

# EGlife

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# WHAT I THINK I CAN SEE

In the second part of a special report on working with colour-blindness, Noella Pio Kivlehan speaks to British Council of Shopping Centres chief Michael Green on how the condition has affected him

It is a condition that affects one in 12 men, and one in 200 women. But most people with colour-blindness are not diagnosed until they are at least eight years old. A diagnosis not only changes the way people view their lives, but can also have a direct effect on their career choice. Michael Green, chief executive of the British Council of Shopping Centres, explains what life is like living with colour-blindness.

### Michael Green, chief executive, British Council of Shopping Centres

I was about 11 or 12 when my colour-blindness was first diagnosed. It was during a school medical, when the nurse asked me to read a chart with numbers as dots. When I couldn't do this they discovered I had problems with the colours red, green and brown.

The revelation did not really affect me too much at that stage, although it did

explain why I was so rubbish at doing art!

It was when I got into my teens that colour-blindness did start to affect my life for the simple reason that I could not buy my own clothes. I had to rely on others to help me. I also had to rely on the help of others when I started my career.

In 1975, I joined Marks & Spencer, where at one stage in my career I was involved with ladies' fashion. I had to ask about colours and store presentation.

Once, while I was working in homewares at the Marble Arch branch, the then chairman, Sir [then Lord] Derek Rayner, asked me to put some brown tableware into his car. I put in orange. Thankfully, he saw the funny side.

What people do not understand is that I'm not colour "blind", as such. I see colours, but my brain cannot register the different shades, so it is more colour "deficiency". Even if I am told that a certain garment or thing is purple, the next time I see it, I will not register what colour it is.

Another area that is a problem is watching presentations. Looking at bar charts or pie charts, my brain simply cannot identify the flow of information. When I left M&S in 1995, I joined MEPC. Two years later I left and ran my own business. My colour-blindness affected me again as I had no one to rely on. I had to be very careful doing presentations, for instance. I joined the BCSC in 2003.

Watching sport is also tricky. For example, if Ireland (in green) was playing Wales (in red) in a rugby union match, then I would not be able to tell the difference between them. That is why I am a Leeds United [who wear white] supporter! Don't even get me started on snooker.

And if I did not know the order of traffic lights – as in the top one means stop – and so on, then I would not know what they were.

As is common in most families, my brother Brian is also colour-blind.

Overall, I do not think that having colour-blindness has hindered me too much. Maybe I am not as outspoken as I perhaps would have been. And my plans to become an airline pilot were scuppered

## WHAT BOTHERS COLOUR-BLIND PEOPLE THE MOST?

- When grilling meat, a red-deficient individual would not be able to tell whether it is raw or well done. Many people with this condition cannot tell the difference between green and ripe tomatoes or between ketchup and chocolate syrup. Others are always buying and biting into unripe bananas, as they cannot tell if they are yellow or green, while the banana's natural matt exterior makes it even harder to distinguish.
- Some food may look disgusting to colour-deficient people: a plate of spinach, for instance, can appear to them like a cow pat.
- They can, however, distinguish some citrus fruits. Oranges seem to be a brighter yellow than lemons.
- A colour-blind person is generally unable

to interpret the chemical testing kits for swimming pool water, test strips for hard water, and soil or water pH tests, because these rely on subtle colour differences.

- Many colour-blind people cannot tell whether a woman is wearing lipstick or not. Some are unable to tell the difference between a blue-eyed blonde and a green-eyed redhead.

- Colour-vision deficiencies bother affected children from the earliest years. For example, a child might use a pink crayon, rather than a blue one, to colour the ocean.

- Bi-colour and tri-colour LEDs (light-emitting diodes) also cause problems: is that glowing indicator light red, yellow or green? Same problem with traffic lights...

Source: <http://www.archimedes-lab.org/colorblindnesstest.html>



“Even if I am told that a certain garment or thing is purple, the next time I see it, I will not register what colour it is”

(I also could not have been a doctor or electrician), but otherwise I have got through life.

However, one thing I would ask people to remember is that there are colour-blind people out there, so please do not just take it for granted that everyone can see what they see.

## LAND REGISTRY MAKES MOVES TO GO COLOUR-BLIND FRIENDLY

Integral to any surveyor's work are publications from the Land Registry. It is now making moves to ensure that all its publications are colour-blind friendly.

A spokeswoman says: “Ensuring all publications and official documents are accessible to everyone is very important to us. We continue to monitor and seek improvement of accessibility of all our products and services through our diversity delivery plan.”

She adds: “We are aware that the use of red and green colours on our title plans may be problematic for our colour-blind customers. Unfortunately, nearly 70% of our title plans exist as scanned images and would not be possible to easily convert the colours into those that are easily accessible by our colour-blind customers.”

The Land Registry says that while this is regrettable, “we will however, and wherever

possible, endeavour to assist colour-blind customers with interpretation of these title plans through our customer teams”.

The spokeswoman adds: “Moving forward, we will continue to actively engage with other stakeholders and explore ways in which we can shape our practices, processes and systems to enable more universal and wider access to our map products by colour-blind people.”