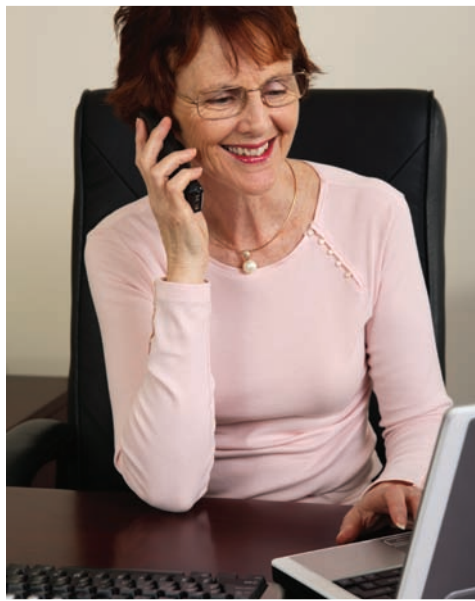


Job Search: The Real Story



A toolkit for blind and partially sighted jobseekers, facilitators and employers



Job Search: The Real Story

A toolkit for blind and partially sighted jobseekers, facilitators and employers

Contents

Foreword	5
Acknowledgements	6
Visage developmental partners	6
Supporting national employers.....	6
Supporting specialist organisations	6
Section one: Using the toolkit	7
1.1. Introduction	7
1.2. User guide	8
Who can use the toolkit?	8
What do you do with the toolkit?	8
User guide for individual jobseekers	10
User guide for facilitators of events	11
1.3. Aims and objectives	13
Aims of the toolkit	13
Learning outcomes	13
Section two: What's in the toolkit?	15
2.1. Module one: Who am I?	15
Aim.....	15
Background	15
Content	15
Resources for module one	16
2.2. Module two: Making yourself more marketable	17
Aim.....	17
Background	17
Content	17
Resources for module two.....	18
2.3. Module three: Cracking the interview code.....	19
Aim.....	19
Background	19
Content	19
Resources for module three	20
2.4. Module four: Facts at your fingertips.....	21
Aim.....	21
Background	21
Content	21
Resources for module four	22

2.5. Module five: Overcoming obstacles	23
Aim.....	23
Background	23
Content	23
Resources for module five.....	25
Section three: Event facilitation manual.....	27
3.1. Introduction	27
3.2. Research	28
3.3. Planning	29
3.4. Final preparation	42
3.5. The event	49
3.6. What happens after the event?.....	50
3.7. Event costing forecast.....	51
Section four: Recommendations	53
4.1. Background	53
4.2. Recommendations for individual jobseekers	54
4.3. Recommendations for facilitators.....	56
4.4. Recommendations for employers	58
4.5. Recommended organisations	60
Section five: Resources.....	61
Module one: Activity 1.1: Icebreaker:	
What is interesting about you?.....	63
Module one: Activity 1.2: Icebreaker: What would you do?	65
Module one: Worksheet 1.1: Believing in yourself.....	67
Module one: Worksheet 1.2: Knowing your worth	69
Module one: Worksheet 1.3: Making the most of yourself.....	71
Module one: Worksheet 1.4: A motivational tool.....	75
Module two: Activity 2.1 (part a):	
Group presentation exercise: Thinking outside the box.....	81
Module two: Activity 2.1 (part b):	
Group discussion: Increasing sales	83
Module two: Factsheet 2.1: Appearance	85
Module two: Worksheet 2.1: Image management	93
Module two: Activity 2.2:	
Quiz: What is your body language saying?.....	101
Module two: Factsheet 2.2: Non-verbal communication.....	105
Module two: Worksheet 2.2: Verbal communication.....	109
Module two: Factsheet 2.3: Public speaking.....	113
Module two: Factsheet 2.4: Image checklist.....	117
Module three: Activity 3.1: Speed interviewing	119

Module three: Worksheet 3.1: Speed interviewing feedback.....	123
Module three: Worksheet 3.2: Speed interviewing questions.....	125
Module three: Worksheet 3.3:	
Role-play exercise: Who would you employ?	131
Module three: Factsheet 3.1: Pre-interview tips.....	139
Module three: Factsheet 3.2: Starting a job search	141
Module three: Factsheet 3.3: Directory of jobseeking resources...	143
Module three: Factsheet 3.4: The CV	167
Module three: Factsheet 3.5: Looking for jobs.....	175
Module three: Factsheet 3.6: Application forms.....	179
Module three: Factsheet 3.7: Covering letters	183
Module three: Factsheet 3.8: Disclosure of disability	185
Module three: Factsheet 3.9: Interview skills	189
Module three: Factsheet 3.10: Getting a job offer	195
Module four: Activity 4.1: Chilling out.....	199
Module four: Factsheet 4.1:	
Registering as blind or partially sighted	205
Module four: Factsheet 4.2: Your rights in employment	219
Module four: Factsheet 4.3: Access to Work	227
Module five: Activity 5.1 (part A):	
Problem solving exercise: Simon's story.....	235
Module five: Activity 5.1 (part B):	
Problem solving exercise: Mary's story.....	237
Module five: Activity 5.2: Discuss it and solve it!.....	239

About this information in this document

Great care has been taken to make sure the information included in this document is correct; however the authors cannot accept responsibility for mistakes or oversights. If you do find errors, please contact Colin Elliott on 0151 298 3221 or Lauren Finnegan on 0207 391 2097 who will try to amend any errors if possible. Similarly, in the resources section of this toolkit, we cannot endorse any particular organisations listed, or vouch that the information regarding their services is also accurate.

Foreword

When Gordon Brown recently asked me what made me set up my business I gave him an honest answer. I said, “Because no b*****d would give me a job!” My answer took me by surprise as much as it did the Prime Minister! However, it is the truth and it is also indicative of the frustration I felt at the time, and the frustration I still feel about the barriers that capable and qualified blind and partially sighted people face when job seeking.

When I look back at that introduction, I’ll admit it wasn’t textbook, but perhaps it was because of this that it was successful. I broke a major rule but did it with a smile on my face, with a warm handshake and with passion in my voice. The encounter resulted in him asking for my business card and him actually giving me his and we have since kept in touch.

I know first-hand how tough the job market can be as a visually impaired jobseeker, so I am delighted to have contributed to one of the pilot events and this subsequent toolkit.

All the practical advice covered within this innovative toolkit is relevant and highly appropriate. If I can endorse just one feature it would be that, while smiling, positivity and self-belief are all extremely difficult to maintain when seeking employment, they are powerfully contagious and persuasive, and when combined they really do lead to success.

I believe that blind and partially sighted people, disability organisations and employers all have a part to play in improving the equality of the job market and therefore achieving social and economic benefits for society. This toolkit provides advice and support for all three groups and can only have a positive impact on the employment rates of blind and partially sighted people and the diversity and strength of our labour market.

Steph Cutler, May 2007

Steph Cutler is a writer, trainer and professional speaker. Her consultancy, Open Eyed, is a leading influence in the area of disability equality. www.openeyed.co.uk

Acknowledgements

This toolkit draws upon the expertise and experience of many different partners. We are grateful for the contributions made by the voluntary organisations, employers and specialist recruitment and training agencies listed below:

Visage developmental partners

- Action for Blind People
- Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities
- Inspire Community Trust
- Kent Association for the Blind
- Kent Supported Employment, Kent County Council
- Newco Products, London Borough of Newham
- Prevista Ltd
- Royal National Institute of Blind People
- The Equal Initiative

Supporting national employers

- Barclays plc
- BT
- Intercontinental Hotels Ltd
- Linklaters
- Manpower UK
- Marks and Spencer plc
- Reed in Partnership

Supporting specialist organisations

- Giles Abbott Voice Coaching (Giles Abbott MA Voice, CSSD)
- Image Intelligence (Steph Cutler and Ian Farrelly)
- QCI Image Consultancy (Sue Cocks)
- Slesser Maclean Career Management and Confidence Boosting
- The CV Clinic

Section one: Using the toolkit

1.1. Introduction

This toolkit is a flexible training package for blind and partially sighted jobseekers. It has been produced by a partnership known as Visage whose aim is to help blind and partially sighted people gain and retain employment. Visage is an Equal funded project supported by the European Social Fund.

The toolkit aims to enable participants to develop a variety of skills to help them get into work. It can help blind and partially sighted people to identify their personal strengths and weaknesses whilst enhancing skills. The toolkit can be used by individuals or in interactive workshops facilitated by disability organisations, job centres or local employers.

The toolkit specifically addresses the needs of blind and partially sighted people. Issues such as confidence, body language and visual presentation are all covered in an appropriate and sensitive manner. In addition, it includes a valuable set of information resources relating to job search, employment rights and support for people with disabilities.

The event facilitation manual contains comprehensive resources to enable an organisation to host an employment event for blind and partially sighted people.

1.2. User guide

Who can use the toolkit?

The toolkit has been designed to provide blind and partially sighted people with additional support with the jobseeking process.

The material is suitable for:

- individual blind or partially sighted jobseekers to use as part of their job search programme
- specialist, disability employment advisors and recruitment agencies to run as a jobseeking programme with individual or small groups of blind and partially sighted clients
- disability organisations to present as one or more specialist workshops for their blind and partially sighted clients
- disability organisations to run one or more workshops for local employers and blind and partially sighted jobseekers.

What do you do with the toolkit?

We recommend working through the material as follows:

Step one

- Read the section 1.3. Aims and objectives
- Research the learning needs of yourself or your client(s) and select aims and objectives from the list that will meet these.
- Use these as a constant point of reference when progressing through the programme.

Step two

- Read through Section two and select the modules you wish to cover.
- You may decide that only some of the modules are relevant to your own or client's current situation. However, be sure to read each module overview carefully, as it may contain material that you have not previously considered.

Step three

- Select which methods of accessing the material you wish to use. For example, if you are working through the toolkit independently you will probably wish to stick to using the worksheets. Group facilitators may wish to choose a mixture of individual tasks and group activities.
- Use the references in the module your choice to locate the required resources in Section five: Resources.

- The resources are split up into worksheets, factsheets or group activities. If you wish to take advantage of the group activities included, then be sure that you have access to a relevant professional for facilitating the material and an appropriate number of people involved to ensure success.

User guide for individual jobseekers

Why should I use the toolkit?

The toolkit is designed to revolutionise your job search. It addresses head on the key factors that research shows contribute to the low success rate of blind and partially sighted people in employment. This toolkit deals with mainstream job search techniques and strategies, alongside the specialist content that will give you a more focused edge to your job search.

Will I need any support with accessing the toolkit?

The toolkit is completely accessible and is available in a variety of formats. You should be able to work through most of the content on your own, but you should still seek professional support to assist you with your job search. Contact details of organisations that can help are included in the Resources section of the toolkit.

How do I incorporate the toolkit into my job search?

Every individual and each job search is unique, so we recommend that you select the sections of the toolkit that you feel would be best for you. However, the toolkit has been designed so that you can work through it all step-by-step if you wish. We are confident that you will discover new material and alternative methods to complement your existing job seeking skills.

How do I know if I am doing the right things?

Evaluation is a crucial element of a good job search programme. This involves keeping track of your progress in an organised fashion. Here are some helpful suggestions for doing this:

- Marking and dating your progress as you work through.
- Keeping a hard-copy or electronic file to record your progress diary; tasks and activities; letters, CVs and applications forms, etc.
- Evaluating your progress frequently (weekly, fortnightly) and setting yourself targets with short-term and long-term action points, that you can review at these evaluation sessions.

How can the toolkit help once I have found a job?

We recommend that you refer back to the toolkit and the targets and action points that you made for yourself after you enter employment. This toolkit is relevant to job retention and your personal development.

User guide for facilitators of events

What has the toolkit got to do with me?

This toolkit is an exciting and innovative programme that aims to address the real issues contributing to the dismally low employment rate of blind and partially sighted people. We believe that many blind and partially sighted people will gain more by using these resources in a supportive jobseeking group. For the toolkit to make maximum impact on the employment rates of blind and partially sighted people, it requires specialist disability organisations to take the leading role in its facilitation.

How will the toolkit benefit my organisation and our clients?

The impact of the toolkit is directly related to the input of the facilitators. For your jobseeking clients to gain maximum benefit from the toolkit, it is essential that they are given access to the interactive elements, such as realistic mock interviews and honest feedback from employers, and professional training and advice from recruitment experts.

By inviting your current employer contacts, who already have some understanding of the issues involved with employment of blind and partially sighted people to an event, your organisation can use this toolkit to make a real difference to the employment prospects of blind and partially sighted people.

Additionally, your relationships with your clients will be enhanced through the innovative format of the toolkit and its material, and will provide employers with realistic solutions and ideas for employing more blind and partially sighted people in their companies.

This toolkit is a fantastic opportunity for approaching new employer and trainer clients, and will draw them in with an exciting and informal offer, which will not involve writing a big cheque!

Facilitation of this innovative new toolkit will demonstrate your organisation's ability to move with the times and the demands of the current labour market and legislation, which hopefully ensures the future loyalty of your clients.

Holding an employment toolkit event will enable your blind and partially sighted clients and employers to come face-to-face and together address real issues and find real solutions.

How do we host a toolkit event?

You can use the toolkit to construct an event that fits in with your own aims and requirements. A useful manual for facilitating an event (based on the results of piloted events) can be found in Section three.

What happens after an event?

The toolkit contains completely up to date material, which can be used as often and for as long as you wish. As a professional organisation you will have the knowledge to update factual information held within the toolkit, when and where is necessary.

Due to the large amount of information covered, you may wish to spread the content over a structured set of workshops as part of a long-term programme with blind and partially sighted clients and employers.

It may be a good idea to provide your clients with copies of the toolkit or sections of the content so that they are able to refer back to the programme when and if they wish to.

1.3. Aims and objectives

Aims of the toolkit

The main aim of the toolkit is to provide blind and partially sighted people with the necessary skills to get into employment. These tools take the form of:

- Module one: Who am I?
- Module two: Making yourself more marketable
- Module three: Cracking the interview code
- Module four: Facts at your fingertips
- Module five: Overcoming obstacles

Learning outcomes

On completion of the toolkit jobseekers will be able to:

- communicate effectively with a range of people in different circumstances and show an understanding of non-verbal communication
- demonstrate the ability to use a range of methods to search for employment opportunities and identify possible sources of support
- demonstrate an ability to sell themselves effectively in an interview situation
- demonstrate an understanding of relevant employment legislation and follow the correct procedures if necessary
- show an understanding of the concerns regarding the employment of someone with sight problems and be able to present counter-arguments in a diplomatic manner.

Facilitators of events will be able to:

- evaluate the success and benefits of the day through quantitative questionnaire and open questioned qualitative feedback during and proceeding the event
- promote their organisation's contribution to improving the level of employment for blind and partially sighted people
- build valuable relationships both with blind and partially sighted job seekers and employers and use these to match jobseekers with potential vacancies or training opportunities

- gain information and feedback from attendees to plan future events.

Attending employers will be able to:

- demonstrate an understanding of visual awareness by assisting a blind or partially sighted person, if they request support
- understand the difficulties that blind and partially sighted people may experience within the workplace and offer support if and when appropriate
- understand the range of support that is available to help in the employment of people with sight problems, including the government Access to Work scheme.

Section two: What's in the toolkit?

The toolkit is made up of five modules. Here is a brief overview of what each module contains, including references to the relevant resources in Section 5: Resource pack.

2.1. Module one: Who am I?

Aim

This module aims to provide blind or partially sighted jobseekers with the necessary tools to:

- realise their potential
- list their strengths and attributes
- recognise areas for self-improvement
- confidently present themselves in a professional manner that grabs an employer's interest.

The module aims to enable jobseekers to discover things about themselves and their abilities that will raise their confidence when facing the job market.

Background

In research for the toolkit, blind and partially sighted people identified issues of low confidence and self-esteem to be the main contributors to their lack of employment success.

Issues around lack of confidence need to be addressed. Feeling more confident about yourself will benefit not only your employment prospects, but will have a positive effect on your life overall. If you are confident in yourself, then others will have confidence in you.

Content

This module can be mixed and matched with any other material that an individual or facilitator may choose to use. However, we feel that raising self-confidence is essential to making the best use of the more practical modules that follow.

For jobseekers to sell themselves in a positive and convincing way to employers, they firstly need to believe in themselves.

This module contains material for achieving the following:

Getting to know yourself better

Before you can start promoting yourself to others, you need to know what it is you are promoting. This section will help you to take the time to look at yourself in a structured and focused way.

Finding your strengths

If our confidence is low, it is often difficult to recognise the strengths that we have going for us. We all have something positive to offer, and it is simply a question of realising what. We may become deterred by job descriptions that ask for qualifications, experience and skills that we may not feel we have, but by looking more closely at what our strengths are, we can start to work out how they can be transferred to the specifics requested.

Seeking improvement

Nobody is perfect, and once we have recognised what we can offer and are proud of this, we can start to look at how we could be even better. Instead of making it a daunting process, this section will assist you in focusing on achievable targets for self-improvement and personal development.

Resources for module one

Activities

Activity 1.1: Icebreaker: What is interesting about you?

Activity 1.2: Icebreaker: What would you do?

Worksheets

Worksheet 1.1: Believing in yourself

Worksheet 1.2: Knowing your worth

Worksheet 1.3: Making the most of yourself

Worksheet 1.4: A motivational tool

Factsheets

Factsheets are not applicable to this module.

2.2. Module two: Making yourself more marketable

Aim

This module aims to empower blind and partially sighted jobseekers with the knowledge and skills for creating an effective image.

A successful job search always includes communication between employers and the jobseeker. So it is essential that jobseekers make the most of every opportunity they get (no matter how short) to sell themselves to an employer.

Background

"First impressions are made within the first 30 seconds of meeting someone, and it takes seven further meetings in order to change that initial impression."

(Sue Cocks, QCI Consultancy: 2006)

Recent research says that many blind and partially sighted people lack confidence and the social skills necessary to present themselves as positively and effectively as they could do. If this is the case, then that ineffective, but nevertheless, all-important first impression may account for at least some of the extraordinarily high unemployment rate for blind and partially sighted people.

This module helps to make the employment playing field more level, by giving blind and partially sighted jobseekers the ability to be as personally effective as their sighted peers.

Content

This module addresses the key components required for personal effectiveness and has been specifically designed to include learning methods and content to be of greatest benefit to blind and partially sighted people. It covers:

Self presentation

It's a visual world, so it is essential that all jobseekers present a positive visual image of themselves as effectively as they can. Judgments can be made about jobseekers' attitude, personality and abilities by the way they look when walking into the room. This section addresses the elements

that affect the way a person looks. The approach taken enables a blind or partially sighted person to work through the material, regardless of their ability to make these first-hand judgments themselves.

Non-verbal communication

A huge part of communication between human beings is non-verbal. Being unaware of our body language or visual communication can cause gross misunderstanding and leave lasting bad impressions. This important section provides you with the knowledge and ability to consider the effect of your own unconscious actions and teaches you to use non-verbal skills to communicate effectively.

Verbal communication

A high proportion of communication is still verbal, and once a good visual impression is secure, the verbal communication that follows needs to build upon the initial good impression. Jobseekers need to be able to communicate their strengths clearly and concisely so that employers come to an accurate conclusion about what a potential employee can offer them. If perfected, strong verbal communication can be a powerful and dynamic tool, and help you to progress in the workplace.

Resources for module two

Activities

Activity 2.1. (part A): Group presentation exercise: Thinking outside the box

Activity 2.1 (part B): Group discussion: Increasing sales

Activity 2.2: Quiz: What is your body language saying?

Worksheets

Worksheet 2.1: Image management

Worksheet 2.2: Verbal communication

Factsheets

Factsheet 2.1: Appearance

Factsheet 2.2: Non-verbal communication

Factsheet 2.3: Public speaking

Factsheet 2.4: Image checklist

2.3. Module three: Cracking the interview code

Aim

The aim of this module is to instil confidence in jobseekers when approaching the 'dreaded' job interview. The advice, guidance and inside-tips from experts will equip participants with the necessary tools for cracking what often appears to be the secret code of interviews.

Background

To make the most of 'their moment' with the employer, jobseekers need to be able to know what exactly is required of them. This module supplies this knowledge in an accessible way to blind and partially sighted people.

Frequently, blind and partially sighted people have less work experience and interview practice than their sighted counterparts, and therefore feel less familiar and comfortable with the process. This module is based upon contributions from real employers and employment experts.

Many of the resources suggest interactive exercises. These are essential for enabling jobseekers to become practiced at the interview process and to perfect their ability to sell themselves well.

Content

This module looks at the interview itself, and focuses heavily on preparation and the process leading up to the final interview stage.

To make the most of this module, we recommend that jobseekers have completed a personal effectiveness course such as Module two: Making yourself more marketable, so that they are feeling confident and ready to tackle this more highly pressured stage.

In addition to the content usually covered in a mainstream job-seeking programme, the specialist content, methodology and delivery of this module has been designed to meet the needs of blind and partially sighted people seeking employment.

The application process

Application forms and CVs are not only important tools for securing interviews, but are also fantastic practice for the interview itself. Learning

how to sell themselves convincingly on paper equips jobseekers with the starting blocks for doing so in person.

Preparation

Performance in an interview is very dependent on how much preparation has taken place. This section provides “dos” and “don’ts” before an interview and also suggests proactive preparation that enables jobseekers to be as well prepared as possible.

Looking at the interview process

It is very useful to reflect on our own behaviour by objectively observing others. By looking at and discussing examples of interviews, we can start to build an idea of what the employer is thinking in a job interview, and adjust our own behaviour accordingly.

Interview practice

This section provides an opportunity to put the newly learnt information into practice through realistic mock interviews in a safe environment, and receive helpful, honest feedback from a professional.

Resources for module three

Worksheets

Worksheet 3.1: Speed interviewing feedback

Worksheet 3.2: Speed interviewing questions

Worksheet 3.3: Role-play exercise: Who would you employ?

Factsheets

Factsheet 3.1: Pre-interview tips

Factsheet 3.2: Starting a job search

Factsheet 3.3: Directory of jobseeking resources

Factsheet 3.4: The CV

Factsheet 3.5: Looking for jobs

Factsheet 3.6: Application forms

Factsheet 3.7: Covering letters

Factsheet 3.8: Disclosure of a disability

Factsheet 3.9: Interview skills

Factsheet 3.10: Getting a job offer

Activities

Activity 3.1: Speed interviewing

2.4. Module four: Facts at your fingertips

Aim

This module enables blind and partially sighted jobseekers to approach the job market fully equipped with all the facts and figures they need, to ensure that they are getting all that they are entitled to and everything they require to carry out their job effectively.

Background

There is a great deal of advice and support for people with disabilities and legislation to protect their rights, but unfortunately not everyone knows about it or where to get it.

This module provides blind and partially sighted jobseekers with information that they can use to overcome any barriers to gaining or remaining in employment.

Much of the concern about employing someone with a sight loss is due to employers being unaware of the help available to blind and partially sighted workers. There are many myths surrounding the employment of blind and partially sighted people, so finding out about the latest access technology and specialist funding helps to dispel these myths.

Content

The module guides jobseekers through a variety of accurate facts and figures, which are segmented into useful employment-related sections. The material has all been carefully selected to benefit blind and partially sighted jobseekers and employees, to enable them to demonstrate that there is plenty of support available financially, practically and technically.

Financial support

Many jobseekers are surprised to discover just what financial benefits are available to blind and partially sighted employees.

As well as ensuring that jobseekers know what they are currently entitled to, this section clears up any worries about being financially less secure when moving into employment.

Other benefits

A range of benefits is available to people who are registered as blind and partially sighted. Some benefits are employment related, but others simply improve your standard of living.

Knowing your rights

Being aware of your legal rights and the employer's legal obligations empowers blind and partially sighted people to make a good case when encountering any difficulties when trying to gain or retain employment. This section provides an easy-to-read summary of what you need to know.

Accessing work

Even after securing a job, blind and partially sighted people may come against challenges in accessing their work, such as using equipment, travelling to work and reading information. This section provides information about the government's Access to Work Scheme, which can assist new employees in overcoming these obstacles.

Knowledge of such support will help to reassure employers that a blind or partially sighted person can fulfil a role adequately and independently with external support.

Chilling out

By considering your relaxation time, you can make your jobseeking and work-life more manageable and less stressful.

Resources for module four

Worksheets

Worksheets are not applicable for this module.

Factsheets

Factsheet 4.1: Registering as blind or partially sighted

Factsheet 4.2: Your rights in employment

Factsheet 4.3: Access to Work

Activities

Activity 4.1: Chilling out

2.5. Module five: Overcoming obstacles

Aim

This module aims to break down the communication barriers between employers and disabled employees and jobseekers.

Background

Following the pilot of modules 1-4, the project developers observed that the most important element involved in making links between employers and job-ready blind and partially sighted people, was informal interaction. By spending the day together working through the modules in a range of activities and roles, natural communication occurred, during which questions were asked, issues addressed and suggestions given for ways to increase the number of blind and partially sighted people in employment.

This module aims to recognise and address the obstacles to employing blind and partially sighted people that are faced both by employers and blind and partially sighted jobseekers. It provides a framework for working together in a safe and controlled environment towards finding a better equilibrium between the two groups.

Content

After detailed analysis of jobseeker and employer feedback from the toolkit's pilot phase, it became evident that employers had four main concerns about employing disabled people:

- Not knowing how to support them.
- Not knowing how disabled people could actually fulfil the requirements of a job.
- The huge financial costs that employers thought they would bring to the company.
- A fear of offending the person with a disability.

Jobseekers admitted being unsure of what employers expected, and felt daunted by the employers' lack of knowledge about disability. Jobseekers had high expectations of a negative response from employers.

This module seeks to build a better mutual understanding between blind and partially sighted jobseekers and employers.

Jobseeker dramas (for blind and partially sighted people)

An opportunity for blind and partially sighted participants to present the difficulties they experience with the job-seeking process as a result of their disability, to welcoming recipients.

Work-related worries (for blind and partially sighted people)

An opportunity for blind and partially sighted participants to bring their daily employment related challenges to the table in a structured format with a welcoming audience.

Employers' concerns

Finally, employers are given the chance to ask the questions they have always wanted to and get honest answers in a safe environment, unrestricted by political correctness and fear of the unknown.

Working together to find solutions

An opportunity for employers and jobseekers to work together and use what they have learnt from the toolkit and their range of work-based skills, to find solutions to realistic employment issues.

Evaluation

This is an essential section, giving participants the chance to reflect upon their previous misconceptions and judgments, what they have learnt and how it is going to change their future. From these evaluation forms the partners working on the Visage Project will be able to ensure that they are providing blind and partially sighted jobseekers and employers with the correct support and guidance.

Resources for module five

Worksheets

Fully accessible evaluation forms can be completed online at www.visage-equal.org

Factsheets

Factsheets are not applicable to this module.

Activities

Activity 5.1 (part A): Problem solving exercise: Simon's Story

Activity 5.1 (part B): Problem solving exercise: Mary's Story

Activity 5.2: Discuss it and solve it!

Section three: Event facilitation manual

3.1. Introduction

As a disability organisation, you will inevitably be familiar with the requirements and responsibilities of facilitating an event.

Two events were organised to pilot this toolkit. Both events were hugely successful and produced fantastic results for the organisation that facilitated them.

The blind and partially sighted jobseekers who attended the event:

- were provided with up-to-date information
- given access to realistic tips and advice from real employers and industry professionals
- took full advantage of the opportunity of networking and mock interviews with employers from a range of leading national companies.

Additionally, employers who attended were full of praise for the enlightening experience and returned to their companies informed and motivated to improve the employment rates of blind and partially sighted people. Following this, employers have:

- continued to support events run by the facilitating organisation
- disseminated their new-found knowledge to colleagues
- provided the organisation and its clients with job vacancy information
- even worked with individuals on real job opportunities.

Subsequently, we have put together this event facilitation manual, so that you have the opportunity of reaping similar benefits.

3.2. Research

Research is the key to a successful event, so that you know what to expect, and give yourself enough time to get everything organised.

Attendees

You will need to pinpoint your target audience, using both current blind and partially sighted jobseekers and new contacts, and identify who would benefit from particular aspects of the toolkit.

Employers are just as crucial. Use your contacts and your colleagues' knowledge and contacts to approach employers known to be open and positive about people with disabilities, as well as approaching other employers for the first time.

Expenses

Plan your budget. The Event costing schedule in section 3.7 provides a flexible model for forecasting your costs that can be adapted to meet the requirements and practicalities of your own event.

Finding speakers and workshop leaders

If your organisation already has contacts with trusted workshop leaders and speakers you may wish to approach them first as potential facilitators for your event. They may also come with a lower price tag.

However, if you are approaching new contacts as speakers and professionals to lead particular sessions, make sure you do your research thoroughly. It is imperative that their material and company ethic is suitable for your audience. It is essential to meet with workshop leaders and presenters to agree the clear objectives and your expectations.

3.3. Planning

Facilities

The venue, catering and transport needs to be confirmed in plenty of time, and access issues need to be planned from the outset. Be sure to consider:

- the location of venue relating to client access by foot or public transport
- wheelchair access
- guide dog acceptance and facilities if possible
- visual impairment friendly surroundings, i.e. good lighting, clearly marked staircases, obstacle free corridors, etc.
- the capacity of venue to include sighted guides, cane users and guide dogs.

We recommend that you use two or more rooms, to allow for break-out sessions, a separate networking area or refreshment space.

Workshop leaders and speakers

It is critical that you brief all your workshop leaders and speakers (especially if they are external to your organisation), so that you know what to expect from them, and they know what to expect from you and your attendees.

Disability can be an unknown or daunting thing to many people, including professional trainers and speakers, who undoubtedly will learn more about issues for people with disabilities during the course of the event. However, it is always a good idea to make sure that everyone involved has an understanding before the event, of what to expect and how to behave.

There is a list of recommended contacts in Section four of this toolkit.

On the following page there is an example of a briefing for a speaker.

Speaker briefing example

Jobseekers' Forum Thursday 13 July 2006 Workshop Leader Briefing - insert name

Thank you very much for agreeing to deliver the Voice Projection for Effective Verbal Communication Workshop at the Jobseekers' Forum.

Time and duration of session

Your sessions will be in CR2 at:

- 1:40pm - 2:35pm (55 minutes)
- 2:45pm - 3:40pm (55 minutes)

Audience

Mixed - employers, employment professionals and jobseekers.

- 18 blind and partially sighted jobseekers (nine jobseekers in each session).
- At least two facilitators in each workshop.
- Some external employers may wish to observe the workshop (You may wish to involve them as you feel appropriate).

Areas you will be covering:

- Effective verbal communication
- Voice projection (warm-up exercises)
- Exact details to be confirmed by you by XX/XX/20XX

The agenda

Once speakers and facilitators are confirmed, an agenda can be produced, providing an outline of the day's events and timings.

Be sure to allow extra time during workshops for providing accessible formats of materials, for use of sighted guide or detailed instruction and general run-over time.

The toolkit covers a great deal of material and we recommend that if you wish to cover it all, then two days are required for complete facilitation.

Ensure that your agenda looks interesting, as it needs to motivate your attendees to carry on through the day.

On the following pages there is an example of an agenda used to facilitate some of the material of the toolkit at a pilot event. It uses eye-catching names to workshops with brief persuasive descriptions.

Agenda example

A Job Search Workshop run by... as part of the Visage Beneficiary Sub Group

Venue address

Date

Friday 14th July 2006: 10:30am - 4pm

Day Programme

10:15am - 10:30am	Tea / Coffee
10:30am - 10:40am	Welcome and Introductions
10:40am - 10:50 am	Talk from a Visage Beneficiary Motivational blind speaker
10:50am-12:00am	Workshop one: "Who am I?" Building your confidence and a personal profile Led by: leading image consultancy
12:00pm - 1:30pm	Workshop two: "Cracking the interview code" <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advice and tips and a Speed Interviewing Session with a range of employers from leading companies.• Talk and coaching on 'Making the right impression' from leading Career Management Coach.
1:30pm - 2:00pm	Lunch
2:00pm - 2:50pm	Workshop three: "Take your pick" Information gathering session: Getting accessible helpful information. Featuring talks and Q&A session from experts on a range of employment related matters.

2:50pm	Tea / Coffee
3:00pm - 3:25pm	Workshop four: "How can you help?" Empathising and problem solving skills for self-progression.
3:25pm - 3:55pm	"Now you tell us!" Feedback and evaluation session.
3:55pm - 4:00pm	"Chill out!" Relaxation exercise
4:00pm	Close

Marketing - Invitations

Whether your jobseeker and employer clients are existing long-term supporters, or are being approached for the first time, it is essential that you produce informative and motivating marketing material, that it is appropriately targeted towards the recipient.

Jobseekers

There is a good chance that many of your blind and partially sighted clients will have taken part in similar sounding 'job-search' programmes, so it is important to sell your Toolkit Event as something new, innovative and different. Promoting exciting and original concepts such as speed interviewing and image consultancy are strong persuasive pitches for securing attendees.

Additionally, advertising the well-known or local employers that you have secured may be effective in convincing your jobseekers that these employers are committed to making employment with them possible.

Make sure your invitations/fliers are fully accessible and produce them in as many different accessible formats (such as braille, email attachment, CD) as you can.

On the following page there is an example of a jobseeker invitation.

Jobseeker invitation example

Introducing the...

Job Search: The Real Story Workshop Day

Whoever said getting a job was easy?

Well we realise that for many blind and partially sighted people it certainly isn't, and to try and make it more so, we are offering a one-day event providing useful information and advice in a fun and interactive format.

Why should I attend?

This is your chance to get invaluable, uncensored and realistic advice and tips on all aspects of the job search process from leading professionals. You will also be given the opportunity to have realistic mock speed interviews from leading employers.

How will it help me?

When applying for your next job you will have a clearer idea about what you want to do, what you can do and how you are going to get it.

When is it?

The one-day event will be held on ...from ... until ... and will even include a free lunch!

Where is it?

It will be held at..., which is conveniently located very close to ... station and can be reached by both the Number ... bus and ... tube lines.

Sounds good... but how much is it going to cost me?

Absolutely nothing – the day will be funded by the European Social Fund as part of the Visage Project – dedicated to improving the level and standard of employment amongst blind and partially sighted people.

How do I find out more?

To reserve your free place on this exciting new event please contact ... at the ... or email atjoe.bloggs@visage.co.uk or simply call 020 700 0000.

Existing employer contacts

When inviting employers who are already familiar with your organisation and the issues that you address, it is a good idea to draw on the support that they have already contributed.

People like to hear praise, and it generally motivates people to do more. As good as your employers have been, they can always do better, and the employment rate of blind and partially sighted people still remains low.

Additionally, all employers need to stay vigilant to new legislation and training and to stay up to date with the support that is available to them and their disabled employees. Remind them of all of this.

On the following page there is an example of an email sent to an employer that had previously provided huge support to events such as this.

Example of an email to an employer

Hi there,

I hope that this email finds you well and that you enjoyed a wonderful Christmas and that 2007 has got off to a good start for both yourself and (name of company).

It is looking to be a good year for us here at ..., as we have been given the opportunity of facilitating an EQUAL funded Visage Job Search event on ... at... here at

For many years now, we have provided our blind and partially sighted clients with advice and guidance on their job search process, and have been pleased to report many fantastic outcomes. However, as you well know, the employment rate for blind and partially sighted people still remains dismally low with only one in four blind and partially sighted people in employment. We feel that this forthcoming event could be the catalyst for some exciting new developments!

There is a lack of employment related experience available to blind and partially sighted people. This has been identified as being a crucial contributing factor to the low employment rate that remains problematic.

So this event will include a focus on the interview process; complete with a mock speed interviewing session and professional advice from career management coaches and image consultants.

Due to the fantastic support and outstanding commitment you have shown to us and our clients in the past, I was hoping that you would be able to supply us with your expert services once more by providing an interviewer for a Speed Interviewing Session. You would be working alongside other well-known employers (include names if you have these confirmed) with a group of our jobseeking clients.

The speed interviewing session will be followed by a short workshop, which will include talks by our legal expert on the latest government legislation surrounding disability (the DDA) and members of our Technology Department will explain how the Access To Work Scheme can provide funding to employers. I am sure that you and your colleagues will be keen to update your knowledge on these important matters.

Judging from the success of the ... recruitment training that you were involved with last ..., I am confident that this event will be a highly advantageous one, both for employers and the jobseekers, giving them additional confidence and skills.

If you or a colleague are able to kindly supply your time and expertise for a couple of hours on ..., then please let me know and I will be delighted to reserve your place and send you further details.

I eagerly await your response.

Kind regards

Jo Bloggs

Telephone 020 800 0000

Email jo.bloggs@visage.co.uk

New employer contacts

Approaching new employers can be daunting, as we have no idea of their knowledge of or attitude towards disability and sight loss in particular.

Employing people with sight loss means respecting blind and partially sighted people as talented and skilled individuals, so trying to gain employers' support by pulling on their heart strings with tales of "our poor clients' woeful situations" is not an effective or acceptable approach.

When approaching new employers:

- **Research the company** – Make sure you know something about the company you are speaking to, and congratulate them on any work they have done relating to diversity and disability.
- **Speak to the right person** – Always speak to the most senior person possible, but preferably someone involved in Human Resources. Large organisations will have a diversity team, who may have targets for the employment of disabled people.
- **Talk the talk** – Avoid using disability jargon or buzz words and acronyms. When communicating with new businesses use language and images that they can identify with.
- **Legal talk** – All companies are bound by the Disability Discrimination Act. Make sure they know about it, and how such an event can assist them to meet their legal requirements.
- **Make them feel valued** – Make the employer aware of just how much they are supporting the enormous issue of employment amongst blind and partially sighted people, and just what benefits they will reap from doing so.

On the following page there is an example of an invitation for a new employer contact.

Example of an invitation for a new employer contact.

Your organisation's address

Date

Dear Mr Head of HR

RE: Job Search: The Real Story Workshop

I am writing to you to inform you of an exciting new Workshop taking place at ...on Friday 14 July from 10:30 am - 4:00 pm.

The aim of the day is to provide blind and partially sighted job seekers with the vital information and advice they need to enable them to get into employment. As employers you will learn more about the skills and abilities of people with sight loss, the technology that enables them to work effectively and the government funding available for employing people with disabilities. We hope to open the eyes of jobseekers and employers alike to realise what really needs to be done to ensure that this occurs.

Attendees will be given the opportunity to take part in a range of sessions including an interview skills session entitled 'Cracking the interview code'.

Within this workshop, jobseekers will be given the opportunity to experience mock job interviews in a speed interview session. To ensure that our clients receive a realistic experience and professional feedback and advice, we are inviting a wide range of employers from highly reputable organisations to assist with this session.

In addition to giving blind and partially sighted jobseekers the opportunity to receive realistic and useful advice, you or a colleague will learn how to conduct interviews that conform with current legislation. Blind and partially sighted jobseekers will give you a deeper insight into the steps that need to be made to ensure that more blind and partially sighted people get the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in paid employment in organisations such as your own.

The speed interviewing session will run from 12.00 - 1.00pm but you are more than welcome to attend as much of the day as you desire, and you will be able to take as much of a role in the day's entire activities as you wish. I have included a full day's agenda and a more detailed outline of the 'Cracking the interview code' session with this letter.

If you wish to show your commitment to what promises to be a highly enjoyable and valuable day please contact Jo Bloggs on 020 700 0000 or email jo.bloggs@visage.co.uk

I look forward to hearing from you and working with you on this new and exciting project.

Yours sincerely

Jo Bloggs

Telephone 020 700 0000
Email Jo.Bloggs@visage.co.uk

3.4. Final preparation

Confirmation

Jobseekers

It is important that jobseekers are made aware of their confirmed place at your event with good notice and in an accessible format. They may need additional time to arrange transport and other mobility related issues, which you could assist with by producing accessible, concise directions, including public transport directions.

Bear in mind that some attendees may be on benefits and long distance travel may be too expensive, so if appropriate consider budgeting for reimbursing travel expenses.

Employers

Employers are likely to need at least six weeks' notice in order for sufficient numbers to be available. Ensure employers are briefed a second time in writing leading up to the event, and telephone them to build the relationship further if possible.

Workshop leaders and speakers

These should be confirmed during early preparation of the event (as outlined above) in order to ensure that a full timetable is secured. However, it is very wise to contact them just before the event, to confirm that things are running to plan.

Producing supporting material

Evaluation / feedback forms

As the toolkit has been developed through a new and innovative EQUAL Funded project, it would be extremely helpful if feedback could be collected from any events held in order for the toolkit to be continually evaluated, so that improvements can be made as and when necessary.

On the following page there is an example of an evaluation form that you can adjust to the requirements of your particular event. You may wish to produce a slightly different version for your attending employers and speakers

Example of an evaluation form

Job Search: Workshop Day

Date

Location

Evaluation form

1. What did you find particularly useful in **Workshop one: Who am I?** and why?
2. Were there any aspects of **Workshop one: Who am I?** that you would change and if so, how?
3. What did you find particularly useful in **Workshop two: Making yourself more marketable** and why?
4. Were there any aspects of **Workshop two: Making yourself more marketable** that you would change and if so, how?

10. Were there any aspects of **Workshop five: Overcoming the obstacles** that you would change and if so, how?

11. How useful did you find the Chill out session?

- Think it's a great idea, and will really help me
- I may use it now and again if I am really stressed
- Nice in theory, but I don't believe any of that stuff

12. How useful did you find the information pack that you received on the day?

- Highly useful and a good summary of the day
- Useful, but not a good summary of the day
- Not very useful at all

13. What did you consider to be the highlight(s) of the whole day?

14. What aspects of the day do you feel could be improved, and how?

15. How effective did you find the external speakers (i.e. employers, image consultants)?

- Highly effective
- Effective
- Did not make any effect
- Made the whole day less effective

16. How would you compare today's workshop with other jobsearch events / programmes that you have participated in?

- Much more beneficial
- About as beneficial
- Not as beneficial

17. What, if anything, do you think that today's workshop offered that other similar events / programmes have not in the past?

18. Did you find the location, format and general organisation of the day to your satisfaction and fully accessible?

- Yes
- No

If no, what problems did you encounter?

19. What format would you prefer the content of the jobsearch toolkit training to take?

- A personal handbook
- One-to-one training with a professional
- A website
- An interactive workshop
- Other

Please specify

20. Would you be interested in being involved with any other events or programmes run by the Visage Project to assist more blind and partially sighted people into and receiving a high standard of employment? (For example, we will require jobseekers to test the finished Jobsearch Toolkit.)

- Yes
- No

If no, why?

21. Have you attended any other Visage Training Days in the past, and if so how did you find that this Jobsearch Workshop Day compared with them?

22. Do you feel that the workshop has improved your future employment prospects?

- Yes
- No

If yes, how?

Handouts / worksheets

Due to the nature of the clientele that your event will be targeting, it is wise to limit the amount of paper material provided on the day. The emphasis instead should be on practical training and absorption of ideas through demonstration.

It may be useful to provide handouts/worksheets prior to the event in an accessible format, such as email, braille or large print, so that jobseekers can become familiar with the material covered beforehand.

Delegate packs

Information packs and delegate packs must be accessible and must be a good reflection of the event that they support. These provide an opportunity to leave a lasting impression with attendees. Appropriate material can be found in the Resource pack (Section 5) of this toolkit.

To encourage further networking opportunities between employers and jobseekers, it is useful to provide each attendee with a list of the contact details of those attendees who are happy to give out their details.

3.5. The event

The toolkit is a catalyst for development. In a well-planned event, facilitators will be able to watch the benefits unfold in front of their eyes.

Be sure to encourage natural interaction from attendees, promote independence of the blind and partially sighted jobseekers, and respectful, but supportive attitudes from employers.

Make sure that everyone feels comfortable and are told at the beginning of the event that they are in a safe environment, where people should feel free to speak their mind and ask questions, as long as they are respectful of each other.

A toolkit event will inevitably produce honest conversation and relaxed interaction, which undoubtedly helps to break down barriers and dispel misconceptions, contributing to brighter employment prospects for blind and partially sighted people.

3.6. What happens after the event?

Hopefully, your event will have sparked off a whole host of opportunities for change within the organisations of the employers who attended and in your blind and partially sighted clients' work lives.

Keep in contact with all your attendees and consider them when organising other events and projects.

Depending on the level of success you achieve, you may be presented with the opportunity of working with companies to recruit your clients actively.

Good luck!

3.7. Event costing forecast

The following costs of running jobsearch training days are approximate only and are based on the pilot events that took place in July 2006.

Please note that the actual costs may vary depending on which elements of the toolkit you select for your training event. Costs of hiring a venue and catering will also vary depending on location. Staff time consumed in organising and running the event is displayed in terms of number of days (this is an approximate only).

	Cost
Venue, catering and event delivery costs	
Venue hire	£20.00 per delegate
Catering	£9.75 per delegate
Workshop leaders	£250.00 per workshop leader
Travel expenses	
Dependent on mode of transport, distance travelled and number of professionals claiming travel costs. Jobseekers' travel costs at the discretion of the facilitating organisation	Variable
Total monetary costs incurred	
Organiser time	
Developing the event programme including step-by-step overview	7 days
Communication with jobseekers	5 days
Communication with employers	7 days
Sourcing speakers and workshop leaders	3 days
Producing delegate briefings and promotional material	5 days
Booking venue, catering and room arrangements	1 day
Other professionals' time	
Facilitator time	
Internal workshop leaders/speakers time	
External workshop leaders/speakers time	
Total number of staff days	

Section four: Recommendations

4.1. Background

To ensure that the toolkit is of greatest benefit, each module has been piloted with blind and partially sighted jobseekers and employers. This testing was carried out in workshops that were facilitated by professionals working from within and external to the disability sector.

Following the pilots, an evaluation report was produced. The internal and external evaluators used specific quantitative and detailed qualitative feedback from all the participants.

Subsequently, an outline for this toolkit was produced. In addition, the following recommendations were put together, to ensure that users of the toolkit would use it to its full advantage.

4.2. Recommendations for individual jobseekers

The toolkit is available as a downloadable Word document from the Visage website www.visage-equal.org

Later in 2007 hard copies will be available in a range of formats. Blind and partially sighted people should request and be provided with the most useful format for their individual needs.

- Since insufficient time was the main criticism raised from piloting the toolkit, it is advised that individuals embark on each module separately, giving themselves enough time to cover every issue in as much time and detail as is necessary.
- One of the unique characteristics of the toolkit is the realistic, first-hand advice concerning the issues that blind and partially sighted people often face.
- Jobseekers will find it invaluable to seek sighted assistance from someone who they feel comfortable with, when covering these elements of the toolkit.
- The interactive elements of the toolkit are useful and exciting. To benefit from these parts, jobseekers are encouraged to research and contact local organisations and employers, specialist professionals (such as Image Consultants and Voice Coaches) and employment experts (such as a DEA at JobCentre Plus). A full list of supporting companies and organisations can be found at the end of this section.
- Some of the issues addressed within this toolkit may seem unnecessary or even difficult to personally deal with. However, they remain important, and must be addressed by users in order to benefit from the toolkit programme and improve chances of employment success.
- The toolkit promotes independence and self-responsibility, both of which are imperative to gaining employment. Jobseekers are advised to make these aspects a priority when following the toolkit programme.

- Everyone's job search is unique. However, it is helpful for all jobseekers to be open-minded to attempting new strategies and ideas when using the toolkit in their job search, as 'you never know, if you never try'.
- Visit the Visage website, www.visage-equal.org to find out more about the project, learn more, make useful contacts and continue to support and benefit from the Visage Project and the jobsearch toolkit.

4.3. Recommendations for facilitators

The toolkit can be downloaded as a Word or PDF document from the Visage website, www.visage-equal.org

Later in 2007 hardcopies in a range of formats will be available. Blind and partially sighted people should be provided with the most useful format for their individual needs.

- Since insufficient time was the main criticism raised in the piloting of the toolkit, it is advised that each module is approached separately, providing sufficient time to cover every issue in as much time and detail as is necessary.
- The participation of employers at the two events was one of the major selling points and a distinct highlight for the jobseekers. Hence, the involvement of employers at future events is strongly recommended and can be current or fresh contacts. A full list of supporting companies and organisations can be found at the end of this section.
- This toolkit is unique in addressing blind and partially sighted jobseekers' need to consider the visual factors that influence job search. Facilitators are advised to employ professionals with expert knowledge of this area, who are able to offer dynamic presentations to jobseekers. A full list of supporting companies and organisations can be found further on in this section.
- Some elements of jobseeker training, such as social and soft skills need to be delivered in a sensitive manner. However, related issues such as personal hygiene, inappropriate behaviour or body language should not be avoided or skirted around under the misapprehension that these are "best left alone because they may be uncomfortable discussion topics for blind and partially sighted people". It is vital to ensure that those delivering, or involved with the training have a good understanding of the specific issues faced by people with sight loss.
- Those responsible for the workshop delivery must ensure that the workshops are fully accessible to participants with additional difficulties/disabilities.

- The pilot events promoted independence and self-responsibility, both of which are imperative to gaining employment. It is advised that these aspects are built into your toolkit programme with blind and partially sighted jobseekers.
- Any information provided to jobseekers should be accessible and provided to jobseekers in advance of use.
- It may be worthwhile to carry out post-event evaluations over the telephone, as this proved more effective in obtaining a larger number of responses. Alternatively, a time could be set aside for written evaluation feedback at the end of the event. Since many people with sight-loss experience difficulties in completing the evaluation forms, professionals could be at hand to help the jobseekers.
- The jobseekers recruited for the pilot events were already known to the facilitating organisation. It is important to use marketing approaches and contacts to seek out jobseekers who are not currently in touch with support organisations.
- Visit the Visage website, www.visage-equal.org in order to find out more information about the project, learn more, make useful contacts and continue to support and benefit from the Visage Project and the job search toolkit.

4.4. Recommendations for employers

- Seek advice and support with any elements of the toolkit from disability sector experts. A full list of supporting organisations can be found at the end of this section.
- The organisations listed in the Acknowledgements supply employers with local jobseekers to work with.
- It is imperative that employers approach the toolkit and related events with an open and egalitarian mind, ready to construct positive and realistic solutions for getting more blind and partially sighted people into work. With this approach the programme will benefit them and jobseekers.
- Although employers participating in toolkit events will provide a unique insight and greater visual awareness, it is useful for employers to come with some understanding of sight loss and an appreciation that blind and partially sighted people are individuals with different abilities and needs.
- Employers hold a great deal of knowledge and experience that will be of huge benefit to jobseekers. It is advised that employers provide this through natural interaction or in mock interviews or feedback, rather than burdening themselves with large amounts of paperwork and preparation.
- Some elements of jobseeker training, such as social and soft skills should be delivered in a sensitive manner.
- However, related issues such as personal hygiene, inappropriate behaviour and body language should not be avoided or skirted around under the misapprehension that these are 'best left alone because they may be uncomfortable discussion topics for blind and partially sighted people'. Therefore, it is important to ensure that those delivering, or involved with the training have a good understanding of the specific issues faced by people with sight loss.
- Those responsible for the workshop delivery must ensure that the workshops are fully accessible to participants with additional difficulties / disabilities.

- The pilot events promoted independence and self-responsibility, both of which are imperative to gaining employment. It is advised that these are not overlooked when working on the toolkit programme with blind and partially sighted jobseekers.
- Any information provided to jobseekers should be accessible and provided to jobseekers in advance of use.
- Visit the Visage Website, www.visage-equal.org to find out more information about the project, learn more, make useful contacts and continue to support and benefit from the Visage Project and the job search toolkit.

4.5. Recommended organisations

The following organisations have contributed to the development of this jobsearch toolkit, and have demonstrated a commitment to equal opportunities.

- **Barclays plc:** www.barclays.com
- **BT:** www.bt.com
- **Giles Abbott Voice Coaching:** www.gilesabbott.co.uk
- **Image Intelligence:**
Ian Farrelly: www.efashionista.com
Steph Cutler: www.openeyed.co.uk
- **Intercontinental Hotels Group Ltd.:** www.ihg.com
- **Linklaters:** www.linklaters.com
- **Manpower UK:** www.manpower.co.uk
- **Marks & Spencer plc:** www.marksandspencer.co.uk
- **QC Image Consultancy:** www.qcic.co.uk
- **Reed in Partnership:** www.reedinpartnership.co.uk
- **Slessor Maclean Career Management and Confidence Boosting:**
www.slessormaclean.co.uk
- **The CV Clinic:** www.thecvclinic.co.uk

Section five: Resources

Module one: Activity 1.1: Icebreaker: What is interesting about you?

Can be used:

- as general ice breaker for a group
- by groups to improve self-confidence, verbal communication and social behaviour.

Instructions

- Group sits in a circle.
- Facilitator introduces him or herself formally, and suggests that a good way for everyone to get to know each other is to go around the circle introducing themselves. However, to make this more interesting, everyone must say one interesting thing about themselves - this can be anything, and does not have to be related to employment.
- Facilitator begins by giving a good example. (Tip: Make it amusing in order to relieve tension).
- The facilitator invites each person to speak in turn, with facilitator making the odd positive remark and thanking all participants warmly.

Plenary

Participants now have more of an idea about their peers; will be feeling more comfortable and will have demonstrated a degree of self-belief, good verbal communication and appropriate social behaviour.

Module one: Activity 1.2: Icebreaker: What would you do?

Can be used:

- as a general ice breaker
- to improve self-confidence, verbal communication and social behaviour.

Instructions

- Group sits in a circle.
- Facilitator introduces him or herself formally, and suggests that a good way for everyone to get to know each other, is to go around the circle introducing themselves. However to make this more interesting, there is a twist.
- The twist is to imagine that each participant has been given £500 by their bank or another organisation. Each person will introduce themselves and must state what they would spend it on and why.
- Facilitator begins by giving a good example. (Tip: Make it amusing in order to relieve tension).
- Choose one of the employers attending the toolkit workshop to be the next to speak. (This will relieve tension in the group.)
- Go around each person with facilitator making the odd positive remark and thanking all participants warmly.

Plenary

Participants will have more of an idea about their peers; will be feeling more comfortable and will have demonstrated a degree of self-belief, good verbal communication and appropriate social behaviour.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module one: Worksheet 1.1: Believing in yourself

What is the worksheet about?

For self-confidence, it is necessary that you know yourself and recognise your potential, as well as having an idea of what improvements you could make.

By the end of this worksheet you will have a comprehensive list of your personal attributes and a clear, concise summary of yourself. Please answer the questions honestly and in full.

Exercise: Recognise your strengths

1. What do you enjoy doing the most?
2. Why do you enjoy doing it?
3. What do you physically or mentally have to do to participate in this activity? (e.g. attend meetings, research on the Internet, etc)
4. What skills have you attained through participating in these activities? (e.g. if you are a member of a society or local club, then you can work successfully in a team and may be a good verbal communicator).
5. How could these skills be used when doing other things? (e.g. watching DVDs requires good concentration and comprehension, which would be highly useful when listening to people's problems or reading factual documents).
6. Now write a list of the skills that you have just recognised as having, bearing in mind how they could be transferred to a work situation.

Congratulations!

You now have a list of skills that you can acknowledge as your strengths. You can use this list when creating your CV, completing application forms or even to promote the skills you offer in an interview!

These are called transferable skills - as you have transferred them from one situation and into one that is work-based.

You can do this exercise with all aspects of your life. You will surprise yourself with how many transferable skills you hold!

You may not have thought that these skills are valuable to an employer, but they are! They become highly useful to an employer by you adapting them for use in the workplace.

For example, if you do not have office-based work experience, you may find that you have still attained the related skills in other areas of your life, i.e. through filing away utility bills, making enquiries by telephone, writing complaint letters, etc.

Module one: Worksheet 1.2: Knowing your worth

What is this worksheet about?

Worksheet 1.1 enabled you to list your transferable skills. This worksheet will help you to acknowledge just what this means and what you can do with them in order to make a positive difference.

When considering the following questions, think of a person that has meant something to you in your life. This can be a family member, friend, neighbour, teacher or perhaps a previous work colleague. It can be anyone you want, as long as you respect them and feel that they have somehow made a positive difference to your life, no matter how big or small.

Please try and answer all questions honestly and in full.

Exercise: What effect do you have on others?

1. What words has someone used to positively describe you in the past?
2. In what situation or why did they make this comment?
3. How did it make you feel when they said this?
4. What other times in your life do you demonstrate this quality?
5. What other ways could you use this quality to benefit yourself and/or others around you?
6. How do you think using this quality makes others feel?
7. Write down a sentence stating what this positive quality about yourself is, how you have used it in the past, and how you could use it for a positive difference in the future.

I am...

Now make a list of the work-related situations that you could make a positive difference to.

Repeat this exercise for a number of positive comments. They do not all need to have been made by the same person.

Congratulations!

You now know how to put your strengths to a beneficial use by examining the effect that you have on those around you. You can feel confident that you are making a difference to other people's lives in some way.

Module one: Worksheet 1.3: Making the most of yourself

What is this worksheet about?

You should now have an idea from completing Worksheet 1.1 and Worksheet 1.2 about your personal strengths, other people's positive perception of you and how you make them feel.

However, to feel truly confident it is essential that you can identify what you find challenging and work out how you can improve weaker skills. If you know your strengths and weaknesses you will not lose confidence when faced with a difficult situation, but will be ready to face challenges and overcome them successfully. Your confidence will encourage confidence in others around you.

Please answer the questions honestly and in full.

Exercise: Thinking outside the box

For this exercise, you need to start thinking metaphorically. This exercise requires you to use your imagination, rather than to think literally. The idea is to transfer your own human characteristics to an inanimate object, e.g. something not living. This means thinking of your characteristics laterally. For example, if you are bright, bouncy and move around a great deal, you could attribute these qualities to an inanimate object such as a ball or kite.

Take as much time as you need to think about this. If you ask someone for their help, make sure that you agree with the characteristics that are suggested to summarise you and the inanimate object that you decide on.

1. If you were an inanimate object or product, what would you be?
2. What are the characteristics that you and the product/object have in common?

Now think about the object only

3. What do people use this product/object for in general?
4. How does this product/object benefit or affect people's lives?
5. How is the product/object marketed?
6. What are the negative points about the product/object, and what can go wrong?
7. How would you improve the product/object, in order to make it more beneficial or appealing to its users?

Now re-answer questions 3 to 7, thinking of you as the useful product or object.

Were any of the improvements you made for yourself similar to those you suggested for the object?

Sometimes thinking of yourself as a product makes it easier to examine what elements of yourself are weaker, and what can be done to improve on these and make yourself more appealing and useful to others.

Now make a list of some of the ways that you can make these improvements and make yourself more appealing and employable to others.

Consider the following to help you to do this:

- learning new skills
- gaining new knowledge/qualifications
- getting more experience
- reflecting on your behaviour and its effect on others
- how you present yourself
- what makes people's lives easier
- what gets you noticed and stand out from others.

Congratulations!

Now you have a list of things that you can do to make yourself even more marketable and thus employable! Your confidence need not be knocked when facing challenges and you have demonstrated how you can find solutions and alternatives to overcoming them.

Module one: Worksheet 1.4: A motivational tool

Who is this worksheet for?

This worksheet presents a number of exercises that can be done by yourself, at your own time and leisure, or as part of a group, with an assigned group leader to present the inspirational piece of poetry and guide discussions.

Introduction

Sometimes it is useful, and often essential, to reflect on our own attitude, behaviour and actions in order to decipher what and why things are not going as well as we would hope in our lives. Once we have reflected on this, we can start to find ways of improving aspects of our lives in whichever way we wish.

The following thought-provoking poem is used by professional image consultants and confidence managers to help people develop new skills. Please read the poem before starting the activities that follow.

The Comfort Zone (unknown author)

I used to have a comfort zone where I knew I wouldn't fail.
The same four walls and busy work were really more like jail.
I longed so much to do the things I'd never done before,
But stayed inside my comfort zone and paced the same old floor.
I said it didn't matter that I wasn't doing much.
I said I didn't care for things like commission cheques and such.
I claimed to be so busy with things inside my zone,
But deep inside I longed for something special of my own.
I couldn't let my life go by just watching others win.
I held my breath; I stepped outside and let the change begin.
I took a step and with new strength I'd never felt before,
I kissed my comfort zone goodbye and closed and locked the door.

If you're in a comfort zone, afraid to venture out,
Remember that all winners were at one time filled with doubt.
A step or two and words of praise can make your dreams come true.
Reach for your future with a smile; Success is there for you!

Exercise one: Your comfort zone

Please answer the following question honestly.

What is your comfort zone?

Think about all aspects of your life, and the things that you have always done, and are scared of changing. (This could be the place you live, the social life you have, your state of mind, etc).

Exercise two: Your no-go zone

Now you have identified the nature of your comfort zone, think about the things that are not within it.

By imprisoning yourself within your comfort zone, there will be many things that you are not getting access to – you may not even know they exist!

Please answer the following questions honestly.

1. What experiences do you not get the opportunity of realising?
2. Which people do you never meet?
3. What subjects do you have no knowledge of?
4. Where have you never been?
5. What other things have you never got to do whilst remaining in your comfort zone?

Now state three improvements that you would like to make to your life, in order to bring about a positive change.

For example: I want to meet more people

Improvement one:

Improvement two:

Improvement three:

Exercise three: Your new zone

Now turn the improvements that you have want to make to your life, into actual achievable goals.

For example: Goal one: I will meet new people and make new friends.

Goal one:

Goal two:

Goal three:

Exercise four: Getting into the zone

With your goals in sight, the only thing left to do is finding the means of reaching them.

Think about the following things which could contribute or put you in the right direction for achieving your goals.

List of life-changing possibilities

- Gaining a new qualification
- Attending a training course
- Seeking professional career, image or confidence training
- Taking up a voluntary job role to gain experience
- Joining a local club or society
- Starting up a new hobby
- Going to communal meeting places
- Taking up a new sport/leisure activity
- Undertaking new research or personal study
- Seeking medical/emotional guidance
- Changing negative attitudes and anti-social behaviour

To reach your end goal, you will need to set yourself short-term targets. This helps to make the process of change less daunting and more manageable.

Please complete the following action plan for one or each of your intended goals.

My action plan

Targets

Goal:

Long-term target:

Short-term target one:

Short-term target two:

Short-term target three:

Actions

- Short-term target one

Step one:

Step two:

Step three:

- Short-term target two

Step one:

Step two:

Step three:

- Short-term target three

Step one:

Step two:

Step three:

Progress

Skills attained:

Qualifications gained:

Experiences undertaken:

Effect on confidence:

Degree to which goal is achieved:

Further development

Un-reached target:

Next long-term action point:

Congratulations!

You have dared to move outside of your comfort zone, and in doing so, have set yourself new goals and have gone about achieving them in which ever way you felt to be beneficial.

Feel free to use this activity as many times as you wish. By referring back to the progress you have made, you can ensure that you are on the right track to achieving your goals, and making your life as full and satisfying as you can.

The poem in this worksheet was donated by Sue Cocks; QCIC 01372
730541/07725 365583
info@qcimageconsultancy.co.uk www.qcic.co.uk
© 2006 Sue Cocks QC Image Consultancy

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module two: Activity 2.1 (part a): Group presentation exercise: Thinking outside the box

Can be used:

- to develop self-confidence, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and social behaviour skills
- as a particularly effective way of developing public speaking skills.

Preparation

To make this activity as beneficial as possible, ask participants to come with a prepared speech (see instructions below). This will enable participants to show their best (rather than time pressured) efforts and it will make the most efficient use of the time that the group has together.

Instructions

- Facilitator asks participants to prepare short 2-5 minute presentation to present to the rest of the group. The presentation should demonstrate the skills that they have learnt from other parts of the module, "Making yourself more marketable".
- Facilitators to provide feedback on presentations.
- Tip: Invite Vocal Coaches or Image Consultants to provide the feedback, in order to ensure credibility of feedback.

Presentation topics

"If you were an inanimate object or well-known product, what would you be, and why?"

In order to do this, you need to start thinking metaphorically. This means that you need to use your imagination, to not think literally, but transfer your own characteristics as a human being to an inanimate object. This means thinking of your characteristics laterally. So if you are bubbly, comforting and a nice thing to come home to at the end of the day, you could be likened to a bottle of bubble bath.

Plenary

Participants will have been provided with the opportunity to demonstrate the skills they have picked up through this module including effective public speaking.

However, they have also started to think of themselves as a marketable product. People often find it easier to make positive and critical comments about inanimate objects or new products, and more difficult to comment directly about themselves. So by likening themselves to an inanimate object or well-known product, they are viewing themselves as something that needs to stand out positively from others, provide a good service and fulfil the needs of its allocated job – in other words how effectively they present themselves.

Facilitators may use the plenary session to make general observations and to build the confidence of the group or individuals. Positive comments from peers can also be encouraged.

Module two: Activity 2.1 (part b): Group discussion: Increasing sales

Note: This discussion is most effective following completion of Module two: Making yourself more marketable: Activity 2.1 (part a)

Can be used:

- to develop self-confidence, verbal and non-verbal communication skills and social behaviour skills.

Discussion topic

To increase the sales of a product, it needs to be sold more effectively. This can be done by better advertising through verbal and non-verbal communication; making the product more useful or more aesthetically appealing or even by adding new features to it.

Like the product we need to make ourselves more marketable, to increase our success at making the right impression and potentially securing more job offers. This can be done through selling ourselves more effectively through verbal and non-verbal communication; improving social behaviour and self-presentation and by picking up new skills, qualifications and experiences.

Instructions

- Participants spend an agreed length of time exchanging ideas on how they would make their chosen object/product more marketable.
- Participants spend an agreed length of time discussing how they would make themselves more marketable.
- Participants present their ideas to the group.
- Group discusses as a whole.

Suggested extension for individuals

Participants can record their findings and set themselves realistic short-term and long-term targets for achieving those items identified for increasing their marketability.

Plenary

Participants will have demonstrated the skills that they have learnt throughout Module two: Making yourself more marketable.

They will also have identified improvements that they could make to themselves, and thought about how these could be achieved, whilst recognising the hugely positive effect that these steps could have on their employability and success as a whole.

Module two: Factsheet 2.1: Appearance

Introduction

This factsheet is based on information from professional image consultants. It is a guide to presenting yourself in both an appropriate and impressive way aesthetically.

It is important that you keep your own sense of style, and let your personality be portrayed through this – but always ensure that this is not over-shadowing the professional image that you need to present to an employer and work colleagues.

When selecting clothes and accessories, consider the following:

- Quality – this indicates your status. Being well-made with good quality fabric is more important than brand or label.
- Fit – choose something comfortable and smart to wear that you can move about in confidently.
- Care – is it a practical washable fabric that you will be able to keep in good condition?
- Clothing in harmony with your personal skin colouring, body size and shape, and personality
- Finishing touches - carefully chosen accessories demonstrate attention to detail.

Business image

If we want to be taken seriously in the world of work, we need to give ourselves an edge. Our image therefore should match our abilities. There's no substitute for taking a good friend shopping with you, who will be able to give you honest, friendly advice. In addition, many high street shops now provide a personal shopper service, where a professionally trained Personal Shopper will offer advice on what best suits you. However, if you choose to shop alone, here are a few style tips.

Tips for a successful business image

- Dress well; know what suits you
- Always be immaculately groomed
- Choose the best quality clothes and accessories you can afford
- Understand your body language and use it to your advantage
- Use your voice effectively.

Men and women have different considerations when creating their business image, so the following sections offer style tips for each.

Business style tips for men

Suits

- When buying a suit think of your age and the image you'd like to project. If you like to be smart but classic, opt for a traditionally cut suit. If you're younger combine your suit with modern pastel colour shirts.
- Think about the colour. Navy blue is most versatile. Black is traditional and formal, but be careful if you have a pale complexion, as black gives the illusion of draining colour from your face. Grey suits appear more faceless, and again, depending on the shade and your skin colour grey suits can drain colour from the face. Shirts with grey suits can be white, pale, or cream for an authoritative look. Try to combine a grey suit with a brightly coloured tie to add warmth.
- Look for a single-breasted cut, as this is more flattering on the stomach area; double-breasted suits draw more attention to the stomach.

Plain shirts

- If you're unsure what colours suit you, always opt for light colours, as these are easier to combine with ties.

Striped shirts

- Striped shirts are more prone to come in and out of fashion, and are also more difficult to combine with a tie.
- Always wear a plain tie with no pattern if you are wearing a striped shirt.
- Never wear a striped shirt with a pinstripe suit, as the stripes are far too visually overpowering.

Checked shirts

- Stick to a small fine check as combining large checks with a tie can be difficult.

Cuffs

- Cuffs that fasten with a single button are the easiest to use and are a simple style.
- The more formal but far more visually impressive option is the French cuff; this is a double length cuff that folds back and is fastened by cufflinks.
- If opting for double cuffs, ensure that the colour of the cufflinks either matches your tie or shirt or other jewellery, such as your watch.

Overcoat

- The biggest mistake men make with business image is their choice of jacket.
- Too many men wear a totally inappropriate jacket over their suit, such as a sports jacket or a jacket cut waist high allowing the bottom of the suit jacket to be visible.
- Invest in an overcoat, woollen for winter and raincoat/trench coat for summer to complete your professional look.

Accessories

- A belt is essential, in plain black, with a minimal formal buckle.
- Shoes complete your look more so than any other accessories. Think about your work role; will you be required to walk up and down hundreds of stairs every day? If so opt for a rubber-soled shoe but remember to retain a balance between comfort and formality. Opting for leather soled shoes, if relevant, adds that subtle touch of class and therefore adds to your stature.
- Socks should be dark colours. Try to match your suit colour; so black with black, navy with navy. Do not opt for bright colours, and never wear white.
- Wrist watches – If possible match the formality of a suit with a formal style watch. There are watch styles available to match everyone's personality, but avoid sporty watches worn with a suit.
- Jewellery and piercings – The general consensus on a man is "less is more". Attitudes to jewellery can differ depending on your profession, and some may have specific references to jewellery and piercings in their dress code. For interviews it is better to play it safe, as some employers feel strongly that piercings are not compatible with the professional image they wish to portray to clients.

- Briefcase – Nothing lets your image down more than a scruffy old briefcase or even using a holdall to take to work. There are plenty of smart alternatives if you hate the traditional boxy formal style briefcase, such as laptop style bags, etc.
- Never wear novelty ties or socks; it ruins your credibility.

Business style tips for women

Women can choose from lots of styles that communicate professionalism and authority whilst still reflecting their individual personality.

Suits, jackets and separates

- Stick to neutral colours for maximum flexibility; remember dark for authority, lighter for approachability.
- Avoid a complete outfit in pastel colours, which may not be suitable for the workplace.

Blouses, shirts and tops

- Use these items to add colour and express your personality if you wish.
- A lighter or brighter colour close to your face can lift a sober suit.
- Avoid exposing too much flesh.
- In summer try a sleeveless camisole top with your jacket enabling you to remain cool and remain businesslike.
- Avoid anything too fussy or dramatic; simple lines are most effective.

Dresses

- A dress has to be of a structured design to be suitable for business. Avoid anything too romantic or with big prints such as heavy floral designs.
- It's far better to stick to a coat-dress or shirt-dress in a simple design in an appropriate colour.

Accessories

- Keep jewellery simple and discrete.
- Nothing dangly that is going to be impractical.
- Choose accessories that suit your skin colouring, body shape and size, and personality.

Hosiery and shoes

- Black and brown are the best colours for shoes, unless you are wearing navy, when you should stick with navy throughout.
- Bare legs are never suitable for a business environment.
- Never wear light shoes with darker tights.

Casual style wear

Office dress codes have become more relaxed so this factsheet includes some "dress down" style solutions for you:

The argument for dressing down was founded on the belief that employees are more motivated and will increase performance if they are allowed to express their individuality through their business appearance. Some organisations have a particular day of the week where dressing more casually is acceptable.

Recently there has been a backlash against dressing down at work. Workers originally welcomed its arrival but when faced with increasing wardrobe requirements, additional expenditure, and greater potential to make image mistakes, formal dress codes suddenly seemed a lot more appealing than they ever had been in the past.

Successful dressing down

Mastering the art of dressing down requires an understanding of:

- how you want to be perceived
- what is acceptable and what isn't at work
- your own colouring, style and personality
- how to co-ordinate separate garments.

Assess your work activities to determine your wardrobe needs

- What you do will determine what you need to wear.
- The more varied your role the more flexible your wardrobe requirements will need to be.
- You may need several looks ranging from formal business, relaxed business to "casual chic".
- Work out your role and therefore how much time you spend in these style categories, as this will dictate which direction your wardrobe should lead towards.

Co-ordination is the key

- To get maximum flexibility, buy co-ordinating separates that can be dressed up or dressed down depending on your activities.
- Build your wardrobe around neutral colours and add colour to add individuality. For example, a neutral suit can look different if it's worn on several occasions with different coloured shirts.

Casual Dos

- Buy shirts or blouses in plain colours or subtle patterns in good quality fabrics and finishes, as these mix well with everything.
- Relaxed trousers are favourable over jeans.
- Stick to structured fitted skirts, as opposed to floaty, fly-away types.
- Buy jackets in contemporary fabrics and colours.
- Choose shoes appropriate to your outfit.
- Ironically, dressing down requires just as much attention to quality as formal dressing.
- Look for good construction and finishes in easy care fabrics that will keep their shape and colour after many washes.

Casual Don'ts

- Don't wear scruffy jeans or t-shirts.
- Don't wear denim jackets, bomber jackets or parkas.
- Don't dress in sport or leisure wear.
- Don't wear anything you would wear relaxing at home.
- Don't wear too much colour or colours that don't work well together.
- Don't wear scruffy or unclean shoes.
- Don't wear anything that needs repairing or cleaning.

Casual finishing touches

Casual dressing still needs appropriate accessories such as:

- a belt
- jewellery
- a watch
- understated make-up
- a suitable bag or attaché case.

The added cost of dressing down

Expect to spend just as much on your casual working wardrobe as you would have on your formal wardrobe. Individual items may cost less but you will need more alternatives to avoid wearing the same outfit week in week out.

Congratulations!

You have an understanding of all the elements that make up an impressive aesthetic image.

Never be scared to ask for assistance from a professional or a friend when putting together that 'perfect outfit'.

When you get it right, you not only look good, but you feel good, and this goes a long way in giving you confidence and an altogether better image to employers.

Part of this factsheet was written and kindly donated by Ian Farrelly.
Contact ian@efashionista.com

Module two: Worksheet 2.1: Image management

What is the worksheet about?

Making the right image is crucial in the jobseeking process. Portraying the right image is made up of a number of factors. Once you are happy with your image, you will feel more confident and in turn, this will be communicated to employers.

This worksheet will enable you to understand image and how to make the most of your own by absorbing the information, completing the activities and putting what you have learned into practice in the real world.

The aim of this worksheet

To inform you about the importance of image and enable you to understand its effect on jobseeking.

The worksheet is intended to enable you to:

- demonstrate the importance of your personal image
- increase your understanding of what image is all about
- help you to think about your image and how others could perceive it
- begin to help you understand your personal image and provide some advice on how to maximise the effectiveness and impact that your image has.

Topics covered

- What is image?
- What makes up our image?
- Why is image so significant?
- What are the key aspects of image?
- How do you create an appropriate image?

Introduction

There are many situations within the job seeking process when you will be given the opportunity to make a good impression to potential employers:

- writing letters and emails
- making telephone enquiries
- in your written/verbal CV
- job interviews
- tests and entrance exams.

Activity one:

How long do you think it takes for someone to form a first impression of you?

At first glance

Within 30 seconds

Once you have started speaking

Within the first minute or so

As long as you are with the person in question

Answer:

The answer is just 30 seconds. That's all the time you have. You never get another chance to create a great first impression.

Activity two: What is image?

What is your definition of image?

Answer:

Image can be defined as:

- the impression we give to others
- the perception that others have of us
- the mental conception we have of another
- the impressions we form when meeting someone new.

What makes up our image?

Image consists of our:

- Facial expressions
- Posture
- Appearance
- Speech
- Actions
- Attitude

Activity three:

Think about yourself in a job interview. How would you describe the way that you fulfil each of the above components of image? If you need some feedback from a trusted sighted friend or professional to answer these questions it is important to ask. Remember, image is not about what you think, but what impression other people have when they see you.

1. A typical facial expression:
2. Your usual posture:
3. Your appearance at an interview:
4. Your voice tone, volume and intonation:
5. Any physical actions, gestures and irregular movements (if any):
6. Your general attitude:

Activity four:

Think about....

What impression does the way you talk, look and behave give to others?

Is it positive? If not, how could it be made more so?

Why is our image so significant?

People make assumptions based on limited information and when people observe a characteristic or behaviour in someone, they then tend to assume that the person has a number of other qualities.

Fact!

Psychologist, Prof Meridian, carried out research into why we form first impressions. He found:

- 55 per cent of a first impression formed about you consists of how your appearance is perceived
- 38 per cent consists of how you non-verbally communicate, and how it is perceived
- Staggeringly only seven per cent of a first impression formed about you consists of what you actually say.

So 55 per cent of someone's first impression of us is based on our appearance, which consists of:

- height
- weight
- colouring
- hairstyle
- accessories
- clothing
- in the case of women this also includes make-up.

Image is also important because it affects how we feel about ourselves. When we feel we are presenting ourselves well, we gain in confidence and self-esteem. This process is called the cycle of success.

Activity five: The cycle of success

Refer to this whenever you feel it will be helpful.

Firstly, visualise a clock.

Then assume that you have created an image that you are confident with.

So you're looking good (You start at 12pm)

When you look good you feel good (Progress to 3pm)

When you feel good you project yourself well (Progress to 6pm)

Project yourself well and you receive positive responses. (Move to 9pm)

Maintain your image well and the cycle begins again.

Questions:

1. How do you feel about your image?
2. How happy are you with it?
3. What number on the clock do you regard yourself to be at?
4. What number on the clock do you think or know others regard you to be at?
5. How will you reach 12 on the clock?

How do we start to control our image?

By looking at and understanding the key aspects of our image. There are three key aspects of your image.

Appearance

- What we wear.
- How well we are groomed.
- The care and attention we pay to the detail of our appearance.

Non-verbal communication

- Posture
- Gestures
- Facial expressions
- Eye contact

Verbal communication

- Volume
- Clarity
- Tone
- Pitch
- Range
- Content

Activity six

1. Do you consider all of the above to be important?
2. Are some aspects of image more important than others?
3. Next to each element of each aspect of image listed above, rank the level of importance you think it has out of a maximum of ten.

When you have completed this activity compare your answers to the answer at the end of this worksheet. You may be surprised!

How do you create an appropriate image?

Well, before you do, there are three considerations:

1. You (in terms of your personality)
2. The environment (for which you require your image)
3. The occasion

Activity seven

The first step is to define your image.

Situation

You have been invited for an interview for a job that you are very interested in. The interview is formal, but you still want your personality to come through to the potential employer.

Consider and answer the following questions:

1. What do you want to convey to the employer?
2. What impression do you want to give to the employer?

Answer

Now that you appreciate how important image is, you can use the “Making yourself more marketable” factsheets to make sure your image is as good as it can be.

Answer for Activity six

All of the aspects of image are equally important. Even if you cannot see other's body language or appreciate their visual appearance, it is essential that you are aware of and understand what affect they have on how people think about you.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module two: Activity 2.2: Quiz: What is your body language saying?

Please answer the following questions, responding by choosing either a, b or c.

This is only a bit of fun, but you should find it a useful tool in discovering what messages you could be giving off, or gaining from others.

The answers given for each question are based on majority opinions and the views of body language experts.

Questions

1. What do crossed arms say?
 - a. I am smart and tidy
 - b. I am afraid of you
 - c. I disagree with you.

2. What does a tilted head say?
 - a. I don't understand what you are saying
 - b. I am very interested in what you are saying
 - c. My neck hurts, so I must tilt it to the side slightly.

3. What does a head resting on a hand say?
 - a. I'm very interested, tell me more...
 - b. I'm bored
 - c. I have a very sore chin.

4. What does a screwed up face say?
 - a. I'm about to cry
 - b. I'm concerned
 - c. I am exercising my facial muscles.

5. What does it mean when you hold your open palms out in front of you?
 - a. I'm hungry, can you give me some food?
 - b. I'm open to suggestions/I don't mind
 - c. I want to give you a hug.

6. What does a clenched hand mean?
 - a. I am going to punch you
 - b. I am holding something
 - c. I am anxious.

7. What would someone think if you were rubbing or poking your eyes?
 - a. My eyes are sore
 - b. I'm tired
 - c. I can't see what you are talking about.

8. What does rubbing the back of your neck mean?
 - a. I have a sore neck
 - b. I am frustrated
 - c. I am fidgeting.

9. What would be interpreted from holding your hand to your chest?
 - a. I am having a heart attack
 - b. I am in love with you
 - c. I really mean and feel passionate about what I am saying.

10. What does rocking back and forth in your seat suggest?
 - a. I am bored
 - b. I am uncomfortable
 - c. I am an energetic person.

11. What impression would you portray by putting your feet up on something?
 - a. I feel at home and comfortable here
 - b. I don't follow rules and I will not follow yours
 - c. I am rude and over familiar.

Answers

1. b or c
2. a or b
3. a or b
4. a or b
5. b or c
6. b or c
7. a or b or c
8. a or b or c
9. b or c
10. a or b
11. a or b or c.

The reason why there are two, or at times three, different answers to these questions is that gestures can be interpreted in different ways dependent on the situation. For example, if we are talking about a professional situation, such as an interview, business meeting or networking opportunity, a formal manner would be required.

Although fidgeting or rubbing your eyes in the privacy of your own home or with a relative or good friend may be suitable, in a formal setting these same behaviours would be interpreted differently. In an extreme case, putting your feet up on a table or desk would be considered highly rude and give a very bad impression to an interviewer.

Many people are particularly squeamish about eyes and find it unbearable to see someone poking their eyes. Rubbing your eyes may also be interpreted as being tired and unable to attend totally to the conversation. This is not an impression that you wish to create.

Some of these gestures can be viewed differently depending on the forms of communication that you are using alongside them. For example, tilting your head slightly whilst occasionally nodding would show interest in what someone was saying to you, whilst tilting your head alone could be perceived as a display of boredom.

It is hoped that this quiz demonstrates to you the importance of gestures and the many negative and positive ways in which they can be perceived.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module two: Factsheet 2.2: Non-verbal communication

Introduction

Non-verbal communication means the messages we give known as body language. Our posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact give messages about what we are thinking and feeling.

We can convey a lot about ourselves to others by our non-verbal communication and we can equally learn a lot about other people from their body language. If you are blind or partially sighted, reading other people's body language is not always possible. For this reason this factsheet concentrates on how you can project a positive image with your own body language.

Why is body language important?

- Most of us don't take much notice of our body language and yet it can speak volumes about us.
- If there is conflict between the words you say and the message communicated by your body, the body is more likely to be believed.
- Body language is often a reflection of a person's state of mind. If a person is confident and happy, their body language reflects that. The opposite is also true.
- With a little understanding about non-verbal communication you can change your body language to match how you'd like to feel or appear to be feeling. This can be very useful for an interview situation.

What does your body language say about you?

Posture

- A confident posture makes you appear confident, but also makes you feel confident.
- Sitting up straight and leaning forward in a chair can say a great deal about you. It shows you are interested, engaged and involved in the conversation.
- You should sit towards the front half of your chair. This makes you appear alert and interested and makes getting up easier as well.

- Conversely, a slumped posture suggests low spirits and energy and disinterest in a conversation or situation.
- Good posture does more than just give you an authoritative presence. It is also good for your muscles and bones.
- Standing up straight and walking purposefully can give, even the smallest or most nervous person, presence. Try it; you will feel the difference.

Gestures

- Gestures often illustrate how you are feeling and what you are thinking. Using gestures when you talk helps make your conversation or business presentation more animated and interesting. Gestures stress the most important parts of what you are trying to express.
- Be aware that gestures can be misleading. They sometimes suggest feelings to other people that may not be accurate. For example, if you stand or sit with your arms crossed you may be seen as cold, aloof, or angry.
- Many gestures like crossed arms are unconscious, so it may take someone like an image consultant to identify inaccurate gestures and advise on more suitable replacements.

Facial expressions

There are seven basic emotions which humans express in the same way, no matter what culture they are from. These emotions are: happiness, sadness, surprise, fear, anger, disgust and embarrassment. When one of these emotions shows clearly on someone's face, we instantly understand it.

It is possible to learn to mask some of these feelings to avoid offending someone or expressing an emotion or opinion that you would sooner keep to yourself. Some facial expressions are more difficult to hide. Tightening the jaw and lips is often unintentional and can signal feelings of anxiety or anger. Furrowed eyebrows can show feelings of confusion or surprise. By becoming aware of and mastering your facial expressions you will give others a more positive impression of you.

If you forget everything else...don't forget to smile. It seems simple, but a smile goes a long way in business as well as in personal relationships.

In most situations, a smile puts people at ease and tells those around you that you are enjoying being with them. It will also help to relax you and will serve to put an interviewer at ease.

Eye contact

Eye contact establishes rapport and trust _ two very important attributes when meeting a potential employer.

As a speaker, good eye contact helps exhibit confidence. As a listener, eye contact shows respect and interest in what is being said. However, 100 per cent eye contact is intimidating. In a typical conversation, the speaker makes eye contact about 40 per cent of the time, while the listener makes eye contact about 70 per cent of the time.

Eye contact may be a bit harder if you have a sight impairment, but it is not impossible to give the illusion of eye contact.

Giving the illusion of eye contact can be achieved by looking in the direction of the speaker's voice, and adjusting your gaze depending on whether the speaker is sitting or standing. You tend to improve the accuracy of your gaze as the conversation progresses.

Top non-verbal communicative tips for interviews

Non-verbal forms of communication can be particularly powerful in face-to-face communication such as an interview.

1. First, approach an interviewer with a smile on your face. This will give you confidence and give the interviewer a warm introduction to you. Do this regardless of how nervous you are feeling.
2. Be sure to make eye contact as you approach the person.
3. When you feel confident, introduce yourself and ask the other person what their name is. It may be preferable to ask this before they ask you, as then you are in control of the conversation. This prevents a situation where you are not sure if a person is addressing you or someone else.
4. It may be an idea when entering an interview situation to extend your hand when the introductions are being made. You may want to instigate a handshake on arrival and on leaving. This will make you look confident and avoid you not realising that someone has extended their hand towards you.
5. Regardless of the other person's gender or status, extend your hand and present a firm grip. As a rule you should try to match the other person's firmness.

This factsheet is based on information donated by Steph Cutler, Image Consultant.

Contact steph@openeyed.co.uk or visit www.openeyed.co.uk

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module two: Worksheet 2.2: Verbal communication

Who can use this worksheet?

This worksheet is a useful learning tool for jobseekers wishing to improve the way they use their voices.

Although it has been structured so that an individual can access the worksheet's information and work through the professional exercises individually, this material would also be highly effective for using with a group of people in a communication workshop.

Why should I work on my voice?

Voice is so often the first point of contact in business and other interactions, and speaking well gives a great boost to your confidence. A large part of the first impression you make anywhere is to do with your voice. Don't believe me? Think back to school and how much you inferred from the first words you heard a new teacher speak!

We all speak, but few of us expertly! We all tell stories, but many of us are unaware of just how much!

How does our voice work?

Your voice makes direct contact with your listener. Electrical energy in your brain becomes kinetic energy in your larynx which becomes acoustic energy as a shock wave travels from your mouth at the speed of sound. This then becomes kinetic energy again as it vibrates your listener's eardrum, and finally electrical energy again as your listener understands your words. This all takes far less than a second!

Top tips for voice production

- Drink plenty of water – drinking plenty of water (not coffee, tea, etc.) is the best and simplest way to keep your voice healthy. Vocal health is directly related to your body's hydration levels.
- Breathe – your voice should always be supported by plenty of breath beneath it as you speak.

Exercise one

Try this exercise for practising your breathing.

- Stand up and place a hand on your stomach.
- Breathe out fully, feeling the way your stomach assists by pushing out the air.
- Then simply release all tension in your stomach muscles, and allow this release to be the start of a deep inhalation.
- Practise repeatedly until it becomes second nature!
- Sing – when you're at home, travelling in a car, whenever you can! Singing freely and comfortably (never force the volume) will strengthen your voice.
- Chant and speak.

Exercise two

- Take a poem or a song you know by heart and chant it slowly.
- Do this, like a monk, on only one note, making the most of every sound. Enjoy the sensation of sound filling your mouth.
- Chant through at least once. Then, starting again, chant one line then speak the next!
- When speaking, allow the energy of chant to carry through into speech.
- Talk Nonsense! – practise the following exercise with friends or colleagues.

Exercise three

- Hold conversations without using real words – this way only tone of voice will be able to convey meaning.
- Play like this for a good period of time, then go straight into talking with words but ask yourself to allow the same variety of tone and pitch.

Look after your voice

These are some very basic tips which will help you as a speaker and greatly boost your confidence! Provided you are careful with yourself, they can't cause any harm. Working your voice is not like working out – never go through the pain barrier!

Clearly, working with a trained voice professional will achieve infinitely more, as a professional voice coach (such as those identified in the Recommendations in Section four) will be able to help you specifically with the unique characteristics of your voice.

Voice coaching is a good idea for everybody. It will help you to be yourself, but better!

The content of this worksheet was donated by Giles Abbott (MA Voice, CSSD)
07900 244 574 - www.gilesabbott.co.uk

Module two: Factsheet 2.3: Public speaking

Ten tips for successful public speaking

The jobseeking process, and most jobs, inevitably involves talking to people we do not know. This could be anything from an informal chat with an employer to contributing to an executive board meeting or making a formal presentation. Even if you do not have to speak to the public in your chosen vocation, learning to speak confidently in public is a great skill to have and will contribute to an overall effective image.

You can use this factsheet to learn the basic steps in achieving this.

Feeling nervous is the most common reason that people shy away from public speaking or even speaking in a pressured environment (such as a job interview).

Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and healthy. It shows you care about doing well. But too much nervousness can be detrimental. Here's how you can control your nervousness and make effective, memorable presentations:

1. Know the room. Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids. If you think that you will need assistance with doing this, then make sure you contact the venue in advance in order to organise a guide. It may even be a good idea to visit the venue another day prior to your presentation, so that there are fewer people and obstacles around.
2. Know the audience. Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers. It may be helpful to place yourself in a position that all attending guests will have to walk through, such as a visitors table or the doorway, so that you can guarantee that you are meeting everyone.
3. Know your material. If you're not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Make sure that you have your presentation or notes in an accessible format (if you require them on the day). Numbering note cards is a good idea, in case you drop them or they fall out of order.

4. Practise your speech and revise it if necessary. You may find it useful to practise in front of a friend or family member, in order to get used to the focused attention you will be receiving.
5. Relax. Ease tension by doing steady breathing and postural exercises.
6. Visualise yourself giving your speech. Imagine yourself speaking, your voice loud, clear, and assured. When you visualise yourself as successful, you will be successful.
7. Realise that people want you to succeed. Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They don't want you to fail.
8. Don't apologise. If you mention your nervousness or apologise for any problems you think you have with your speech, you may be calling the audience's attention to something they hadn't noticed. Keep silent.
9. Concentrate on the message — not the medium. Focus your attention away from your own anxieties, and outwardly towards your message and your audience. Your nervousness will dissipate.
10. Turn nervousness into positive energy. Harness your nervous energy and transform it into vitality and enthusiasm.

The best tip for perfecting public speaking is to practise.

The following are good places for gaining experience of talking to groups:

- local blind or mainstream clubs and associations
- local public speaking societies
- local community and faith groups
- local activist groups.

Your aim is to become a confident speaker, regardless of your audience, whether it be an employer interviewing you, a discussion with a colleague or a room full of people. When you become a confident speaker, you will not find any one of these situations more nerve-racking than another.

This factsheet was contributed to by Sue Cocks; QCIC 01372
730541/07725 365583
info@qcimageconsultancy.co.uk www.qcic.co.uk
© 2006 Sue Cocks QC Image Consultancy

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module two: Factsheet 2.4: Image checklist

What do I use an image checklist for?

You may find it useful to read through this checklist before leaving for a meeting, job interview or day at work, in order to check your presentation.

You could show the checklist to a friend or family member, so that you can tick off each aspect as you prepare.

Try taking the checklist with you when you go shopping, to remind yourself what you are looking for, and if whatever has caught your eye is appropriate and professional.

Do checklist

Dress appropriately

- For the type of organisation, dress culture, your role, the occasion or event.
- Neither over-dressed nor under-dressed.
- Neither too traditional nor too modern.
- Neither too authoritative nor too approachable.

Wear quality

- Cheap clothes and accessories never say "integrity" or "credibility".
- There is no real substitute for quality.

Look current

- If you look up to date on the outside, your thinking and ideas are seen as up to date.
- Successful people embrace change and are forward thinking.

Be impeccably groomed

- Gaining respect from others starts with showing respect for yourself.
- Anything that isn't covered by a garment should be impeccably groomed.

Have personal style

- Dress in styles and colours that suit your body shape and colouring.
- Wear clothes that fit properly.

- Clothes should express your personality and your professionalism.

Don't checklist

Dress inappropriately

- Inappropriate clothes make you look like you're in the wrong company, wrong job, or at the wrong level.

Lack quality

- Good clothes and accessories are investments that pay excellent dividends.

Look old-fashioned

- In this fast-paced competitive world you cannot afford to lag behind.

Poorly groomed

- A scruffy appearance always translates as a scruffy approach to work and life.

Little personal style

- Not knowing what suits you and falling into the "cloning syndrome" can send out a message that you lack personality or individuality.

This factsheet is based on material donated by QCIC 01372
730541/07725 365583
info@qcimageconsultancy.co.uk www.qcic.co.uk
© 2006 Sue Cocks QC Image Consultancy

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module three: Activity 3.1: Speed interviewing

Instructions for facilitators setting up a speed interviewing session

Aims

- To give the attending blind and partially sighted jobseekers a realistic experience of a job interview in an innovative and efficient format.
- For the blind and partially sighted jobseekers to gain immediate, helpful feedback which they can use to improve their own interview technique.
- For the blind and partially sighted jobseekers to meet and benefit from the experience and knowledge of professionals from leading companies.
- For attending employers to gain an insight into the issues surrounding job interviews for blind and partially sighted people.
- For employers to receive natural and informal visual awareness training.
- For employers to have the opportunity of meeting talented potential employees with disabilities.

Layout

The room can be arranged as you wish. We recommend:

- Small tables arranged in a circular formation or lines of tables arranged in a U-shape formation.
- One seat placed at either side of each small table or in a similar fashion along longer tables (ensuring each pair has sufficient space to talk without disturbing others).
- A speed interviewing feedback sheet, and speed interviewing questions (Worksheet 3.1 and Worksheet 3.2) and a pen laid on each table.
- The facilitator stands at the front of the room with a timer, bell and any other necessary equipment.
- Interviewees all sit facing either inwards or outwards the circle/U-shape centre.
- Interviewers sit facing the interviewees.

Timing

- Each speed interview will last three minutes.
- The interviewer will then be given 30 seconds to make any additional written comments on the Speed interviewing feedback sheet (Worksheet 3.1) about the interviewee concerned.
- The interviewer will then be given a further one minute to provide their interviewee with verbal feedback.
- The interviewer is then given 30 seconds to move to their next interviewee.
- The whole thing starts again!

Instructions

- Interviewers and interviewees remain seated opposite one another until told otherwise.
- Once signalled by the session facilitator, interviewers will conduct interviews with the interviewee they are seated with.
- Interviewers can use the questions from the speed interviewing questions (Worksheet 3.2) provided or that of their own, while interviewees respond appropriately.
- During the interview and in the time provided and signalled by the facilitator, interviewers make written comments on the speed interviewing feedback sheet provided.
- In the time provided and signalled by the facilitator, interviewers provide their interviewee with verbal feedback.
- Once the entire speed interview is complete, interviewers move in a clockwise direction to the next seat and interviewee.
- The next speed interview begins when the facilitator signals.
- And then it all starts again!

Questions

Interviewers can use speed interviewing questions (Worksheet 3.2) or any questions that they have used or prefer to use in their own interviewing experience.

The Feedback Sheet

The speed interviewing feedback sheet remains on the table of the interviewee, and their name is marked at the top of it.

The feedback sheet needs to be filled in as follows:

- Each interviewer fills in their name and the company that they are employed by in the allocated space.
- The interviewer makes comments in the space provided during and after the interview.
- The interviewer ticks either 'YES' or 'NO' at the end of the interview. The definition of these statements is left up to the interpretation of the interviewer. The response will simply measure if the interviewee made a positive or negative initial impression on the interviewer.
- Note: If the interviewer has a sight impairment, then an alternative form of recording feedback will need to be provided, i.e. a laptop, an audio recorder, etc.

It is essential that interviewers are as critical and honest as possible, in order for jobseekers to gain the utmost benefit from the exercise.

It may be useful to refer to Module two of this toolkit "Making yourself more marketable" to find criteria for scrutiny during the interview.

Following the session

- Thank everyone for participating.
- Ensure that everyone involved in the speed interviewing session is provided with each other's contact details (providing they consent).
- Find out each interviewee's preferred reading format and provide all interviewees with their speed interviewing feedback sheet in their preferred format.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module three: Worksheet 3.1: Speed interviewing feedback

This form is for use in a speed interviewing session. See Activity 3.1 to find out how to use it.

Interviewer's name and employing company	Yes	No	Additional Comments

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module three: Worksheet 3.2: Speed interviewing questions

Introduction

These questions have been compiled from a broad selection used by actual employers in real interviews from a range of diverse companies and work sectors.

As a jobseeker you may find them useful for preparing and practising for an actual job interview, either alone or with a family member or friend.

However, this resource can also be used in a speed interviewing session (as outlined in Activity 3.1).

The questions have been split up into question types, so that you can become familiar with a wide range of styles and using appropriate responses.

Direct questions

1. Why do you want to work here?
2. What kind of experience do you have for this job?
3. What are the broad responsibilities of your current job?
4. How does your current job relate to the corporate objectives of your organisation?
5. What aspect of your current job is the most important?
6. What are your greatest achievements?
7. What did you dislike about your last job?
8. How long would you intend staying with us?
9. Tell me about yourself.
10. What interests you about this job?

11. What is your greatest strength?
12. What can you do for us that someone else cannot?
13. Describe a problem you have had to deal with?
14. Do you prefer working alone or with others?
15. What would you like to be doing in five years from now?
16. Why should I employ you?
17. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
18. How do you see yourself in five years?
19. What makes you think you are qualified to do this job?
20. Can you work under pressure?
21. Why are you leaving your current job?
22. Why should we employ you?
23. Why do you want to work for us?

Tough questions

Why do you want to work here?

- Prior research will help you to decide the company's good points as you see them, e.g. "I believe your company will provide me with a stable and happy work environment".

What kind of experience do you have for this job?

- Sell yourself.
- Know what is critical to the employer.
- All companies are looking for someone who can make a difference within six months.

If you don't know what the job involves ask:

- What kind of work would I be expected to do?
- What are the broad responsibilities of a ?

This question has three levels:

- You need to know where you fit into an organisation.
- It establishes how much you know or do not already know.
- If you don't understand the job, you are knocked out there and then.

Beware of using jargon

How does your job relate to the corporate objectives of your organisation?

- This checks your ability to get the job done as part of a team.

What aspect of your job is the most important?

- A wrong answer to this can knock you out of the running.
- The question establishes time management, prioritising and task avoidance.

What did you dislike about your last job?

- Most interviews start with a preamble about the organisation/job - this will help you to answer the question.
- Keep your answers short and positive, e.g. you like everything about your current job.
- Only say something negative if pressed or see how you can turn it into a positive for the new employer.

How long would you intend staying with us?

- Interviewer may be thinking about offering you a job.
- Put the ball back in their court e.g. "I'd like to stay as long as I'm making a contribution. How long do you see me as staying?"

What would you like to be doing 5 years from now?

- Your answer should show a desire to be regarded as a professional team player.

What are your qualifications?

- Check out whether the interviewer means job related or academic?

What are your greatest achievements?

- Keep answers job-related.
- Writing your CV will help you to answer this question.

What is your greatest strength?

- Identify the main ones from your CV.
- You need to demonstrate: reliability, tenacity, reactivity to change.

What interests you about this job?

- Be sure you have enough information to answer.

Why should I employ you?

- Give a short and to the point answer.
- Repeat your job description and skills.

What can you do for us that someone else cannot?

- Use job description and overlay with what you can do – relate to achievements.

Describe a problem you have had to deal with

- This question is designed to assess your analytical skills.
- Use this five step plan when answering the question:
 1. Examine the problem.
 2. Assess hidden factors.
 3. Identify possible solutions.
 4. Consider consequences and cost implications of solutions.
 5. Recommend solution and seek advice and/or approval.
- Then give an example.

Tell me about yourself

- Clarify by asking, "What area of my background interests you the most?"

What have you done that has shown initiative?

- This assesses whether you are a "doer" who will save time, money and costs.

Do you prefer working alone or with others?

- Before answering make sure that you know whether you are required to work alone.

Questions to ask at the end of the interview

1. If you employ me what would your specific expectations be?
2. Why is the position open?
3. What would you most like an employee to bring to this company?
4. What is a typical day like?
5. What are the career options?
6. What can someone at this level, who is performing well, hope to achieve?

Module three: Worksheet 3.3: Role-play exercise: Who would you employ?

Introduction

Sometimes we need to observe certain characteristics in others in order to identify them in ourselves.

In order to gain some understanding of what employers are thinking and how they come to the decision of whom to employ, try doing this exercise.

You can do this:

- by yourself as an individual exercise.
- as a group activity where members of the group act out the parts of the candidate and the interviewer, and the remaining members observe and discuss what they see.

Task

Imagine you are an employer.

You have advertised for a position within your company. The successful applicant will be working closely with you as part of your team, and will therefore need to fit in well with your friendly, highly motivated team.

From the application forms that you received, three candidates were short listed for interview.

Candidate A

Anne enters the room on time dressed in an ill-fitting and un-matching grubby looking suit. She has not informed you that she has a sight problem, and therefore you were not expecting her disability and have not made any reasonable adjustments.

This has meant that Anne could not access the important information about the company that you supplied to all the candidates prior to interview.

Anne is escorted to the interview room huffing and puffing and is quite obviously distressed.

She has her head down and fails to attempt either eye contact or a handshake.

When you ask her how her journey was and apologise for making no consideration for her disability, she moves very close to you and speaks loudly about the awful journey she has had and the ill-treatment she received from station staff.

Once Anne has finished complaining you guide her to a seat.

Once you enter into the main interview, you discover that Anne has a Masters Degree in the subject area in which your business is concerned, and has five years' previous experience in the field.

When you enquire why she left her previous employment, she replies that the employer was useless and made no effort to make adjustments for her, and she was basically "bullied out".

After further conversation, Anne becomes more confident and speaks positively about her skills, experience and the varied leisure activities that she pursues. Whilst she speaks, she is looking in a completely different direction from where you are sitting.

Anne has an in-depth knowledge of her sector in which you are working, and gives excellent examples of using the software efficiently that your company works with.

Candidate B

John enters the room early, dressed in a stylish well-fitting suit. He is well groomed and has obviously shown care in his appearance.

John contacted the HR department of your company once he received notification of the interview, to make you aware of his sight impairment. Therefore reasonable adjustments were made to accommodate John comfortably and respectfully.

John is confident when he arrives, although he has previously informed you that he has no useful vision, he attempts good eye contact and offers his hand at greeting.

After asking you where the chair is, he confidently walks with the aid of his guide dog to the chair and sits down.

After enquiring how John found the journey in, he replies that it was a new route to him, but he has researched the transport prior to the interview and visited the area at the weekend, so he had no problems getting to the interview today. He makes a witty joke about his guide dog being more interested in the chip shop next door, which makes you laugh and eases the tension.

John speaks clearly and concisely providing detail of his one year of experience in the field in which you are working. Though he admits his experience is not great, he is keen and motivated to succeed in this field and knows that he would be an asset to your company for the many skills that he has attained in other areas of his life.

John provides evidence of the three excellent A Levels (in relevant subject areas) he achieved two years ago. When you inform John that the rest of your team are university graduates, he replies that he would be more than willing to take on further study if it were required.

Candidate C

Paul enters the room 10 minutes late and apologises casually for his lateness, remarking jokingly about the "useless tubes". He is wearing a very expensive looking suit and is impeccably groomed.

Paul did mention in his application form that he was partially sighted, but when contacting your HR team stated that he would not need any reasonable adjustments to be made.

When you offer a hand to Paul, he takes it confidently and shakes your hand, in your opinion, a little too hard and for an uncomfortable length of time. He makes excellent eye contact and tells you that he could get used to working in a place like this - and the girl on reception is definitely a bonus! You laugh awkwardly, not feeling comfortable with this disrespectful comment.

Paul sits down confidently and taps his fingers on the side of the chair impatiently, while you find his application form in the pile in front of you.

You do not ask about his journey, as he has already mentioned the trouble he had with the tubes, so you ask if he lives far from your office. He responds with a shrug, saying that it is a bit of a trek, but he can always sleep on the train, as he hates early mornings.

Once you delve further into the interview, you discover that Paul has a first class degree in a relevant subject and has a varied employment background that well equips him for the job you are interviewing him for.

As you question him further regarding his experience of working within a small team, he picks a loose thread on the arm of the chair he is sitting in and leans back with his legs spread out in front of him. He replies that he has worked in a team and always gets on with everyone - as he is good at telling others what to do.

He gives excellent examples of use of written and verbal communication, and he appears to have researched your company in great depth.

On leaving the interview Paul slaps you lightly on the shoulder and says he looks forward to hearing the good news.

Now you decide!

1. Who would you choose?
2. Why did you choose this candidate?
3. Why did you not choose the other two candidates?
4. What were the good points about each candidate?
5. What were the bad points about each candidate?
6. Which characteristics presented by the candidates do you think you may have shown in the past, and which ones will you adopt and avoid in future?

What the actual employer thought...

Mr Jones (the interviewer) chose Candidate B, John, for the post for the following reasons:

- Mr Jones was confident that John would make a good impression with both his staff and their clients through his smart image, positive body language and friendly persona.
- Mr Jones was sure that John was punctual, self sufficient and keen to take initiative, portrayed through John's contacting the company in plenty of time regarding the reasonable adjustments he required and his prior research into the area and related public transport.
- Although John did not have as much experience as Mr Jones would have liked, he demonstrated knowledge and skills attained through other means excellently. He also appeared keen and motivated to succeed.
- Although John was not a university graduate, he did have a strong academic background and said that he was more than willing to participate in further training.
- John demonstrated excellent verbal and non-verbal communication, and was quite charismatic at times.
- Mr Jones liked John and thought that he would fit in well with the friendly team.

Mr Jones (the interviewer) did not choose Candidate A, Anne, for the post for the following reasons:

- Mr Jones felt that Anne was not well prepared for the interview, as she did not contact his company prior to interview, so was not able to access either the important information about the company supplied or easy-step directions to the interview, even though it was available in a range of formats.
- Mr Jones was worried that Anne's sloppy appearance would present a negative image to his clients.
- Mr Jones was shocked and made to feel uncomfortable by Anne's abysmal body language (e.g. lack of eye contact, invasion of personal space, loud voice, etc.), and was concerned that this would once again, present a negative image for the company.
- Anne came over as aggressive and pessimistic through her lengthy complaints and her portrayal of her previous employer. As a result of this, Mr Jones was concerned that his company would not be able to fulfil Anne's requirements, and she would accuse them of being discriminatory and bullying.
- Mr Jones thought that Anne would not fit in with his team or work well with his clients and would have a detrimental effect on the office atmosphere.

However, Mr Jones was impressed with Candidate A, Anne, for the following reasons:

- Anne had excellent academic qualifications - the strongest of all three candidates and even the rest of his team!
- Anne had a good employment background and could demonstrate a high level of competency.
- Anne was skilled in accessing the essential software used by the company.

Mr Jones (the interviewer) did not choose Candidate C, Paul, for the post for the following reasons:

- Mr Jones was disappointed by Paul's lack of punctuality, his insincere apology and lazy attitude towards early mornings.
- Mr Jones found Paul, in general, incredibly arrogant, but especially when he presumed that he would be hired on two occasions.
- Mr Jones was concerned that Paul would not fit in well with the existing team, as he made disrespectful comments about his receptionist, and admitted to dominating other members of a team and continually getting his own way.

- Mr Jones found Paul's body language disrespectful and threatening, as he tapped impatiently, vandalised his furniture and sat in an overconfident, lazy manner.
- However, Mr Jones was impressed by Candidate C, Paul for the following reasons:
- Paul was impeccably presented and would present a good image for the company.
- Paul was confident and demonstrated strong verbal communication.
- Paul was highly qualified and had the strongest employment background of all the candidates.
- Paul used positive body language at times.
- Paul contacted the company prior to the interview, and made them aware of his situation.
- Paul had researched the company prior to the interview, and was able to speak accurately on related topics.

Module three: Factsheet 3.1: Pre-interview tips

Introduction

This factsheet will provide you with tips and hints that will help you to be at ease and make you feel more comfortable when preparing for an interview.

Why the interview is so important

- Your CV creates the interest – it's your personality that gets you the job.
- A job interview has been likened to a first date. It could be "the start of something big" or be "over forever" after 30 minutes or less.

Points to remember

- The interview is a form of sales pitch; you are both the salesperson and product. In a short space of time you and the interviewer need to find out whether you are the right person for the position and if the job is right for you.
- You need to allow the interviewer to gain insight into who you are, what motivates you, both personally and professionally. This will enable the interviewer to assess your suitability.
- Remember the interviewer is an ally, not the enemy, and the meeting should take the form of a two-way conversation, rather than a question and answer session.
- It is worth reminding yourself that the interviewer is keen to fill the position and hopes that you will be the one.

Practical tips

- Where possible, give clear examples of situations you have been in and how you handled them. That way the interviewer will be able to judge how well you work alone or with others, pick up information and/or take action.
- Careful preparation before the interview will ensure you do yourself justice and show yourself in the best light. It demonstrates to the interviewer that you are serious about the job.
- Greet the interviewer with a smile and remember to smile during the interview.
- Listen carefully; if you haven't heard or understood the question, ask for it to be repeated. Take a moment or two to think before replying; that way you don't shoot yourself in the foot.

- Speak clearly with energy and conviction.
- Pay careful attention to body language, voice projection (your voice denotes confidence) and avoid any mannerisms which may irritate people. (See Module two: Making yourself more marketable, for assistance with all of these). Most importantly try to be natural.
- It is usual practice for an interviewer to ask you at the end of the interview if you have any questions. Therefore it is important to come prepared with at least three or four.

They could be:

- Is there a probationary period?
- What training opportunities are available?
- How soon can I expect to hear if I have the job?
- Does the company offer a season ticket loan?

Good luck with your next interview!

This is based upon material written and donated by Carol Slesser of Slesser Maclean Career Management and Confidence Boosting.
www.slessermaclean.co.uk

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module three: Factsheet 3.2: Starting a job search

Starting a job search can be a daunting task. There are a bewildering number of job roles in the labour market and sometimes it can be hard to know what you could and should be applying for. Before you start sending out your CV or completing application forms you need to think about where you are. This will include:

- **Your knowledge** - What do you know? What subjects have you studied? What training courses have you attended?
- **Your skills** - What do you do well? What do people compliment you on?
- **Your experience** - What jobs and roles have you performed in the past? What have you learned? Where have you been successful?
- **Your interests** - What do you enjoy doing? What are you passionate about? What hobbies or interests do you have?
- **Your resources** - What financial resources can you draw upon? What contacts do you have? Who is prepared to help you?

It is also important to think about where you want to be. Setting employment objectives can include:

- What type of occupations are you interested in?
- How far are you prepared to travel to work?

Get some advice

A careers advisor can give you advice and guidance to help you answer the above questions. Before you start a job search, get some specialist advice to help point you in the right direction.

You may find it useful to refer to Module 1: Who am I? which is a self-help guide for learning about yourself and gaining confidence.

There are many providers of career services that can assist you to identify your current position and your employment objectives. For details see Factsheet 3.3: Directory of jobseeking resources.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module three: Factsheet 3.3: Directory of jobseeking resources

About this factsheet

This factsheet contains a list of services, organisations and resources that may be able to help you with your job search. All the organisations listed offer employment-related services, and some also offer additional services that may be useful, such as help with housing, leisure and benefits. Organisations are grouped into broad categories and then listed alphabetically for your convenience.

This factsheet consists of the following sections:

1. Jobcentre Plus
2. Specialist employment services
3. Other useful contacts
4. Employment initiatives
5. Useful websites

1. Jobcentre Plus

Telephone directory enquiries for details of your local office
www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk

Jobcentre Plus is a government agency supporting people of working age from welfare into work. Your local Jobcentre Plus office can give you a wide range of information on jobs, training and self-employment options.

Every Jobcentre has a specialist Disability Employment Advisor (DEA). They can provide a range of support, advice and information on your work options, financial assistance and what to do next. They will also be able to provide details on the services and programmes Jobcentre Plus provides to help assist you to find work.

Employment assessments

An employment assessment can help you identify your abilities and strengths. It will also help you identify what steps you need to take in order to achieve your employment objectives. An employment assessment will involve a one-to-one interview with a Disability Employment Advisor, and possibly a session with a Work Psychologist. The aim of the assessment is to produce an action plan that will help you achieve your goals.

New Deal for Disabled People

New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) is a voluntary programme for people who are claiming a benefit relating to their disability. NDDP offers support from a network of employment specialists who can give you advice on how to get a job and help to match your skills and abilities to what employers need.

Support services include:

- helping you to fill in application forms and write your CV
- supporting you as you prepare for interviews
- providing advice on local job vacancies.

Job Introduction Scheme

If you find a job you would like but you or the employer are not sure whether it would be suitable, the Job Introduction Scheme (JIS) might be able to help. The scheme offers an employer help towards your wages or other employment costs for the first few weeks until you are both sure the job is right for you.

The scheme can apply to any full-time or part-time job lasting at least 26 weeks. Ideally, at the end of the JIS period, you and your employer will both be reassured and you will keep the job, which you can do with confidence.

Access to Work

This programme provides advice and practical support to help you and your employer overcome anything relating to a disability that is preventing you from working. It can help if you are already in work or just starting a new job.

For more information, see Module four of the toolkit, Facts at Your Fingertips, Fact sheet 4.1.

Work Preparation

The Work Preparation programme can help if you've been out of work for a long time due to a disability or illness. It is tailored to your needs and to help you overcome any difficulties you might face when you return to work. Work Preparation helps to build up your confidence and find out what skills you have. It also helps you find out what kind of work you are suited to and lets you find out if you are ready for a working environment.

WORKSTEP

If you have a disability that means it is more difficult for you to find and keep a job, you may be able to get help through WORKSTEP.

WORKSTEP provides support to you and your employer that is tailored to meet your individual needs. When appropriate, it will give you the opportunity to progress into unsupported employment. It offers a variety of different job opportunities with a wide range of organisations.

Jobseeker Direct

Jobseeker Direct is a quick and easy phone service that keeps you in touch with the latest job vacancies. This service is available to anyone who is looking for work, and the lines are open weekdays 8.00am - 6.00pm, and Saturdays 9.00am - 1.00pm. All calls are charged at local rates. Telephone 0845 6060234

2. Specialist employment services

Action for Blind People

Telephone 0800 915 4666

www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Action for Blind People have specialist Employment Teams who provide a comprehensive range of support and work with people on a one to one basis to give individual and structured help to enable people to find and sustain employment. They also have a Self Employment Team who can give support and advice on setting up and developing businesses.

Some of the services they offer include:

- Practical and personal help with looking for a job.
- Advice and guidance on making the most of your skills.
- Work experience placements and job tasters.
- Jobs skills training – including CV workshops and interview techniques.
- Workshops in confidence building and assertiveness training.
- Specialist training and rehabilitation including IT.
- Support whilst attending job interviews.
- Job retention following sight loss.
- Information on Access to Work – financial support whilst in work
- One-to-one mentoring.
- Job search.
- Support in setting up your own business.
- They also run the Workstep programme, a Jobcentre Plus initiative designed to help people with disabilities find sustainable work.

Supported Employment

Through their range of factories, Action for Blind also run a Supported Employment programme and employ visually impaired people in manufacturing a wide range of products in order to provide employment opportunities and promote personal development.

Employers

Action for Blind People provide employers with a comprehensive range of practical advice and guidance on employing people who are visually impaired which includes advice on Access Technology, Financial Support through schemes such as Workstep and Access to Work, and through training courses in Visual Awareness.

Mobile Information Service

Action for Blind People also has Three Mobile Sight Loss resource vehicles which travel to locations throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and offers free and impartial advice on sight loss, equipment and products. Please contact the Helpline number for further details.

For information on other Action for Blind People's services, please contact the helpline or visit the website, where you can access information, download publications and fact sheets, and listen to podcasts.

Association of Disabled Professionals

Telephone 01204 431638

Email adp.admin@htlworld.com

www.adp.org.uk

ADP is a membership organisation that provides advice, information and peer support to disabled people interested in working in professional fields. It provides a quarterly newsletter and has produced a series of employment guides for disabled people. They operate a 24-hour answer-phone service where disabled people can seek advice and support from another disabled person, and they also have an established Network List through which members are able to give support to one another.

For people interested in becoming self-employed or setting up and running their own small business, the Association of Disabled Professionals has an established Disabled Entrepreneurs Network, (DEN) which provides information and also signposting to accessible and appropriate training and development.

For further details or to join, you can download a membership pack from the website or contact ADP on their office number or via email.

Association of Visually Impaired Office Staff (AVIOS)

Telephone 020 8657 3563

Email Secretary@avios.org.uk

The Association for Visually Impaired Office Staff (AVIOS) is a self-help organisation which works for the benefit of visually impaired people employed, training or having experience in office-based occupations. Members receive a bi-monthly cassette, a magazine of general information and news about AVIOS, reduced fees for AVIOS training events and exhibitions, and occasional pamphlets produced on specific subjects. It also has an email discussion group where members can ask for and obtain help and advice.

AVIOS aims to promote employment of blind and partially sighted people in office-related work and to also maintain awareness of developments in new technology.

Blind Business Association Charitable Trust (BBACT)

Telephone 0845 045 0696

Email info@bbact.org.uk

www.bbact.org.uk

BBACT offer free services to blind and partially sighted people who are self-employed or who are considering starting a business. They can provide assistance from the earliest stages of business planning, and it also runs a mentoring programme, where experienced blind and partially sighted entrepreneurs give specialist advice, encouragement and support. BBACT also administer a small grants fund to help with equipment and materials for education and training purposes and in some instances can provide grants to aid business expansion or provide specialised equipment not covered under the Access to Work Scheme.

The website also provides useful links to other organisations who offer business support and advice.

Blind in Business

Telephone 020 7588 1885

Email employment@blindinbusiness.org.uk

Contact: Clare Young

www.blindinbusiness.org.uk

Blind in Business offers support to people who are currently at university or have recently graduated. They offer assistance with the practical aspects of finding work, and in addition, they offer information on current recruitment programmes and networking opportunities with other blind and partially sighted professionals. Some of the areas they help with are:

- Information on current recruitment programmes in easy to access formats.
- Assistance with the practical aspects of completing application forms.
- Specialised interview practise sessions with graduate interviewers from major employers.
- Reading service for selection tests and assessment centres.
- Networking and support from visually impaired employees and professionals.
- Advice and support on obtaining equipment for work.
- Information and advice on disclosing a visual impairment.

CareerConnect

Email careerconnect@afb.net

www.careerconnect.org

CareerConnect is a service run by the American Foundation for the Blind. It is a resource for people who want to learn about the range and diversity of jobs performed by adults who are blind or partially sighted throughout the United States and Canada. CareerConnect also has a database of successfully employed blind and visually impaired adults who are willing to discuss their work lives and how they perform their day-to-day work responsibilities with or without adjustments.

Connexions

Telephone 0808 0013219

www.connexions.gov.uk

Connexions is a government agency that offers a range of services to people aged between 13-19 who live in England. It also provides support up to the age of 25 for young people with disabilities. Connexions Personal Advisers can give you information, advice and practical help with a range of things that might be affecting you at school, college, work or in your personal or family life. Some of the areas they can offer help and support with are:

- Careers
- Learning
- Health
- Housing
- Free time
- Money
- Work
- Relationships
- Your rights
- Travel

The Connexions Direct Service also has advisers on hand to give advice and information on a range of topics from 8am to 2am every day. You can access the advisers via phone, email, text, minicom and also through their online service where you can chat to an adviser.

Disability Action (Northern Ireland)

Telephone 02890 297880

Email ceo@disabilityaction.org.uk

www.disabilityaction.org.uk

Disability Action works to ensure that people with disabilities attain their full rights as citizens, by supporting inclusion, influencing Government policy and changing attitudes in partnership with disabled people.

Disability Action's Employment and Training Service offers information and support for people with disabilities, to assist them in gaining and retaining employment or to participate in vocational training.

Disability Wales / Anabledd Cymru

Telephone 029 208 8325

Email info@dwac.demon.co.uk

www.disabilitywales.org

Disability Wales are a membership organisation of disability groups and allies from across Wales, **who** provide independent advice and information, training opportunities and support for disabled people. The organisation also offers support and advice to disabled people who wish to become self-employed, and the website contains case studies of disabled people's experiences of moving into self-employment.

Employment Opportunities

Telephone 020 7448 5420

Email info@eopps.org

www.eopps.org.uk

Employment Opportunities is a national charity helping people with disabilities find and retain work. They offer services in many parts of Britain through a network of local centres and **provide general help and guidance. Some of the services they offer include:**

- Confidence building
- Experience and skills assessment
- Skills development, such as communications and IT
- Work experience and supported work opportunities
- Help with job searches, CVs, application writing and interview techniques
- Ongoing in-work support

They also offer specific support to graduates entering into employment for the first time through their graduate programme.

Manpower

Telephone directory enquiries for details of your local branch

www.manpower.co.uk

Manpower is one of the UK's leading employment agencies who are starting to specialise in working with jobseekers with disabilities through awareness raising and making the application process with new employers more accessible. The website allows you to search through their current vacancies online, and also register multiple CVs and store covering letters. They also operate a job matching service, and once you create an account, will notify you of suitable vacancies.

Nextstep

Telephone directory enquiries for details of your local Nextstep provider

www.nextstep.org.uk

The Nextstep information and advice network provides support to helping you improve your career prospects. They offer free information on learning and work to anyone aged 20 or over. The website gives information and allows you to locate your local service provider.

Pertemps

Telephone 0121 450 8300

Email enquiries@ppdg.co.uk

www.ppdg.co.uk

Pertemps is one of the UK's largest independently owned recruitment companies and have offices throughout the UK. They offer a range of employment and training services in each location and the website allows you to register your CV and job search online.

Remploy Interwork

Telephone 0845 845 2211

Email realjobs@remploy.co.uk

www.remploy.co.uk

Remploy Interwork is the specialist recruitment division of Remploy Ltd, the UK's largest provider of jobs for disabled people. Interwork's recruitment services are designed to provide employment opportunities to disabled people across all sectors of business and industry.

Remploy has recently opened the first of its high street branches in Birmingham, Plymouth, Nottingham and Leeds, with further branches due to open throughout 2007. In each branch you will have access to a wide range of resources and tools to help your job search, including online learning facilities, free access to the internet and telephones to look for and apply for jobs and vacancies direct from many of the top local employers. You will also be able to join JobReady Groups that give practical tips and advice on searching for jobs, getting your CV into shape and learning how to deal with interviews.

RNIB

RNIB offers a range of employment services to help blind and partially sighted people into employment

Employment Line

Telephone 0870 013 9556

Email employmentline@rnib.org.uk

www.rnib.org.uk/employment

RNIB operates a dedicated employment advice line that can provide information on effective jobseeking, including:

- addressing the question of disclosing a disability
- details of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)
- resources available to help in searching for jobs
- how to write CVs, application forms and covering letters
- interview skills
- taking psychometric tests.

Vocational guidance

RNIB employment specialists can help you identify your skills and abilities and assess your career goals in a session of vocational guidance. The aim of this guidance session is to help you focus your objectives and develop an action plan to outline how you can get there.

You can access vocational guidance with RNIB via an employment assessment with a Disability Employment Advisor at Jobcentre Plus.

Trainee Grade Scheme (TGS)

TGS offers unemployed blind and partially sighted people paid work experience for a period of up to 50 weeks. Successful applicants have the opportunity to gain new skills and experience in a real work environment. In addition, trainees are offered training, jobsearch support and a full up-to-date reference.

TGS vacancies are advertised in the RNIB vacancy list, which is circulated fortnightly. The latest vacancy list can be accessed via www.rnib.org.uk/vacancies or by calling 0800 195 4135.

RNIB also have other services available to help you including:

Technology Information Service

Telephone 0870 013 9555

Email technology@rnib.org.uk

www.rnib.org.uk/technology

RNIB operates a dedicated technology information service that can provide details on the latest developments in access technology. The service produces a range of information sheets on topics covering areas such as using a computer with low vision and how to operate notetakers and accessible mobile phones.

RNIB Volunteering

Telephone 0845 603057

Email volunteering@rnib.org.uk

www.rnib.org.uk/volunteer

Volunteering can help you into paid employment by building up your skills, experience and confidence in the workplace. RNIB offers a range of volunteering opportunities throughout the UK. Contact the RNIB volunteering team for details of opportunities in your area.

RNIB Helpline

Telephone 0845 766 9999

Email helpline@rnib.org.uk

RNIB Helpline can offer information and advice on a range of topics relating to sight problems. They also can signpost you to a number of specialist RNIB services, including:

- Welfare Rights - Advice about your entitlements to benefits and concessions.
- Emotional Support Service - Confidential support, information and counselling for people who are directly or indirectly experiencing emotional difficulties because of sight loss.
- Leisure Services - Information, advice and guidance on all aspects of leisure and tourism, for blind and partially sighted people wishing to make the most of their free time.

Royal London Society for the Blind

Telephone 020 8838 4384

Email enquiries@rlsb.org.uk

www.rlsb.org.uk

Working in London and the Home Counties, RLSB's employment services are specifically geared to support blind and partially sighted people into sustainable and rewarding employment. Through their Workbridge programme, Employment Support Advisers (ESA's) offer support to disabled people (particularly those with a visual impairment), who are seeking work. They also offer support and advice to people who have become disabled, or more severely disabled, while in employment, and who need help to stay in work. Some of the services they offer are:

- a full assessment of skills
- assistance with preparing a CV and completing applications forms
- regular job search via company and council bulletins, the internet and newspapers
- preparation for interviews including mock interviews
- advice on adaptive technology and loan of equipment for job start.

Shaw Trust

Telephone 01225 716 350

Email stir@shaw-trust.org.uk

www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Shaw Trust is a national charity that provides training and work opportunities for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market due to disability, ill health or other social circumstances. They are the largest UK provider of employment services for disabled people and they run a number of government-funded employment services to support people moving from benefits to work, offering guidance on finding jobs, training and benefits. They also offer a range of pre-employment activities, work-related accredited training and supported employment opportunities.

For jobseekers, Shaw Trust can help with:

- financial support/Job Start Grants up to £200
- money to help with expenses, clothing, child care costs etc
- support to access benefit protection
- work tasters to help you find your preferred type of work
- support in your job search and interviews
- support once you have started work.

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Telephone 0800 328 5050

Email info@skill.org.uk

www.skill.org.uk

Skill promotes opportunities to empower young people and adults with any kind of disability to realise their potential in further and higher education, training and employment throughout the United Kingdom. Skill provides individual support, promotes good practice and influences policy in partnership with disabled people, service providers and policy makers.

Society of Visually Impaired Lawyers (SOVIL)

Telephone 020 8330 2309

Email john@wall.co.uk

Contact: Sir John Wall, CBE

SOVIL is a self-help group that aims to promote the interests of blind and partially sighted lawyers and those wishing to work in the legal profession. It is not an employment agency, but it can help its members by arranging short-term mentoring, putting them in touch with firms of solicitors who have previously employed blind trainees and/or solicitors and advise on how to go about seeking employment.

VI Sector Jobs

www.magill.co.uk

VI Sector Jobs is an independent email distribution list for vacancies in the visual impairment sector. Sign up to the mailing list and get a range of opportunities, including all the latest RNIB, Action for Blind People and Guide Dogs for the Blind vacancies, emailed to you directly.

WorkDirections

Telephone 0800 587 5666

Email info@workdirections.org.uk

www.workdirections.co.uk

WorkDirections employment advisors work with jobseekers on a one-to-one basis, giving personal, ongoing support. They have large operations in Birmingham and London and also operate in Brent, supporting people off Incapacity Benefits and into work. If you live in these areas, they can help with:

- assigning you a personal employment advisor to give support
- job-hunting advice, such as finding and applying for jobs, confidence-building, and interview techniques and practice
- in-work benefits calculations - to work out how much better off you will be in work
- support from in-house psychologists and physiotherapists
- regular use of Job Stations, equipped with PCs, internet, phones, newspapers etc
- appropriate Financial assistance - help with travel expenses, work equipment, interview clothing etc.

3. Other useful services

Benefits Agency

Benefits Enquiry Line 0800 882200

Subject to individual circumstances, you may be entitled to some benefits as a blind or partially sighted person. This free-phone number will provide you with an advisor who will be able to tell you what you may be entitled to.

Community Service Volunteers (CSV)

Telephone 020 7278 6601

Email information@csv.org.uk

www.csv.org.uk

CSV is the UK's largest volunteering and training organisation. CSV involves people in high quality volunteering and training opportunities that tackle real need and enrich lives. You can be employed in a range of destinations and situations throughout the world. Placements can be as short as a day to up to a whole year.

DIAL UK

Telephone 01302 310123

Email enquiries@dialuk.org.uk

www.dialuk.org.uk

DIAL UK is a national organisation with a network of 160 local Disability Information and Advice Line services (DIALs) run by and for disabled people. These advice lines can offer you support with a range of issues, including benefits, equipment and discrimination issues.

Employers Forum on Disability

Telephone 020 7403 3020

Email enquiries@employers-forum.co.uk

www.employers-forum.co.uk

A national network of employers who wish to develop their policies and understanding on employing people with disabilities. The forum does not operate a placement service for disabled job seekers, but can provide a list of members to approach about vacancies or sponsorship.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Helpline 08457 622633 (England)

www.equalityhumanrights.com

The Equality and Human Rights Commission can provide answers, advice and guidance regarding anything to do with the Disability Discrimination Act. If you want to know what your rights are, what you are entitled to or believe that you have been discriminated against because of your disability contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission for their conciliation service.

Learning and Skills Council

Telephone Call directory enquiries for details of your local office

Email info@lsc.gov.uk

www.lsc.gov.uk

In order to improve your career prospects, you may decide that you want to update your skills or learn new ones. Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) in England and Wales and Local Enterprise Companies (LECs) in Scotland provide a range of training and will be able to tell you what is on offer. If you are unemployed, ask about work-based learning for adults.

National Association of Local Societies for the Visually Impaired

Telephone 01302 571888

www.nalsvi.cswebsites.org

NALSVI represents local voluntary organisations for blind and partially sighted people. Local societies offer a diverse range of services that can include employment support, training and emotional support. NALSVI can put you in touch with your local society who will be able to offer practical support via the range of services on offer in your area.

National Council for Work Experience

www.work-experience.org

Information on all aspects relating to work experience. Includes a searchable database of current vacancies and work experience providers.

Social services

Telephone directory enquiries for details of your local office

Social services offer help and assistance with daily living support. This can include rehabilitation and mobility training.

4. Employment initiatives

This section outlines some examples of employment initiatives run by employers that are specifically aimed at disabled people.

BBC

www.bbc.co.uk/jobs/extend

The BBC Extend scheme offers talented disabled people an opportunity to develop a career in the media. Extend is a BBC-wide work placement scheme which offers appropriately qualified disabled people a great opportunity to gain a six months (24 weeks) paid work placement.

Extend placements are offered throughout the UK. Each year there are around 18 Extend opportunities, which includes roles such as Broadcast Journalist, Researcher, Production Team Assistant and many more.

BT

The BT Able to Work initiative aims to offer disabled people permanent job opportunities in tact centres throughout the UK. To find out more about BT's Able to Work scheme please contact RNIB Employment Line on 0870 013 9556 or email employmentline@rnib.org.uk

Lehman Brothers

Lehman Brothers, along with a number of other investment banks, run a summer internship scheme for disabled people. For more information please contact Employment Opportunities on the contact details given above.

Scope

www.scope.org.uk/graduates

Scope's Leadership Recruitment initiative provides access to graduate employment opportunities for disabled people. Candidates can apply for a 12 month paid work placement at Scope or gain support in their applications to partner employers.

5. Useful websites

JobServe: www.workthing.co.uk

The world's first internet recruitment service. The site works well with Jaws and other screen readers.

Guardian Jobs: www.guardian.co.uk/jobs

Allows you to browse through a large range of vacancies from across all sectors and professions, search by a number of categories, or register for a regular email alerts on relevant vacancies to you.

Jobs Go Public: www.jobsgopublic.co.uk

Job listing website for public sector vacancies, including charities and local government.

Monster: www.monster.co.uk

Search a database of over 20,000 jobs and register your CV online to make applying for jobs simple. Monster also offers excellent careers advice and a range of career tools.

Prospects: www.prospects.ac.uk

Job listing and advice website aimed at graduates. Contains a database of employers, job vacancies and information about a variety of careers.

Jobs in Charities: www.jobsincharities.co.uk

Details of the latest vacancies in the voluntary sector.

Reed: www.reed.co.uk

Search a large database of jobs and place your CV online. Also offers a CV Builder that automatically formats a professionally laid out CV after you have entered your details.

Total Jobs: www.totaljobs.co.uk

Search a large database of jobs, upload your CV and look through some good application process tips.

Directgov: www.direct.gov.uk

Brings together information from a wide range of government departments in an easy to access format. Includes information on employment, finance and benefits, training opportunities and housing.

Module three: Factsheet 3.4: The CV

What is a CV?

A Curriculum Vitae (CV) outlines your personal details, relevant skills, experience and qualifications. It is used to help you “sell yourself” to a prospective employer by highlighting your strengths and achievements. The aim of a CV is to get you an interview.

Why write a CV?

Writing and updating a CV is a useful technique during job search as it helps you to keep track of your skills and experience in one document. Putting a CV together can also help you think about what you have done in employment, education or leisure activities.

Types of CV and when to use them

The two most common types of CV are:

Chronological

- A traditional format where work experience is organised in date order.
- Use this if you're staying in a similar field, your job history shows career development or if your last employer's name may be advantageous.

Functional

- Emphasises your transferable skills and experience gained, avoiding any reliance on work in date order.
- Use this format when changing careers, your skills are more impressive than employment history, or you have had a range of unconnected jobs.

General tips

- Limit it to a maximum of two sides of A4 – keep it concise.
- Keep it clear and specific – simple language works best.
- Use positive and active language.
- Highlight your selling points clearly.

Example of a chronological CV:

Anne Other

123 New Road
Anytown
Anyshire
A12 3BC

Telephone 0000 0000 000

Email anne.other@anyisp.co.uk

Personal Profile:

An enthusiastic and reliable worker with excellent knowledge of business administration. I am able to meet deadlines and can work within a team or on my own initiative. I am keen to find a position within an office environment which will enable me to utilise my IT skills whilst providing me with a challenge.

Employment:

March 2001 - July 2004	Smith and Son - Administrator <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arranged and prioritised meetings• Monitored mail and telephone calls and made invoice payments• Oversaw the management of the company secretarial database.
September 1995 - February 2001	ABC Textiles Ltd - Assistant Sales Administrator <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acted as the central point of contact for all customer communications• Maintained close communication with the outside Sales Representatives and provided constant source of information and sales support.• Developed a highly professional working relationship with both British and International Suppliers.
October 1994 - September 1995	ABC Textiles Ltd - Office Junior <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Composed and typed correspondence.• Organised travel requirements.

Education:

1992-1994 A Levels	Anytown College <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sociology – C• English Literature – D
1990-1992 GCSEs	Anytown School <ul style="list-style-type: none">• English Language – B• Mathematics – C• 5 other GCSEs grades A-C

Training:

1999-2000 CLAIT Plus (Level 2)	Anytown College <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Modules included database solutions, desktop publishing and web page creation.
-----------------------------------	--

Additional information:

- Confident user of MS Office, including Word, Outlook and Excel
- Typing speed of 50 wpm.

Interests:

- I am a keen participant in my local amateur dramatics society
- I have been regularly attending Japanese language lessons for the past five years.

References:

Available on request.

Example of a functional CV:

Anne Other

123 New Road
Anytown
Anyshire
A12 3BC

Telephone 0000 0000 000

Email anne.other@anyisp.co.uk

Personal Profile:

I have recently completed my higher education and I am now actively seeking employment. During my university studies I was able to gain valuable customer service skills in the retail trade. I am a reliable person with good time keeping. I am friendly and approachable and am able to follow instructions accurately. I possess good verbal and written skills.

Key Skills:

- Excellent IT skills, including advanced knowledge of MS Office, Dreamweaver and PhotoShop.
- Excellent knowledge of a range of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.
- Able to communicate with a wide range of audiences.
- Able to prioritise workload and excellent management skills.
- High standard of written English.
- Experience of web publishing.

Achievements:

- Organised a trip to Austria for university society.
- Wrote a number of music reviews and features for the student newspaper.
- Created database of listeners for the local talking newspaper to increase efficiency of service.
- Created and designed website and a range of other marketing materials for the university Snowboarding Society.

Education:

2001 – 2004 Degree	Anyshire University • BA History – 2:1
1999 – 2001 A Levels	Anytown College • English Literature – A • History – A • French – B
1997 - 1999 GCSEs	Anytown School • English Language – A • Mathematics – A • 8 other GCSEs grades A – C

Work Experience:

Summer 2003	Bank plc, Student Trainee
Summer 2002	Bookshop Ltd, Retail Assistant
Summer 2000	Anytown Talking Newspaper, Volunteer

Interests:

- I am an active member of the university snowboarding society and have helped to plan several excursions to dry slopes and a trip to Austria.
- I play the guitar in a band and regularly play at local venues.

References:

Available on request.

Buzz words

Through a CV you are saying to an employer “I can do this job” and “interview me”. This means that you need to present yourself in the most positive way possible. One way you can do this is by carefully selecting the words you use to promote yourself. The following work areas and associated words may help when putting together your CV:

Coping with routine

Conscientious, Consistent, Controlled, Coped, Dealt with, Efficient, Managed, Performed.

Working with others

Advised, Co-operated, Counselling, Facilitated, Guided, Managed, Negotiated, Participated, Presented, Supervised.

Achievements

Accomplished, Achieved, Co-ordinated, Created, Developed, Formulated, Revitalised, Recommended.

Problem-solving

Implemented, Improved, Instigated, Interpreted, Initiated, Inspired, Introduced, Investigated.

Initiative

Created, Designed, Developed, Devised, Directed, Established, Formulated, Innovation, Motivated, Negotiated, Organised, Originated.

Skills and achievements

This section of your CV allows you to sell yourself through listing your main skills and experience. You can use the following outline of skills to help you describe your abilities:

Skills with individuals

Communicate well using the telephone, Persuade or sell to individuals, Deal with customers, Manage and supervise individuals, Delegate work to others.

Skills with groups

Communicate to small groups, Lead seminars, Perform or entertain people, Persuade a group, Take part in group debates, Brief a team, Chair meetings.

Commercial skills

Manage or run a business, Spot potential markets, Develop a new business, Design a marketing campaign, Look after customers well, Develop new sales initiatives, Promote or sell by telephone.

Skills with information

Search for or research, Gather information by interviewing people, Check information for errors/proof read, Analyse information, Organise or classify data, Retrieve information, Write reports.

Physical skills

Manual dexterity, Ability/strength/speed, Craft/sewing/weaving, Painting/finishing/restoring, Washing/cleaning or preparing, Setting up or assembling, Growing/tending.

Personal profiles

A personal profile introduces you as an applicant. It is one paragraph outlining your key strengths, achievements and goals. The following examples offer an outline of the different styles you can use:

- A college leaver with excellent computer skills. My college course work and work placements have enabled me to gain good research and presentation skills and an ability to communicate with the general public. I also see myself as an enthusiastic and reliable team player who is willing and able to develop new skills quickly.
- A reliable and conscientious employee with good customer service skills and a proven record of achieving targets and goals, looking to move to a more frontline management role.
- I regard myself as a cheerful and friendly person, who is reliable and trustworthy. I am keen to learn new skills and use my considerable abilities within a garage/car business environment.
- I am currently looking for work in the computer industry. I am very familiar with most aspects of computing and have used computers for many years, and am always confident of learning anything new.

Check your CV

Your CV has around 10-15 seconds to impress a potential employer. It is vital that you sell yourself effectively by using positive language and by easily highlighting your key skills and achievements.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module three: Factsheet 3.5: Looking for jobs

Focus your time and effort

It is essential to put time and effort into your job search. To be successful this needs to be focused realistically. For example there is no point in completing 10 applications for a job in a specific sector if candidates are required to have an entry qualification that you do not have. It is important to seek help from a careers advisor, with a knowledge of the qualifications, experience and standards required in different sectors and roles. With this help you can target applications that maximise your chances of gaining employment.

Identifying vacancies

Internet job boards

Job boards like Total Jobs, Guardian Jobs and Jobs Go Public represent some of the best ways to easily find job vacancies. Most printed job opportunities appear online, alongside many more that are only available via job boards. Most websites allow you to upload a copy of your CV and covering letters. This makes applying for vacancies very easy, but you should remember to tailor your CV and covering letter to each vacancy to maximise your chances of getting an interview.

Approaching employers directly

If you can identify a specific employer that you would like to work for then you should approach them directly as only a very small proportional of jobs are advertised. For example, if you wanted to work for RNIB then it is far better to check www.rnib.org.uk/jobs than to check online job boards or newspaper adverts. If you do not have internet access, write to an employer with a copy of your CV and a covering letter. Hopefully they will be able to keep your details on file and consider you for any opportunities in the future.

Newspapers

Publications offer a good range of job vacancies, especially at a local level. If it is not possible for you to access printed newspaper vacancies, either through a vision aid or the support of a friend or relative, you should seek advice from your local Jobcentre Plus or the employment agencies available in your local area.

Agencies

Agencies are intermediary services that match jobseekers to vacancies. Once registered with an agency they will match your skills and experience to vacancies that may be appropriate for you. Agencies have large numbers of jobseekers on their books. It is important to telephone them regularly to ask what new opportunities are available and to let them know that you are still actively seeking work.

Trade publications and websites

If you are interested in a career in a specific sector of employment then trade publications and websites can be excellent resources. For example, if you are interested in pursuing a career in marketing there are numerous publications and websites that specifically list marketing vacancies.

Careers fairs

Careers fairs are an excellent way of seeing lots of employers in one day. Careers fairs provide information about job vacancies and how companies plan to recruit for those vacancies. You can find out about careers fairs from your local careers advisory service and related publications.

Jobseeker Direct

Jobseeker Direct is a phone service operated by Jobcentre Plus. It aims to keep you in touch with the latest job vacancies. This service is available to anyone who is looking for work, and the lines are open weekdays 8.00am - 6.00pm, and Saturdays 9.00am - 1.00pm. All calls are charged at local rates. Telephone 0845 606 0234 for details.

Disability friendly employers

There is no certain way to identify specific employers as "disability friendly" or not. However, if this is an important method of focusing your job search then there are a couple of methods you can use.

Disability symbol

Some employers use the disability symbol that is awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers that have made some commitments to the recruitment of disabled staff. For example, if you see the disability symbol on a job advert or application form, it means that if you meet the minimum requirements for the job, the employer will invite you to an interview.

Contact the Disability Employment Advisor in your local Jobcentre Plus for details of the employers in your area that use the disability symbol.

Employers' Forum on Disability

The Employers' Forum is a network of employers interested in developing policies on disability in the workplace. There are around 400 members of the forum, representing 20 per cent of the UK's workforce.

A list of Employers' Forum members can be found at:
www.employers-forum.co.uk

Module three: Factsheet 3.6: Application forms

Requesting an application form in an alternative format

All employers are required under the Disability Discrimination Act to make application forms accessible. This can be done either by making forms available in an alternative format or by offering a reasonable adjustment to the recruitment process, for example by allowing you to complete the form over the phone.

Before completing the form

- Make sure that you give yourself plenty of time to complete the form.
- Read it through to ensure that you are clear about the kind of information that the employer requires.
- Collect together all the information that you can about the employer – job description, person specification, brochure, etc. – and identify what they are looking for in terms of skills, experience and qualifications.

Completing the form

An application form gets you an interview. So the most vital thing to have in mind when completing the application form is to make it as easy as possible for the person reading the form to shortlist you. The section you need to put most effort into is the personal statement. Sometimes this section is replaced with competency-based questions.

Personal statements

Personal statements give you the chance to demonstrate how well you can do the job. As with your CV, you need to actively sell yourself, your skills and your achievements to an employer. You will only be offered an interview if you demonstrate with examples how you meet the criteria for the job.

The most important thing to remember when writing a personal statement is that you should address all points on the person specification and the job description. Make sure you answer these points with specific examples from your previous jobs, work placements, leisure interests or education.

To make things more straightforward you can mirror the personal specification in your personal statement. For example, if the person specification has 12 bullet points split between the headings Education, Skills and Other, then your personal statement should have 12 bullet points split between these three headings. By doing this you are making it easy for the recruiter to put a tick in the box that says you addressed that point in the person specification.

Competency-based questions

This type of question is becoming increasingly more common on application forms, especially in graduate recruitment. They usually begin with "Describe a time when you..." or "Give an example of..." and ask for examples of specific skills such as teamwork, leadership, persuasiveness and so on.

One way of answering these questions is to use the STAR approach, where you identify a Situation, Task, Action and Result. The situation and task are usually combined and form the introduction. The action you took should form the main body of your answer and the result should be your conclusion. For example:

- **Situation** - how, when, where, with whom?
- **Task** - what situation or the task you were faced with?
- **Action** - what action did you take?
- **Result** - what results did you achieve/conclusions did you reach?

"Whilst volunteering at ABC Charity last summer I was given the task of producing a database of supporters. I gathered information from a number of departments and conducted an information audit on how the database needed to be used. I designed the database and entered the relevant information into the system. As a result of the database, fundraising revenue has risen by 15 per cent."

After completing the form

- Put together a short covering letter to send out with the application form. This letter enables you to set the scene for the employer and to reinforce your key strengths and reasons for applying for the job. See Factsheet 3.7 for help with covering letters.
- Make sure you keep a copy of your completed form so that if you are called for interview, you can quickly go over what you said about yourself and prepare for the interview more effectively.
- Be prepared to contact the employer to check the progress of your application if the closing date passes and you hear nothing from them for several weeks.

Module three: Factsheet 3.7: Covering letters

When should I use a covering letter?

A covering letter should always be included when you are sending out a CV or returning a completed application form. It should generate interest and motivate the employer to want to know more about you. A covering letter is even more critical if your application is speculative, that is not in response to a specific vacancy.

Structure

Base your covering letter on the following outline structure:

Paragraph one

Introduce yourself, state what you are applying for and where you saw the vacancy.

Paragraph two

Outline why you are applying. What in particular has made you send your CV or application form for this particular job? Try to demonstrate how enthusiastic you are about the job. At this stage you can also demonstrate any research you have done.

Paragraph three

This should be a summary of the key points of your CV or application form. What are the two or three best reasons for giving you an interview?

Paragraph four

This paragraph is flexible, and it is your opportunity to explain any gaps in your career. It is also a good place to disclose your disability or mention any adjustments you may need at an interview or test.

An example of a targeted covering letter is shown on the next page.

123 New Road
Anytown
A12 3BC

Mr Editor
The Gazette
Fleet Street
Anytown
A0 0ZZ

15 November 2007

Dear Mr Editor

Re: Assistant Press Officer

I am writing in response to your advertisement on 12 October for the above position and enclose my Curriculum Vitae for your consideration.

Reading your company literature and speaking to some of your employees at the recent Anytown Recruitment Fair has convinced me that working for The Gazette will be a challenging and exciting experience. The role of Assistant Press Officer will allow me to develop my existing skills in a commercial environment.

You will see that I have had considerable experience of press officer work during my years at University. I was responsible for all press contact for our student union and for the production of press releases for a number of events. My work experience during vacations has developed a number of the skills mentioned in your advertisement, particularly teamwork and meeting deadlines.

As you will note from my CV, I am partially sighted and will require screen magnification software if there is a PC-based test as part of the selection process. I am happy to utilise my laptop if required. The government's Access to Work scheme will cover the majority, if not all of the costs of any additional equipment required.

Yours sincerely

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this worksheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module three: Factsheet 3.8: Disclosure of disability

Should you tell a potential employer that you have a disability?

There are no hard and fast rules in relation to disclosure and you do not have to tell an employer about your disability. It is up to you to decide if, and at what point in applying for a job, you let an employer know that you have a sight problem.

Reasons for disclosure

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

If you disclose your disability during the application process and then feel you have been treated unfairly you can make a complaint under the DDA. However, if you have not told the employer about your disability it may be possible for them to say that they did not know about it and could not have been expected to make any adjustments. By not declaring your disability it takes the emphasis away from the employer being required to make a reasonable adjustment.

In addition, if you have disclosed the fact that you are blind or partially sighted the employer cannot lawfully refuse to employ you without good reason, i.e. your application for employment cannot be rejected simply because of your sight problem.

Access to Work scheme

You can get funding from the government's Access to Work scheme for any specialist equipment or extra transport costs and help with work related obstacles resulting from a disability. Employers are often worried about the potential costs of taking on a disabled employee and many are not aware of the Access to Work scheme. By openly disclosing your disability you will be able to raise their awareness about the help that is available and allow them to focus on your skills and abilities.

Equal opportunities policies

Some employers use the 'two ticks' Disability Symbol on job advertisements, which are awarded by Jobcentre Plus. This symbol means that the employer has made a commitment to employing disabled people. The symbol also means that the employer has guaranteed to interview any disabled candidates if they meet the minimum criteria from the person specification. Also, look out for positive statements about disability in an employer's equal opportunities policy. In some cases, your disability may be viewed as an additional qualification.

A question of trust

It is worth bearing in mind that when applying for a job, many employers require you to be truthful in all aspects of the application form and may say that any non-disclosure is a justified reason for dismissal.

Positive aspects of your disability

Your disability may also have provided you with unique experiences that may be useful in the workplace. For example, your sight loss may mean that you have acquired excellent IT skills through the use of access technology or that you have developed excellent organisational skills.

Forming a disclosure strategy

If you decide to tell a potential employer about your disability, the next stage is to establish at what point in the application process you should tell them.

CVs

It is not necessary to mention your disability on your CV. You may feel that an employer will see your disability as the most important thing about you or make assumptions about you on the basis of your disability. Also there may not room on your CV to qualify your disability or to highlight the range of adjustments that could be made.

If the CV is speculative or not followed by an application form, you need to decide if you would prefer for an employer to know about your disability before you are called for an interview. This may depend on whether you will need a reasonable adjustment to be made for you at the interview or for you to do the job satisfactorily.

Covering letter

A covering letter should be sent with your CV to potential employers. Covering letters allow you the opportunity to explain your disability in more detail than on a CV. You can also highlight the range of adjustments that are available and that funding for these is available through the Access to Work scheme. However, bear in mind that the focus of a covering letter should always be on your skills to do the job.

Application form

Some application forms ask direct questions about disability, so you can consider what details you choose to include at this stage.

You may have done voluntary work, which may cause the employer to wonder if you have a disability. For example, you may be the secretary of your local voluntary society for blind people and have gained skills and experience that are relevant for the job you are applying for.

Equal opportunities monitoring form

Some employers may have a separate equal opportunities monitoring form that they ask all applicants to fill in. These forms are not used to judge application forms and are separated from the form. The people who carry out the shortlisting process do not see these forms.

Interview

If you have not let the employer know that you have a disability before the interview, they may ask you irrelevant questions about your disability at interview. It is important to focus at an interview on the ways in which you fit the requirements for the job, rather than on your disability.

In addition, non-disclosure could lead to you facing assessments on interview day that are inaccessible. This wouldn't help you demonstrate your abilities.

During an interview you should be prepared to talk positively about your disability and be able to highlight the range of support and equipment that is available.

Summary

You do not have to tell an employer about your disability. By not saying anything it may mean that you face less discrimination, but it also takes away some of the obligations of an employer.

It might be a good idea to form a disclosure strategy, where you plan how you tell an employer about your disability. This means that you can positively discuss your disability on your own terms and retain a focus on your own skills and abilities.

Module three: Factsheet 3.9: Interview skills

Getting to this stage

If you are getting to the interview stage it means that your CV is working for you and that you are completing application forms effectively. Finding appropriate vacancies and using good CV and application form techniques should mean that you get offered an interview for the majority of vacancies you apply for.

What are employers looking for at an interview?

If you have got to the interview stage then it means that you have beaten off competition from a number of other applicants and that the employer already has a fairly good idea that you can do the job. The purpose of the interview is to assess the shortlisted candidates against the skills needed for the job.

Dealing with interview stress

The most important interview skill you can learn is the ability to be yourself even when you are under stress and feel nervous.

There are two main techniques that can help you achieve this:

- **Familiarise yourself with the situation** – which means that it is important to practise applying for jobs so that you get used to filling out application forms and answering job-related questions.
- **Have confidence in your ability to perform** – which means that it is important to prepare yourself in every possible way you can for an interview. Examples of how to do this are given in the next section.

Before the interview

Well prepared is well performed. Effective preparation means that you will come across as confident, articulate and knowledgeable. More importantly, good preparation helps you manage your nerves and shows the employer that you really want the job.

Research the organisation and the context of the job

This is a key phase of your preparation for an interview. An employer will expect you to want the job you are applying for and one way of showing this is by demonstrating that you have fully researched the work area. Have there been any major developments in the organisation recently? How might any changes in the external environment affect their work?

Reread your application

Interviewers will have copies of your application so it is important that you know exactly what you have told them. They may ask you specific questions about activities and achievements that you have mentioned and will expect you to be able to talk confidently about them. Going back through your application again also helps remind you about the key skills and competencies that you want to highlight in your interview.

Find out who will be interviewing you

This can be vital to preparing for the rest of the interview. Are you going to be interviewed by the line manager for the role? If so, you can expect a detailed interview on your specific abilities to do the job. If you are being interviewed by a Human Resources Manager or an out-sourced agency then the interview will be more general and competency based.

Think about what questions you might be asked

It is easy to predict some questions that you will be asked. For example, you can be sure that there will be a question on equal opportunities. Preparing answers is one of the best ways to boost your confidence in an interview. Worksheet 3.2 lists many of the common interview questions and further examples of questions and suggestions on how you answer them are given later on in this factsheet.

Plan some questions to ask at the end of the interview

Having already completed some research about the organisation you should have some idea of the projects and developments that they are involved with. It might be useful to plan some questions around this (see Worksheet 3.2 for some ideas). You could also consider some more

general questions, such as asking the interviewers about what they like about working for the organisation.

Arrange any adjustments

If you require any adjustments at the interview or for any test or assessment, make sure that you let the employer know in plenty of time. You should also check the day before the interview that everything is in place.

Making a good impression

Dress appropriately

It is important that you put a lot of effort into how you dress for an interview. A potential employer will begin to form an impression of you from the first moment they see you. Inappropriate clothing will mean that they are thinking negatively about you and this could jeopardise all the important preparation that you have done for the interview. (See Factsheet 2.1 for more help with making a good impression.)

Plan your journey

If you are late for an interview you are very unlikely to get the job. You need to arrive 10-15 minutes before the start of your interview. Plan the journey in advance; know what transport you need to catch in order to make it in time and then get the bus or train before it. If you are unable to check the location out beforehand make sure you leave plenty of time in case you cannot find the right building straight away.

At the interview

Arriving at reception

As soon as you arrive you should behave as though the interview has started. Sit up as straight and as attentively in the reception area as you would in the interview room.

In the interview room

Be polite, courteous and respectful. Thank the interviewers for seeing you. Sit up and appear interested, alert and enthusiastic. Be positive; you have been successful in achieving an interview when others were not. Smile and look at the person to whom you are talking. Listen carefully to

the questions and think before answering. Ask if you don't understand and re-start an answer if you make a mistake.

It is also important to end the interview confidently. This will be the last thing that an employer remembers about you, so you should try to be positive. For example you could say:

“I have been really impressed by what you have told me about your organisation. I really feel that it would be the type of environment that I could succeed in”.

Dealing with specific questions

The following is a list of questions that you might be asked at an interview. There are some suggestions that you may like to use to prepare your own answers.

Why do you want to work here?

- It will give me a chance to do the work that interests me.
- Good reputation of the company.
- Good training opportunities.

What would you like to be doing in five years time?

- Explain that you would still like to be working for the company, but have developed within it.

What are your weaknesses?

- Describe aspects of your last job that you found hard and how you overcame these difficulties.

What makes a good team member?

- Good communication
- Flexibility
- Co-operation
- Adaptability
- Talk about how you demonstrated the above in previous work or activities.

How long have you been out of work?

- If you have been out of work for some time, try and be positive. Describe any job search, voluntary work, training or leisure activities that you have been involved in.

How do you manage your deadlines?

- Prioritising
- Planning
- Communicate any difficulties
- Talk about how you demonstrated the above in previous work or activities.

What is your experience of providing information to others?

- Perhaps producing leaflets, writing content for a website, organising an event.
- Signposting to other information providers or giving advice.
- Use examples from a work, social or educational setting.

Stay positive

Confidence comes from practice and preparation. Even if you do not get the job this time, each interview gives you an opportunity to learn something for the next interview.

Module three: Factsheet 3.10: Getting a job offer

The first day of a new job is daunting for everyone, but it can seem particularly daunting if you have a sight problem. Moving to a new place of work in an unfamiliar environment is stressful, and it is natural to have concerns about a new job and meeting lots of new colleagues.

Stay positive

The most important thing to do before your first day is to stay positive about the job. Remember how pleased you felt to receive the job offer. Having negative thoughts about your new job and your ability to do it is natural, and these fears can be particularly strong for people who have been out of work for some time. The job is something that you obviously wanted to do and you were excited about doing.

Access to Work

When you get a firm offer of employment and a start date you should contact Access to Work – contact details can be found in the Access to Work Factsheet 4.3.

Conditions of employment

Depending on the position and the company whom you have applied for, you may find that your offer is in subject to certain conditions. Make sure that you are aware of these conditions during the application process and are able to comply with them if you receive an initial job offer.

Common examples of these are:

- A probation period: This is a period of time in which you are employed and paid by the employer, but do not necessarily have the same benefits and legal rights as longer term employees. This can often mean that the employer can dismiss you for unsatisfactory behaviour with less warning during this period.
- Approved references: The employer may not check up on your references until you have received an initial job offer. If the offer is given to you subject to references, then they may be able to terminate the offer if the feedback they receive from your referees is unsatisfactory.

- **Successful medical:** Some posts may require a medical test to be successfully passed in order for you to take up the role. Once again, if this condition is stipulated by the employer at the initial offer, then they may be able to terminate the job offer if you fail to meet it.
- **CRB Checks:** A role that is working with vulnerable children or adults will always request a clearance by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) in order to examine your suitability for the post. This should be clearly stipulated in an advert, or at least in the application process, and therefore if you are unable to gain this clearance, you will not be permitted to take up the role.

The first day

One of the keys to a good first day is being able to deal with the nerves effectively. Think back to your job search and how you dealt with the pressure of an interview. Small things such as getting up early, eating a good breakfast and planning what you are going to wear should ensure that you have the best possible start to your day.

Meeting colleagues can be one of the most challenging aspects of a new job for someone who is blind or partially sighted. There may be some awkward questions about your disability or some people may try to avoid you altogether. There are no easy answers to how to deal with these situations. Nevertheless you need to be prepared to talk positively about aspects of your disability in the same way you did at your interview.

Dealing with the layout of a work environment may be an issue for someone with a sight problem. If this is the case, it should be possible to arrange coming into the workplace before the official start date to familiarise yourself with the new environment. If it is not possible, make sure you talk to your manager about getting some extra time and help to learn the layout of the workplace.

Remember that no one expects you to know everything at once and keep reminding yourself that they have chosen you for the job.

The first week

The first week is all about settling into the routine of your work and getting to know your new colleagues. Creating a good impression by arriving early and showing enthusiasm is always a good idea.

Getting to know your colleagues is the most important thing you will do in your first week. Try to join in with as many things as possible and do not be afraid to make a nice gesture or two. A nice touch would be to bring in some chocolates or biscuits to share. Do not wait for colleagues to ask you to lunch, take the initiative and ask them. Small details like these are vital in creating a good first impression.

And finally...

Starting a new job is exciting. There is nearly always a honeymoon period when you are welcomed and learn lots of new things. Try to enjoy it! When you prepare yourself mentally for your new job, you will be a success at it.

Module four: Activity 4.1: Chilling out

This activity can be done individually or can be facilitated within a large group.

Why you need it

As you will probably have already noticed, job searching can be jolly stressful! So it is important that you give yourself time to chill out, relax and de-stress every now and then too!

The following exercise is designed to help you in countless ways, not just for personal relaxation, but also to help you stay calm, more relaxed, confident and in control when facing those employers.

To let go of stress properly, we can take ourselves through three different levels of relaxation:

Level one: Releasing any pent up stress from your body

At times of high-stress we often hold tension in our shoulders and back – stress can also be seen in your face through frowning and grimacing.

Firstly, you will feel better for releasing this tension, but secondly you will improve your posture and facial expression, which will give you more positive body language when meeting other people.

Level two: Settling your emotions and releasing negative emotions

It is important that you are emotionally calm, relaxed and settled. Unbalanced emotions can result in you becoming stressed and pent up with negative energy that may influence your behaviour and will certainly be picked up by other people. While job searching, it is important to keep motivated and focus on the positive. If negative experiences occur, it is useful to try and let go of the negative emotions attached to these from your mind and focus on the positive energy connected to pleasant experiences.

Thus outwardly you will appear calm, relaxed and positive – which will make you more approachable and pleasant to talk to, and will also influence the responses and comments that you may make.

Level three: Dispelling negative thoughts and keeping a balanced state of mind

Once we have settled the emotions and are feeling calm and tranquil, we are then going to go a level deeper, to the level of thought, again letting go of any negative thoughts and breathing in positive mental energy. If you can successfully draw these in and focus on them, you will feel content, positive and motivated to succeed, which will help you to bring about better results.

The exercise

You can perform this exercise for as long as is appropriate to the situation that you are in, or as long as you like. The good thing is, is that it can be done wherever you are and for as long as you want.

Here are some simple step-by-step instructions. Feel free to insert your own time allowances and to change it to suit you.

Step One: Physical relaxation

- Make sure you are sitting comfortably with your back straight.
- Place your hands in your lap with your palms facing upwards, so that your body is open to taking in as much positive energy as possible.
- Now close your eyes...
- Relax your body, starting at your feet. Your feet should be flat on the floor. Become aware of your feet and consciously let go of any tension and relax the muscles.
- Continue to your ankles, your calves, your knees and your thighs – taking your awareness up your legs and let go of any tension.
- Now take your awareness up towards your hips, your buttocks and the base of your spine, all the time relaxing. Then feel relaxation flowing up your spine.
- Keep moving up your back until you reach your shoulders – this is a key area where lots of people hold a lot of stress and tension, so spend as long as you need, relaxing your shoulders and losing the tension.
- Now bring your awareness to the front of your body and relax your abdomen. Relax your chest. Take your awareness to your hands and just relax your hands. Feel the relaxation rising up your arms as you re-join the shoulders and just let go of any tension.
- Now relax your neck as best you can in accordance with your posture.
- Relax your chin and your mouth, relax your nose, relax your eyes, and your eyebrows and forehead. Tension is held in all the small parts of your face and it will feel better when you have taken it away. Just let go of any tension in your face and relax your scalp.

Step two: Balancing your emotions

Now that your body is completely relaxed and tension free, you can take your awareness deeper to the emotional level.

- First of all become aware of any negative emotions you may have experienced through out the day. Just bring them to your mind's eye. They could be to do with how you have been made to feel during this course, on your journey, or even something that occurred earlier this week, but find the emotion and focus on it.
- Feel the emotion and focus on it for a few moments.
- Now take in a deep cleansing breath of air and concentrating on the negative emotion, breath it out and away from your body. Picture the emotion as a murky grey mist, or an unpleasant smell or texture leaving you and leaving your emotions settled and cleansed.
- Now take your awareness back to your emotions. Focus on a positive emotion, a feeling of happiness that you may have had today when you were pleased with something that you achieved, a moment when you felt loved or appreciated today and just hold it.
- Concentrate on that emotion and feel the positive energy that comes from the emotion.
- Take a deep breath, and focusing on the good emotion that you are feeling, concentrating on how it makes you feel, breathe in the warmth of the emotion and let it fill your whole body. Let the positive energy fill every cell of your body as you breathe in. And feel that your emotions are settled.
- Spend a few moments in this calm, relaxed state.

Step three: Positive thoughts

Now your emotions are settled and calm, you can go a level deeper, to your thoughts. Again we are first of all going to become aware of the negative and then the positive.

- Take your awareness deep into your mind and become aware of any negative thoughts you may have experienced recently. Just bring them to your mind's eye.
- Once you have the negative thoughts, whatever it is, do not judge yourself for having it, just become aware of it and realise that you can let go of it.
- Take a deep breath, and just release, breathe out the negative thoughts from your body, picturing it leaving you as murky grey cloud.
- Now take your awareness back to your mind and bring to mind any positive thoughts you have experienced recently.
- Hold the positive thought and recognise that this is the real you.
- Now taking a deep breath, breathe in the positive energy that the thought is producing and bring it into very cell of your body. Let the positive energy flow throughout you and hold that warm relaxed feeling.
- Just enjoy the sensation for a few moments.
- Now become aware of your body which is relaxed, your emotional state which is settled and your mind which is calm. Just stay with this state and focus on your breathing for a few moments.
- You can access this positive energy whenever you need to.
- Let the positive energy flow out and bring success to your day.
- And when you are ready, just open your eyes and relax.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this activity sheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module four: Factsheet 4.1: Registering as blind or partially sighted

About this factsheet

If you have a sight problem it's a good idea to think about registering. This factsheet takes you through the registration process and how it can help you to get any practical support you need. This includes information on concessions and welfare benefits that can be claimed by people who are registered as having a sight impairment.

This factsheet consists of the following sections:

- The registration process
- Support from your local council
- What are the benefits of registration?
- Welfare benefits
- Further information
- Appendix: A certificate of Visual Impairment.

The registration process

The two categories of registration

Depending on your level of sight you will be registered as severely sight impaired/blind or as sight impaired/ partially sighted.

Being registered as severely sight impaired/blind does not necessarily mean that you are totally without sight, or will lose all your sight in the future.

Loss of sight in only one eye does not qualify you for registration, unless you have poor sight in the remaining eye.

What is the register?

Each local council keeps a register of severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted people living in its area. The register is held either by the social services department (social work department in Scotland) or by their contracted representatives. The register is confidential.

What is it for?

Registration can qualify you for certain concessions, and can help with claims for some welfare benefits. The register also helps your local council plan and provide the best service it can for people who have sight problems.

Should I register?

The system for registering or asking for services is very simple. You can ask for information and support as soon as you feel you need it.

You do not have to be registered to obtain help and information. Registration is completely voluntary but for some concessions it is essential. You will find information about concessions and welfare benefits towards the end of this document.

How do I register?

What do I have to do?

Registration actually happens in two stages. Firstly you need to be certified as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted by an eye specialist, the consultant ophthalmologist.

If you are already attending an eye hospital or clinic you should discuss certification with your specialist. Or you might prefer to talk it over first with someone else at the eye clinic such as an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, a hospital social worker or a volunteer from a local society for people with sight problems. You might want someone with you to take note of any information you are given. If you do not attend an eye clinic, you should ask your GP to refer you to a consultant ophthalmologist.

What happens when I see the consultant?

The consultant will decide whether you are eligible for registration by measuring your visual acuity and your field of vision. That is, how good you are at seeing detail and how much you can see from the side of your eye when you are looking straight ahead. You should wear your usual glasses or contact lenses (if any) for the examination.

The consultant may do other tests to check your eye health.

This could mean the consultant uses drops to dilate your pupils, blurring your vision for a few hours afterwards. You may want to have someone with you to help you home after the appointment.

There are specific rules about the level of sight needed to be registered severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted. If you would like more information about this please see the appendix at the end of this document or telephone our Eye Health Information Service on 0845 766 9999.

If you meet the criteria the consultant can certify you as either severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted by completing the Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI).

What happens to the form?

The form gives details of the assessment of your vision, and certifies that you are severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted and that you are therefore eligible to be registered with your local council.

It gives other relevant information about your circumstances and your preferred format for correspondence. You will be asked to sign the form to agree that a copy can be sent to your local social services/social work department, your GP and the Department of Health. You will be given a copy for yourself. The hospital keeps a copy.

If your sight is affecting your ability to drive safely you will be told that you should telephone DVLA on 0870 600 0301.

What if I disagree with the consultant's decision?

If you are unhappy with the outcome of the examination you can ask your GP to refer you to a second specialist.

Scotland and Northern Ireland

The registration forms used in Northern Ireland are similar to those used in England and Wales. The registration form used in Scotland is called BP1. However there are plans to change this so that Scotland will use a similar system and forms to England and Wales. These changes are expected to be implemented by 2007.

Support from your local council

The second stage is registration itself. Registration often makes it easier to get support and practical help. Your local social services/social work department should receive your certification form within five days. A worker should then contact you within two weeks to ask you about your needs and any support you feel would help, and to talk to you about being added to the register. You can choose to be registered straight away, or take more time to think about it. If you agree to be registered the date of your registration should be the date the consultant signed your certification form.

There can be delays between certification and registration. So, if you are having difficulties because of poor sight, remember you are entitled to ask your local social services/social work department to assess your needs, even if you are not yet registered or have chosen not to register at this time.

How do I get support before I am registered?

If you visit your high street optometrist (optician) they will be able to give you a leaflet with tear off form that you can send to social services. This is called the Low Vision Leaflet (LVL).

You can fill this in yourself, with information about your circumstances, and any difficulties or anxieties you have because of your sight problem. You can ask for information about the services available to you. The leaflet includes details of where you can get advice and information locally and nationally. The optician will probably also arrange for you to be seen at your local hospital eye clinic.

You have another chance to be referred for help, from the hospital eye service. You do not have to wait until your treatment at the clinic has ended. Hospital eye clinic staff can fill in a form called Referral of Vision Impaired Patient (RVI), with your consent. This will tell the social services/social work department about your situation, request an assessment of your need for support and state how urgently they think you require help.

You can also telephone RNIB Advocacy Services for advice on 0845 766 9999.

What help can my council provide?

Specially trained staff, usually called rehabilitation workers (or rehabilitation officers), can support you in a range of activities. This could include getting about safely indoors and out, other skills for daily living such as cooking, and leisure activities. They can also refer you to other services you might need.

These workers may be part of a special team working with people with a sight or hearing loss or based with the local voluntary agency for blind and partially sighted people.

Not every local council employs rehabilitation workers. However it should be possible to “buy in” any services that were agreed following your needs assessment.

If you later move into a different area, you should let your new council’s social services know that you are registered as severely sight impaired/blind or as sight impaired/partially sighted. Arrangements can then be made for details of your registration to be transferred to your new local authority.

Most local councils issue a registration card to people who are registered as severely sight impaired/blind or as sight impaired/partially sighted. This can help to prove entitlement to certain concessions. People with sight problems find such cards helpful to back up requests for assistance when out and about, particularly if they do not use a white cane or guide dog and their sight problem may not be obvious to other people. Local councils in England should issue registration cards which follow guidelines laid down by the Association of Directors of Social Services.

What are the benefits of registration?

If you are registered severely sight impaired/blind you are entitled to the following concessions.

- Blind person's personal income tax allowance

This allowance is in addition to the usual personal tax allowances. It can be transferred to your husband or wife, or your civil partner, in part or whole if you do not have enough taxable income to use it. Contact your local tax office or telephone Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' priority telephone line on 0845 9000 444 about claiming the allowance. Further information is available at their website, hmrc.gov.uk or from the office that deals with your tax affairs.

- Reduction of 50 per cent on the television licence fee

Applies if a registered severely sight impaired/blind adult or child lives in the household. Ring the TV licence helpline on freephone number: 0800 328 2020.

- Car parking concessions: the Blue Badge Scheme

The Blue Badge can be used in any vehicle in which you are travelling. Contact your local council's social services department.

- Free postage on items marked "articles for the blind"

These can include books, papers and letters in large print (minimum font size 16pt), braille items and computer disks and CDs which have been prepared for blind or partially sighted people.

You may also be entitled to:

- Free permanent loan of radios, cassette players and TV sound receivers. Contact your local council's social services and ask about the British Wireless for the Blind Fund.
- Help with telephone installation charges and line rental. Contact your local council's social services to ask if you qualify.

If you are registered severely sight impaired/blind OR sight impaired/partially sighted you are entitled to:

- Free NHS sight test

Tell the optician about your registration before the sight test. The test is also free for anyone aged 60 or over.

- Discounted Rail Travel

The Disabled Person's Railcard generally gives at least one third off the price of certain rail tickets for the cardholder, and an accompanying adult, if applicable. Visit disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk for further details of the scheme and how to apply. Alternatively, if you do not have this railcard you can get the same discounts on rail travel. However to qualify you must be travelling with another person. You will have to provide proof of your registration to obtain this discount.

Contact your local railway station, or telephone National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50, for details of the journeys and ticket types to which a discount applies.

- Local travel schemes

Contact your local council for details of travel concessions in your area, including free travel on local buses.

- Exemption from BT Directory Enquiry charges

Ring 195 and ask for a PIN number. You can still use the free service if BT is not your telephone company.

- Protection by the Disability Discrimination Act

Gives rights to people with sight problems who have been treated unfairly. Telephone RNIB Helpline for details on 0845 766 9999.

You may also be entitled to:

- Leisure concessions

Concessions are available to people with disabilities, or people receiving certain benefits, for various leisure and recreational activities. For example a free ticket for a person accompanying you to participating cinemas if you are registered severely sight impaired/blind or getting Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance; and reduced price entry to museums and exhibitions. Check locally about availability of concessions and proof required with the relevant service provider .

Welfare benefits

People who are registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted are not automatically entitled to any welfare benefits, and there is no special benefit or pension for them. We have listed benefits that blind and partially sighted people – subject to age and other circumstances – may be able to claim.

Please telephone RNIB Welfare Rights Service on 0845 766 9999 for advice and for our detailed fact sheets on these benefits. Although we cannot guarantee your entitlement we recommend that you apply for the appropriate benefit. If you don't claim, you won't get anything!

Attendance Allowance

If you are aged 65 or over you can claim Attendance Allowance. It is for people who require help during the day and/or the night. People who need watching over to avoid getting into danger can also qualify.

Disability Living Allowance

If you are under 65 you can get Disability Living Allowance (DLA). This has two components. You may get the care component if you need help or supervision. You can get the mobility component if you need guidance to get about in unfamiliar places.

To get a claim form for Attendance Allowance or DLA contact your local social security office, or ring the Department for Work and Pensions' Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 88 22 00.

NB People who need help with seeing only can qualify for Attendance Allowance or DLA. You do not have to be getting help to qualify for Attendance Allowance or DLA. It is the help you need that matters.

Pension Credit

If you are aged 60 or over you can get the guarantee Pension Credit if your weekly income is low enough. If you are aged 65 or over you may get the savings Pension Credit if you have modest retirement income or savings.

Additional amounts can be paid if either you and/or your partner are a carer, or if you and/or your partner can be counted as "severely disabled". If applicable, these amounts make it more likely that you will qualify for Pension Credit.

Contact RNIB Welfare Rights Service to check if you qualify on 0845 766 9999. Telephone The Pension Service on 0800 99 1234 to make a claim.

Income Support

You can get Income Support if you are under 60 and have a low income. People who work 16 or more hours a week cannot usually get Income Support.

Contact your local Jobcentre or other Department for Work and Pensions office, or ring the Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 88 22 00.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

These are means tested benefits to help people on a low income with their rent and their council tax. Contact your local council Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit section.

NB Attendance Allowance and DLA are ignored as income for the above benefits, and an award may make it more likely that you will qualify for these income-based benefits.

Council Tax disability reduction

You may get a reduction in your council tax bill if you have a room set aside to meet needs related to your disability. For example, to use and store equipment for your communication needs such as a CCTV. The reduction is not automatic. Ask your local council tax section for details or contact RNIB Welfare Rights Service for advice.

Exemption from “non-dependants” deductions You may be exempt from the deductions normally taken from income-based benefits where there are adult non-dependants living in your home. The exemption applies if you are registered severely sight impaired/blind or get Attendance Allowance or the care component of DLA.

Contact your local council’s benefit section to check if you are exempt from the non-dependants deductions in Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

Tax Credits

Tax Credits are income-based benefits that can be paid on top of other income including wages and benefits. Claims are based on gross taxable income for the tax year prior to the year of application. They are administered by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs.

You may get Working Tax Credit (WTC) to top-up your wages if you work at least 16 hours a week. It includes a disability element if you are registered severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted and you get DLA or another qualifying benefit.

You may get Child Tax Credit (CTC) if you are responsible for a child. The Government has estimated that 9 out of 10 families with children qualify for CTC, so it is worth checking if you can get it. If you have a child who is registered blind or gets Disability Living Allowance, your CTC will include the disabled child element.

Ring the Tax Credits Helpline on 0845 300 3900.

Incapacity Benefit

Incapacity Benefit can be claimed by severely sight impaired/blind and sight impaired/partially sighted people who are unable to work, or while they are seeking work.

Contact your local Jobcentre or other Department for Work and Pensions office or ring the Benefits Enquiry Line on 0800 88 22 00.

Carer's Allowance

If someone such as your partner, a relative or friend spends time looking after you, they may get Carer's Allowance, and/or the carer premium in income-based benefits. You may get one or both of these for looking after another person e.g. your partner, regardless of whether or not you are blind or partially sighted. The person being cared for must be getting either Attendance Allowance or the middle or highest rate care component of DLA. Telephone the Carer's Allowance Unit on 01772 89 96 55.

Important! Before you or your carer claim Carer's Allowance, contact RNIB Welfare Rights Service to check that you, or the person you are caring for, will not lose money.

Health Benefits

If you need "complex lenses" you can get a voucher towards the cost of glasses (check with your optician whether you need complex lenses). If you are unable to leave your home without the help of another person you may be able to get free medical prescriptions.

You can get help with NHS costs, including vouchers towards the costs of glasses and free NHS sight tests, if you receive Income Support,

guarantee Pension Credit or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or if you have a low income.

Your needs count

We hope you have found this information helpful.

Please let RNIB know if you have problems accessing services in your area. We are campaigning to improve services across the UK and we may be able to take up your case if you are not getting the support you need.

RNIB's Welfare Rights Service provide advice and information on social security and other benefits. RNIB Advocacy Services provide advice and information about social services and sources of financial help. Please telephone our services on 0845 766 9999.

You can also contact the Department for Work and Pensions' Benefits Enquiry Line on freephone 0800 88 22 00.

Appendix – Certificate of Vision Impairment

The consultant has rules to follow when completing the Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI). These rules take into account:

- visual acuity: your central vision, the vision you use to see detail
- visual field: how much you can see around the edge of your vision, while looking straight ahead.

Measuring your visual acuity and visual field helps the ophthalmologist to decide whether you are eligible to be registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted.

Your visual acuity is measured by reading down an eye chart while wearing any glasses or contact lenses that you may need. This is known as a Snellen test. Your field of vision is measured by a field of vision test.

The Snellen scale

Visual acuity is measured using the Snellen scale. A Snellen test usually consists of a number of rows of letters which get smaller as you read down the chart. On the Snellen scale normal visual acuity is called 6/6, which corresponds to the bottom or second bottom line of the chart. If you can only read the top line of the chart then this would be written as 6/60. This means you can see at 6 metres what someone with standard vision could see from 60 metres away. The figures 6/60 or 3/60 show the result of a Snellen test.

The first number given in the result of a Snellen test is the distance in metres from the chart you sit when you read it. Usually this is a 6, for 6 metres, but would be 3 if you were to sit closer to the chart i.e. 3 metres closer.

The second number corresponds to the number of lines that you are able to read on the chart. The biggest letters, on the top line, correspond to 60, then as you read down the chart the numbers that correspond to the lines get smaller, 36, 18, 12, 9 and 6. The bottom line of the chart corresponds to the number 6. Someone with standard vision who can read to the bottom of the chart would have vision of 6/6.

For example, a person with standard vision would be able to read the second line on the chart when 36 metres away. However, if you had a Snellen score of 6/36 you would only be able to read the same line at 6 metres away. In other words you need to be much closer to the chart to be able to read it. Generally the larger the second number is, the worse your sight is.

Results of your CVI

The ophthalmologist uses a combination of both your visual acuity and your field of vision to judge whether you are eligible to be registered, and at which level.

If you have a good visual acuity then usually you will have had to have lost a large part of your visual field to be registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted. Alternatively if you have all your visual field you will usually have to have a very poor visual acuity to be registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted.

Generally to be registered as severely sight impaired/blind your sight has to fall into one of the following categories:

- Visual acuity of less than 3/60 with a full visual field.
- Visual acuity between 3/60 and 6/60 with a severe reduction of field of vision, such as tunnel vision.
- Visual acuity of 6/60 or above but with a very reduced field of vision, especially if a lot of sight is missing in the lower part of the field.

To be registered as sight impaired/partially sighted your sight has to fall into one of the following categories:

- Visual acuity of 3/60 to 6/60 with a full field of vision.
- Visual acuity of up to 6/24 with a moderate reduction of field of vision or with a central part of vision that is cloudy or blurry.
- Visual acuity of up to 6/18 if a large part of your field of vision, for example a whole half of your vision, is missing, or a lot of your peripheral vision is missing.

This factsheet is based upon information kindly donated to the Toolkit by the RNIB Welfare Rights Team. They can be contacted on 0845 766 9999.

© RNIB 2007. Reproduction of this factsheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module four: Factsheet 4.2: Your rights in employment

About this factsheet

This factsheet contains a brief introduction to the Disability Discrimination Act and how it protects you in employment. The factsheet outlines some of the circumstances that may be considered discriminatory under the DDA and what you can do if you feel that you have been the victim of discrimination.

If you feel that you have been discriminated against, it is important that you seek advice as soon as possible. At the end of this factsheet you will find a list of some of the organisations that may be able to assist you.

This factsheet consists of the following sections

Section one: What is the DDA?

Section two: What is meant by discrimination?

Section three: What if I have been discriminated against?

Section four: Further information

Section one: What is the DDA?

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) gives rights to disabled people - those with a "physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day to day activities".

Who has rights under the Disability Discrimination Act?

If you are registered or could be registered as blind (severely sight impaired) or partially sighted (sight impaired) then you are automatically covered by the Act. Even if you cannot be registered you still may have rights under the Act. For more about registration please see Factsheet 4.1.

What employment is covered by the DDA?

Employers of any size are covered by the Act. The only major occupation not covered by the Act is service in the armed forces.

The type of employees covered includes temporary, part-time, permanent and contract staff. Voluntary work is not generally covered by the DDA, but there are instances where it might be, so seek advice.

The same definition of discrimination applies across the employment and occupation provisions of the Act. However, there are special provisions relating to reasonable adjustments and who is responsible for the adjustments in relation to certain occupations.

Section two: What is meant by discrimination?

There are three main ways in which an employer can discriminate against a disabled person:

- direct discrimination
- indirect discrimination; and
- failure to make "reasonable" adjustments.

Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination is treating a disabled person less favourably on the grounds of disability. This is generally where the disability itself is the reason for the treatment - treatment that is based on prejudice.

For example, it would be direct discrimination if an employer refuses to offer a job to a blind or partially sighted person, despite their qualifications and experience, purely because they do not wish to employ someone with a sight problem.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination is treating a disabled person less favourably for a reason relating to disability than they would treat others for whom that reason did not apply.

For example, it would be indirect discrimination if an employer dismisses an employee who has had two months off work for a reason relating to their sight problem. If it is the employer's policy to dismiss anyone who has taken this length of time off, then it is not direct discrimination. But it is indirect discrimination because the time has been taken off for a reason relating to the disability. The employer has to prove that the dismissal was justified and that no reasonable adjustments could have been made.

Failure to make reasonable adjustments

The third type of discrimination is a situation where the employer's failure to make a reasonable adjustment puts a disabled employee at a substantial disadvantage.

What is a "reasonable" adjustment?

The Disability Discrimination Act does not specify what is reasonable and what is not, but the following examples highlight the sort of adjustments that could be considered:

- Making adaptations to the written test used in an interview.
- Allowing job applications to be submitted on tape.

- Providing a blind and partially sighted person with a reader or adapted computer with large character, braille display or speech output.
- Providing time off when an employee develops a sight problem to enable them to have an assessment or rehabilitation to learn new ways of doing something.
- Re-allocating some minor duties to another colleague.

The Act does say that an employer should pay regard to:

- the extent to which making the adjustment would prevent the effect in question
- the practicability of taking the step
- the financial and other cost in making the adjustment and the extent to which making it would disrupt any of its activities
- the extent of the employer's resources
- the availability of financial or other assistance for making the adjustment
- the nature of the employer's activities and the size of the employer's undertaking.

Job adverts and the DDA

It is unlawful for an employer to advertise a vacancy that indicates a reluctance to make a reasonable adjustment. For example, if an employer advertises a job with a requirement that applicants have a driving licence, where the licence is not essential for the job and there is no mention of reasonable adjustments to this requirement, the employer may be acting unlawfully.

Section three: What if I have been discriminated against?

There are a number of steps to resolving any problems in the workplace without having to take any legal action.

Informal grievance

Your employer may be willing to help resolve any problems you are having, and they need to know about your concerns. You can raise an informal grievance with your line manager or your Human Resources department.

Formal grievance

If you are unable to resolve the issue informally, your next step could be to start a formal grievance procedure. Ask for a copy of your employer's grievance procedure, which should tell you how they will deal with your complaint. If your employer does not have a grievance procedure, or will not give you a copy of it, you should still put your complaint in writing in order to help any future employment tribunal claim.

You can get examples of how to write grievance letters by visiting the Equality and Human Rights Commission website at www.equalityhumanrights.com

Employment tribunal

If you feel you have been treated unfairly by an employer because of your disability then you may be able to use the DDA to bring a claim against them. Any claim is heard at an employment tribunal. If you succeed in your case you may be given compensation, reinstated in your job (if you have been unfairly dismissed) or a declaration that you have been discriminated against.

Getting more information

It is a good idea to get some basic information on the DDA before taking your case further. A good place to start is to contact the Community Legal Service and find details of legal advisers in your area. The Community Legal Service can be contacted on 0845 345 4345 or by visiting www.clsdirect.org.uk

Time limits

Claims of discrimination must be made to the employment tribunal within three months of the alleged incident of discrimination.

Questionnaires

It can sometimes be hard to prove that you have been discriminated against – particularly if you have been refused employment. In order to help you get information to support your case you can send a questionnaire to the employer. You can ask them questions such as whether they employ disabled staff and whether they have an equal opportunities policy. The employment tribunal will take the answers given into account at the hearing.

Making your application

You have to make your application to the employment tribunal on a form known as an IT1. You can get a copy from your local Jobcentre Plus. The form will ask you about the type of complaint that you want the tribunal to look into. You should include:

- details on your eye condition and how this meets the DDA definition of disability
- what happened to you and the date or dates it happened
- why it was discriminatory and how it relates to your disability
- an outline of the employer's failure to make reasonable adjustments or the fact that the adjustments made were inadequate
- why any adjustments you required were reasonable
- the effect the employer's actions had on you.

The role of ACAS

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) will automatically be sent copies of your application to the employment tribunal and of the employer's response. They will write to you to tell you the name of the officer who has been assigned to your case and invite you to discuss it with them. The ACAS officer can act as a go-between, helping to reach a settlement that is acceptable to you and your employer.

The hearing

An employment tribunal panel usually comprises three members: a legally qualified chairperson and two lay members. You will normally be asked to give evidence first, followed by any witnesses. When your employer and their witnesses give evidence you have the opportunity to cross-examine them. When all the evidence has been called, you will have a chance to sum up your case to the tribunal.

Section four: Further information

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Helpline 08457 622633 (England)

www.equalityhumanrights.com

The Equality and Human Rights Commission can provide answers, advice and guidance regarding anything to do with the Disability Discrimination Act. If you want to know what your rights are, what you are entitled to or believe that you have been discriminated against because of your disability contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission for their conciliation service.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Telephone Call directory enquiries for details of your nearest CAB office

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free information and advice.

Community Legal Service

Telephone 0845 345 4345.

www.clsdirect.org.uk

The Community Legal Service can help you find the right legal information and advice to solve your problems. You can use the CLS Legal Adviser Directory to find a legal adviser in your area.

Law Centre

Telephone Call directory enquiries for details of your nearest centre.

www.lawcentres.org.uk

Law Centres provide a free and independent professional legal service.

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this factsheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module four: Factsheet 4.3: Access to Work

About this factsheet

This factsheet outlines the government's Access to Work scheme and how it can assist you in your job. Full details are given on the process of making a claim and what you can expect at each stage of the process. At the end of the factsheet, contact details for each Access to Work Business Centre are listed.

This factsheet consists of the following sections:

Section one: What is Access to Work?

Section two: Making a claim

Section three: Contact details

Section one: What is Access to Work?

Access to Work (ATW) is a scheme run by Jobcentre Plus. The scheme provides advice and practical support to disabled people and their employers to help overcome work-related obstacles resulting from a disability.

How does it do this?

As well as giving advice and information to disabled people and employers, ATW pays a grant through Jobcentre Plus towards any extra employment costs that result from a disability.

Am I eligible for help through Access to Work?

If you have a disability and are in a job, about to start a job, or are self-employed, ATW could be for you. It applies to any paid job, part-time or full-time, permanent or temporary.

If your disability or health condition affects the type of work you do, and it is likely to last for 12 months or longer, contact your nearest ATW Business Centre to check your eligibility for the scheme.

Unemployed or employed disabled people needing help with a communicator at a job interview can also get help through ATW.

What type of help is provided through Access to Work?

Access to Work can help you in a number of ways. For example, it can help pay for:

- adaptations to premises and equipment
- communication support at interview
- special aids and equipment
- support workers
- travel to work
- awareness training for your colleagues.

How will my needs be assessed?

The ATW Adviser will normally phone or visit you at your place of work. They will also need to discuss the ATW application with your employer to enable them to arrive at the most effective provision.

Sometimes specialist or technical advice may be needed. The ATW Adviser will arrange for a specialist provider, such as an organisation like RNIB or Action for Blind People, to complete an assessment and

recommend appropriate support. A written and confidential report will be sent to the ATW Adviser, who will use the information to help them to decide on the level of support that can be approved.

How long will it take to get the help needed?

The ATW Business Centre aims to arrange the help needed in the shortest possible time, but individual circumstances vary. However, if there is any delay the ATW Adviser will explore temporary alternatives, for example a support worker or reader.

Who will buy and pay for the help needed?

Once the assessment process has been completed the ATW Adviser will discuss your needs with you and your employer and will agree what help can be provided through Access to Work. The ATW Adviser may ask your employer to obtain quotes in order to arrive at the approved cost.

It is the employer's or self-employed person's responsibility to purchase and provide the support required and then to reclaim the cost from ATW.

Please note that your employer should not purchase any items until the ATW Business Centre has notified you both that they have approved the agreed support.

How much is the Access to Work grant?

The contribution by Access to Work varies depending on the individual circumstances of the applicant. The following gives some idea of what areas of support, and by how much they will cover their costs:

Access to Work pays 100 per cent of the approved cost for:

- unemployed people
- people changing jobs with a new employer
- self-employed people.

Whatever the employment status of the applicant, Access to Work will cover a large proportion, if not 100 per cent, of the approved costs of:

- travel to work
- communicator support at interviews
- support workers.

For people working for an employer who have been in the job for six weeks or more, ATW pays a proportion of the costs of support. Your employer will be asked to pay the first £300 of the approved cost and then 20 per cent of the total up to £10,000.

If you are changing jobs but staying with the same employer you should contact your local ATW Centre to discuss whether your employer has to pay a contribution or not.

How to apply for Access to Work

You should contact your nearest ATW Business Centre directly. Details of the application process and contact details for all ATW Business Centres are given at the end of this factsheet.

What will the ATW Adviser need to know?

There are actions that you can take to help the ATW Adviser to deal with the application quickly. Do not wait until you have started your new job before asking for help; the sooner the ATW Adviser knows about the request for support the more time they will have to get help ready for when you start.

The ATW Adviser will need some detailed information and it helps if you can ask your employer for the following details:

- A job description for the new job.
- Your expected start date.
- Contact details for your line manager.
- Contact details for your employer's Information Technology specialist.
- Contact details about who will authorise the purchase and cost sharing.

Section two: Making a claim

Starting the process

Contact your local ATW Business Centre directly, where you will be offered advice and guidance from an Access to Work Adviser.

You will be sent an initial two-page form asking you to complete some basic details about your job and contact details for you and your employer. If you already know what you need to terms of support it is possible for ATW to approve costs at this stage. However, we would not recommend this approach as there may be options you may not know about that can be explored during an assessment.

Assessment

An assessor will come out to your workplace in order to work out exactly what you require to access your work. You and your employer can do this with external help – this can be an ATW Officer, an external contractor or an RNIB Employment or Technology Officer or other expert.

Report

This needs to be sent to ATW outlining the results of the assessment. The assessor can produce a formal document, or you can supply a letter containing the necessary information, e.g. what you require, who manufacturers it and how much it costs.

Agreeing support and costs

The ATW Adviser will present a final figure of necessary costs to your employer and then the split of costs between the two agencies will be consulted. In some instances ATW can cover 100% of costs.

Authority to purchase

ATW will provide written permission to your employer to go ahead to purchase any necessary equipment, and this note will confirm their final agreed contribution.

Purchasing

Your employer is free to purchase the equipment as soon as permission has been granted. They can then apply for reimbursement of the ATW's agreed contribution using the documentation supplied.

Set up, installation and training

The costs of these elements will have been outlined in your report, and your employer can apply for reimbursement of the ATW contribution to these using supplied documentation.

Ownership, repairs and insurance

The equipment that you use is the responsibility of and is owned by your employer. Agreements will be made between all involved parties, if you wish to purchase the equipment or move it to your next place of employment.

Does it really work?

There are many blind and partially sighted people working in a range of jobs throughout the UK, some of which may not have been as easy or even possible to do without the support available through the Access to Work scheme.

Case study

Steve is a Human Resources Manager and he is responsible for all the activities involved in supporting a network of employees. By applying for and successfully receiving ATW support, his employer has supplied him with a computer screen reader, a mobile phone with speech software, a braille display in the office, a scanner and a braille embosser.

Steve says “The support from Access to Work takes the financial worries away from the employer, and it means that your skills and abilities are enhanced through the additional support that is available.”

Case study

Margaret is a lecturer at a further education college where she works part-time teaching students to sing, accompanying them on the piano. Margaret, who is partially sighted, initially contacted Access to Work because she needed to improve her access to the sheet music she needs to read while playing the piano.

Access to Work, through a workplace assessment, was able to put in place adjustments to working practices and use task specific lighting to help Margaret access an important part of her job.

Section three: Contact details

To make an Access to Work claim, you should contact your local Access to Work Business Centre by telephone. The contact details for each centre are given below:

London Access to Work Business Centre

Windsor House, 185 Ealing Road, Alperton, Middlesex, HA0 4LW
Telephone 020 8218 2710

South East Access to Work Business Centre

Norfolk House, High Street, Shoreham by Sea, West Sussex, BN43 5EN
Telephone 01273 364750

South West Access to Work Business Centre

19 Eagleswood Business Park, Woodlands Lane , Bradley Stoke, Bristol, BS32 4EU
Telephone 01454 84 85 86

West Midlands Access to Work Business Centre

Jobcentre Plus, Paradise Street, Newcastle Under Lyme, Staffordshire, ST1 1RZ
Telephone 01782 382 148

East Midlands Access to Work Business Centre

7th Floor, Newtown House, Maid Marion Way, Nottingham, NG1 6GG
Telephone 0115 989 5857

East of England Access to Work Business Centre

900 The Crescent, Colchester, CO4 9YQ
Telephone 01206 288788

Yorkshire and the Humber Access to Work Business Centre

Jobcentre Plus, Pepper Road, Leeds, LS10 2NP
Telephone 0113 214 2345

North East Access to Work Business Centre

1 Cathedral Square, Cloth Market, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 1EE
Telephone 0191 215 2182

North West Access to Work Business Centre

Jobcentre Plus, PO Box 313, Bolton, BL1 1FW

Telephone 01204 516 480

Office for Wales Access to Work Business Centre

4th Floor, Companies House, Crown Way Maindy, Cardiff, CF14 3UW
Telephone 029 2038 0997

Scotland Access to Work Business Centre

2nd Floor, 21 Herschell Street, Glasgow, G13 1HR
Telephone 0141 950 5327

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this factsheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module five: Activity 5.1 (part A): Problem solving exercise: Simon's story

Task

Either by yourself, or within a group, read through Simon's story and use what you have learnt from the toolkit to find helpful solutions to the questions at the end of this exercise.

Background

Simon is 18 and has just finished school and has left with average to good results in three A levels.

He is registered blind.

He has no desire to go to University at present, but is keen to get into employment as soon as possible. However, he has no specific ideas about the field of work that he wants to enter into.

Simon has been applying for a range of office jobs in his area, but has had no response to his applications as yet, and has started to feel disillusioned.

He would like to move out from his parent's house, but does not feel that he can support himself financially on the sole benefit that he receives – Disability Living Allowance. He has heard that there are benefits that he can claim, but is worried that if he applies for more support then it will have detrimental effects on his ability to find employment.

Simon has never been in paid employment, but completed a two week work placement in the office of a local small business. He has also worked as a Sixth Form Mentor to younger students in his mainstream school.

Questions to consider

- What support and advice is available to Simon?
- What financial support is out there and how will this affect his job prospects?
- How could Simon ensure that his job applications produce better results?
- How could Simon get more work experience?
- What can he do to make himself more appealing to employers?
- How can Simon make the most of the skills, knowledge and experience that he already holds?
- How can Simon gain confidence and feel better about himself?

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this activity sheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module five: Activity 5.1 (part B): Problem solving exercise: Mary's story

Task

Either by yourself, or within a group, read through Mary's story and use what you have learnt from the toolkit to find helpful solutions to the questions at the end of this exercise.

Background

Mary is 42 and very recently started to lose her sight through a degenerative eye disease. She is now registered sight impaired (partially sighted) and has been told her sight could get worse.

She is finding it increasingly more difficult to complete the tasks she is responsible for in her current job role. Accessing the computer and travelling to work are Mary's main problems, which her team and manager were fairly sympathetic about at first.

However, her manager is now growing impatient with her as she is failing to meet deadlines on work that must be word processed, and recently members of her team have made nasty comments regarding her need to arrive at the office later, and leave earlier, due to the darker mornings and evenings.

In a recent review, Mary's manager expressed his concern about Mary "not being up to the job" and suggested that she resign with two months' pay. Mary has worked at the firm in question for 10 years and wishes to remain employed.

Although Mary's husband has been a good support, she feels that she has received little professional support and does not feel that anyone understands what she is going through. She has started to feel depressed and does not go out socially anymore as she has lost a lot of self-confidence.

Questions to consider

- What support is out there to help Mary cope with her sight loss and recent situation?
- What can be done to ensure that Mary retains her job?
- How can the tasks Mary is finding difficult in her current role be made more accessible?
- What can the employer do to support Mary better?
- What legislation is there to protect Mary from losing her job?
- How can Mary regain her self-confidence and get her social life back?

© Visage 2007. Reproduction of this activity sheet in an unaltered form is permitted provided copyright credit is given.

Module five: Activity 5.2: Discuss it and solve it!

Here are some suggestions for discussion points within a mixed group of blind and partially sighted jobseekers and employers.

As an individual jobseeker it may be useful to talk to friends or family who are currently working in order to gain some insight into the employer's perspective.

Discussion point one

What are the negative experiences that blind and partially sighted people have encountered in the past, and how could employers avoid this taking place in their companies?

Consider the following:

- Jobseekers sharing both positive and negative experiences.
- Employers sharing both positive and negative experiences.
- Both groups exploring why any problems occurred.
- Both groups finding solutions to existing issues.
- Both groups discovering proactive solutions for overcoming obstacles before they even occur.

Discussion point two

Why is employment so important to us?

Consider the following:

- Making a contribution to society.
- The life experience and skills that we attain from employment.
- Financial implications of working.
- The sense of worth and identity that we gain from doing a job.
- Self-respect.
- It can be a great way to make friends.

Discussion Point three

Why should companies employ blind and partially sighted people?

Consider the following:

- Why not? they have as much right to employment as anyone else.
- They could be the best person for the job.
- Blind and partially sighted people can have additional skills, such as being highly competent in it, have a good memory, etc.
- The disability discrimination act prevents employers discriminating against applicants for their disability.
- They add diversity and valuable knowledge to the company.

Discussion Point four

What are employers concerned about, when looking at employing a blind or partially sighted person?

Consider the following:

- They are expensive to accommodate.
- They will not be able to do their work efficiently or independently.
- They will make other members of the team feel nervous.
- They will be a burden on the insurance.
- They will be a huge health and safety hazard.
- Their guide dog will be a nuisance.
- They will not be able to travel independently for work.
- They will not be able to use a computer, read letters, etc.

Are these misconceptions and what is the real truth behind them?

Consider the following:

- Access to Work.
- Access Technology, visual and mobility aids.
- Blind and partially sighted people are all different, and many have lived regular lives in a mainstream environment with their own coping strategies.
- Disability makes no difference to insurance.
- The DDA and good health and safety policies.
- There are a range of mobility aids, and only a proportion of blind and partially sighted people use guide dogs, which are strictly trained.

Discussion point five

What have we learnt about each other, and what will we try to do in the future to increase the number of blind and partially sighted people in employment?

Consider the following:

- Overcoming obstacles.
- Informing ignorance.
- Changing our own attitudes.
- Changing others' attitudes.
- Gaining new skills, qualifications and experiences.
- Updating corporate policy and work culture.
- Raising awareness.
- Positive thinking.

The Visage Developmental Partnership is funded by the European Social Fund under the EQUAL Initiative. It is designed to tackle the barriers to employability that many disabled people, and in particular blind and partially sighted people, still face.

The lead partner in the Partnership is Action for Blind People the other partners are the Kent Association for the Blind, Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities, Inspire Community Trust, Kent Supported Employment, Newco Products, Prevista Ltd and RNIB.

This toolkit has been commissioned by RNIB as a partner of the Visage Beneficiaries Sub-group, comprising of Action for Blind People, RNIB, Inspire, Prevista and Kent Association for the Blind.

About this information in this document

Great care has been taken to make sure the information included in this document is correct; however the authors cannot accept responsibility for mistakes or oversights. If you do find errors, please contact Colin Elliott on 0151 298 3221 or Lauren Finnegan on 0207 391 2097 who will try to amend any errors if possible. Similarly, in the resources section of this toolkit, we cannot endorse any particular organisations listed, or vouch that the information regarding their services is also accurate.

This toolkit was designed and produced by Royal National Institute of Blind People. Registered charity number 226227.