.myfuture.edu.au/>

At 'myfuture' you will find career quizzes to uncover careers to match your interests and abilities. This site is built by QUT (Queensland University of Technology) but it is relevant no matter where you live.

<http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndoo/get-ready%20NDCC/>

Here you find top tips about getting ready for study after finishing year 12. The site is built by the University of Western Sydney.



Figure 9: Student uses P.C to research, measurable by gathering data to track. Source: <http://yorktown-senior.york.com/groups/announcement/plugging-eyes-for-the-blind-eyes-on-the-future-remote-technology-providers>

iv. Enrolment at a University

1. Universities in Australia use your ATAR (Australian Tertiary Assessment Rating) to offer you a place in their courses. Your ATAR is calculated as a mark out of 100 points from your exam and assessment marks from year 12. Career teachers and year advisors will advise all students in year 12 about the process of using your ATAR to apply for a university place.
2. **Early Entry Scholarships.** A scholarship is a grant of money towards your education. Early entry scholarships are offered to students who have shown a consistent achievement record. Early entry gives you a place in your chosen course before you sit your exams. You must still finish and pass year 12, but you are guaranteed the position so the stress is off! Check the websites for application dates and conditions.

Links about Early Entry Scholarships

2a) UNE: University of New England, NSW
<http://www.une.edu.au/future-students/and/early-entry.php>

1. My ultimate aim is to have a live information page online so that students can communicate with one another and share problems and resolutions
2. And find up to date information about how to go about university entry with support for vision access

Towards Tomorrow

1. Email Donna for a copy of the guide:

donna.linton-keane@det.nsw.edu.au

2. Work with it and your students and send the author feedback.

3. Engage with the author in establishing an online information page- BLOG where students and professionals can share information and experiences in real time.

1. A BLOG is a regularly updated website or web page, typically one run by an individual or small group, that is written in an informal or conversational style.

18 Thanks

With thanks to the students who shared their photos and ambitions in this project.



Image shows man speaking too loudly at a student and his guide dog, so that they are blown off balance!

Source:
<http://www.disability.qld.gov.au/community/communication/postcards/>

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1. I have a limited number of printed copies with me today.
2. Can email my research and the project to anyone interested.
3. I am a strong believer in doing things once and sharing, not reinventing over and over.
4. Especially love to hear from individuals who would be interested in developing the BLOG with me.