ENABLER report: The development of a screening tool and distance travelled measure for employment services for blind and partially sighted people
Part One: Phase 1

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RNIB supporting blind and partially sighted people

Action for blind people
Part of RNIB Group

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Executive summary

ENABLER is a three-year research project funded by Big Lottery (BIG) which seeks to improve the employment opportunities of blind and partially sighted job seekers. The project is being carried out by RNIB, Action for Blind People (Action) and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham. Phase 1 of the project aims to harness the experiences of blind and partially sighted job seekers to develop a standardised assessment model and best practice guidelines for employment services. Future phases of the project aim to inform the design of new service interventions that move people closer to the labour market.

The project aims to draw upon the experience and expertise of Action and RNIB employment co-ordinators (ECs) and clients to develop a means of "classifying" blind and partially sighted job seekers according to their distance from the job market. Successful identification and classification of client base will ensure we provide appropriate support to a broad range of job seekers. It will also create a mechanism by which clients' progress towards employability can be effectively monitored. The project is timely because fast action is required in order to align services with the UK Government's new Work Choice programme, which came into effect on 25 October 2010.

This report is one in a series of three, which present each stage of the project's development. It describes the various steps the project took in conceptualising and developing a first version or prototype of an employment screening tool as part of Phase 1 of the project. The screening tool was designed to (a) categorise clients into "levels" which were indicative of their distance from the labour market (allowing employment services to offer programmes which were appropriate to the clients' needs by offering a **formative** assessment); (b) measure clients progress over time (that is their "distance travelled" towards employment; and therefore (c) offer a **summative** assessment tool for supporting clients and evaluating services.

The development of the employment screening tool comprised the following steps:

- A review of existing evidence from RNIB and from external projects.
- A proposed theoretical framework to help "situate" the whole project.
- A proposed methodology to address the challenges of including the views of the people we intend to support and to ensure that the outcomes from the research are relevant and positive for those participating.

- A consultation approach which included: analysis of policy, analysis of RNIB/ Action client records, reviewing of existing tools, and focus group discussions with ECs and clients.

An iterative approach to the design of the screen tool was employed to ensure that ECs and clients were involved in the process. This also ensured that the practical requirements of the tool were considered carefully (for example ECs were already using a range of data collection methods as part of various employment and training programmes across Action and RNIB; and ECs were providing advice and trialling the ENABLER tools in parallel to their everyday work).

The final prototype of the screening tool involved the following:

- A screening tool including nine sections: demographics; employment activity; job search skills; education and training; computer skills; access to information; independent travel; vision; and health related issues.

- An information sheet describing a four level client segmentation model: Level 1 "work entry" (closest to the labour market); Level 2 "transitional"; Level 3 "long term"; Level 4 "potential customers" (furthest from the labour market).

- A scoring sheet which provided instruction for the user of the screening tool to generate a "distance for the labour market score" (based upon the segmentation model) by combining client responses.

This screening tool was formally trialled in phases 2 and 3 of the project. Findings from the trials are presented in the second report in the series of three. These three reports, taken together, describe the project's work through to completion.

1. Introduction and context

The ENABLER project addresses concerns that current employment services may not recognise the additional barriers facing many blind and partially sighted people; such as access to job seeking information, accessibility of online resources, mobility training, the functional impact of different sight conditions, and the cost and availability of access technology equipment and software. These barriers can be further compounded by other factors such as low educational attainment, a lengthy unemployment history, additional disabilities and mental health problems. Furthermore, existing funding mechanisms within mainstream employment services are weighted towards job outcomes. Consequently employment services tend to concentrate on clients who are seen as "job ready". Blind and partially sighted individuals with additional complex needs who are not yet ready for employment become further marginalised as a result.

1.1 Evidence informing the project

1.1.1 External evidence

The following is a brief summary of research cited in the original bid proposal sent to BIG in 2009. Relevant evidence is limited and often statistically "descriptive" but reflects the lack of support for, and understanding of, this marginalised group. Two recent surveys show how individuals' experiences and perceptions vary according to the level of additional disabilities/barriers.

"Network 1000" interviewed 1,007 registered blind and partially sighted people twice.

Survey 1 (Douglas et al, 2006):

- 34 per cent employed.
- 20 per cent unemployed (able to work, not currently working)
- 46 per cent "economically inactive", including 22 per cent "long-term sick/ disabled". 49 per cent of this group hadn't worked for over 10 years.

Survey 2 (Douglas et al, 2009):

- Less people described themselves as "unemployed" (20 per cent to 12 per cent), whereas more described themselves as "long term-sick/disabled" (22 per cent to 36 per cent).
- Arguably, limited success for those seeking employment led them to re-categorise themselves as "long-term-sick/disabled", reflecting decreasing hopes of finding work, and corresponding decline in confidence.

- Those originally describing themselves as "long-term sick/disabled" continued to do so, reflecting their perception that they would not find work, and a lack of support.

Another report commissioned by RNIB, "Labour market experiences of people with seeing difficulties", drew upon a wider representation of blind and partially sighted people (including those not registered) involved in the Labour Force Survey. This found only 48 per cent employment amongst those describing themselves as "disabled by sight problems" and only 36 per cent employment of those "with additional disabilities" (Meager and Carta, 2008).

Reaching those furthermost from the labour market is high on both Government and sector agendas.

- A priority of VISION 2020 UK, an umbrella organisation with over 40 members in the visual impairment field, is "to remove significant barriers to inclusion, so that people with sight loss can exercise independence, control and choice".

- RNIB Group's new strategic priorities include "supporting blind and partially sighted people to retain and gain employment".

- A Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) report proposes a vision for improving the life chances of disabled people, including support for gaining/ retaining employment (Strategy Unit 2005).

- The independent Freud Report highlights the need for greater focus on those further from the labour market, recommending that "UK welfare policy applies its resources further towards helping and encouraging the least advantaged into work" (Freud 2007).

- ERSA (Employment Related Services Association) asks Government to take every opportunity to support those furthest from the labour market through core expenditure.

1.1.2 RNIB evidence

RNIB's Work Focus programme (2008-2010), delivered in partnership with Action, provided important evidence about what helps people into work. RNIB funds were invested in four employment pilots in London, Sheffield, Scotland and Norfolk. Work Focus Officers were free from the usual outcome-led, time limited restrictions usually associated with government-funded programmes to work with harder-to-reach people out of employment. For example, there was no postcode limitations, no maximum qualifications ceiling and it didn't matter what benefits participants were claiming. This "open door" policy enabled staff to reach harder-to-employ people (those "furthest" from the labour market). The experience of Work Focus demonstrated that "all referrals are not equal". Segmenting customers according to their need enabled staff to tailor services

or make appropriate referrals to others. This highlighted that those furthest from the labour market require more intensive services than those ready to move into work. A combination of bespoke training and referrals to other services (orientation and mobility, access technology training, benefits advice) enabled and empowered clients to access services they needed to enhance their ability to look for work. Participants in group activities reported learning a great deal from one another. This reinforced the importance of peer-learning and the need for an organisation-wide peer support effort (Simkiss, 2011).

Work Focus also identified gaps in provision and services, particularly at the local level, in literacy and numeracy training, vocational skills training including computer literacy, disability-specific skills training to enhance independence such as orientation and mobility, and alternative communication modalities such as use of braille or optical devices, and access technology training (Simkiss, 2011).

All of the above evidence underpins the emergence of the ENABLER project. Appropriate intervention is based upon recognising differences between job seekers alongside the development of bespoke training for blind and partially sighted individuals. This project is developing appropriate assessment and intervention strategies to help blind and partially sighted people get back into work, in particular those furthest from the labour market. It is also providing much needed research, tracking blind and partially sighted job seekers' journey from a position of "not being job ready" to one of being "job ready" and, in some cases, actually finding work.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 A framework for developing a screening tool

This section explores some of the main discourses around disability and employment drawing on an interactional approach that provides us an "evaluative space" to consider the medical, psychological, environmental, economic and cultural factors when identifying the specific pre-employment needs of blind and partially sighted people. These factors are useful when designing and testing a screening tool which measures distance from the labour market. The project was designed to invite clients to participate in the project and thereby informing us about the types of interventions that can move them closer to the labour market with measurable benefits.

An interactional approach suggests that a range of factors should be addressed to improve quality of life of visually impaired people through a series of interventions such as coaching or therapy to improve self-esteem, introduction of aids and adaptations, barrier removal, anti-discrimination and attitudinal change, better benefits and services (Shakespeare, 2006). More recently there have been discussions about the benefits of integrating both the social and medical models and the drive to find a middle way which considers "a plurality of approaches beneficial in the analysis of disability" (Shakespeare, 2006, p54). The "medico-psycho-social" model which lies at the heart of the WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF 2001) can provide a sensible and practical way of understanding the complexity of disability and offers a way forward for defining and researching disability and "should be endorsed by disability studies" (Shakespeare, p59). A number of researchers have used the framework within their empirical work. For example, the ICF interview schedule provided a useful framework and vocabulary for designing the interview questions for a Network 1000 survey of visually impaired people in the UK. The interview schedule contained questions about the nature of an individual's impairment, how they travelled (activity), the purpose of their journeys (participation) and so on. Douglas et al (2012) noted that although "the ICF framework in its entirety may not be accepted by all researching the area of disability, we believe it offers a useful vocabulary for collecting such data" (p17).

Shakespeare talks about redressing the balance between medical and social aspects by highlighting five elements which he feels is adequate to the complexity and diversity of disabled people and their aspirations and "a helpful basis for future research" (p59).

1. Functioning in an ordinary way without getting special attention or being singled out as a result of disability.

2. Mixing with others and not being ignored in friendship and networks.

3. Taking part in and contributing to society whether through paid work or volunteering.

4. Trying to realise one's potential – which may need help from others.

5. Being director of one's life.

We also consider how aspects of the capability approach can help us to reconcile the tensions that could emerge from taking both an inclusive approach with strong elements of specialist service provision from a single-impairment organisation.

The capability approach developed by Sen (1992) and later by Nussbaum (2000) assesses the relevance of impairment and disability in designing just and inclusive institutional and social arrangements. In capability terms, it does not matter whether a disability is biologically or socially caused but more the scope of the full set of capabilities (the materialised options or life chances) a person can choose from and the role the impairment plays in this set of choices. It is not primarily interested in investigating the question of how many resources are being spent in total but rather whether the resources (or services) are directed appropriately, taking the needs of the individual adequately into account. The capability approach framework promotes an "evaluative space" to achieve "valuable" objectives within the space of capability. It helps us to reconsider human diversity by promoting public consultation on the choice of relevant capabilities through non-threatening ways that respect human dignity (Nussbaum, 2000, p211). In many respects it considers what people are actually able to do and how they can be enabled to achieve their objectives.

2.2 Inclusive approaches and specialist knowledge

Contemporary views of disability rightly maintain that appropriate "inclusive" approaches to services should include all, whatever their needs.

Drawing from the various discourses around inclusive research, human diversity and specialist knowledge in the area of visual impairment, it would be pertinent to articulate an inclusive process that encouraged the participation of visually impaired clients in discussions about the services they receive already and ask them to consider services that are important to them. Further,

it is possible to reconcile inclusive approaches with dimensions of specialist knowledge. Shakespeare (2006): "there seems to be no intrinsic reason why a single-impairment organisation might not be progressive and helpful, given that people with different impairments experience specific issues and problems, both medical and social" (p32). Although these organisations have historically specialised in offering services on a "segregated basis", they have been able to provide support in specialist areas such as mobility training, independent living skills and low vision training. Contemporary views of disability rightly maintain that appropriate "inclusive" approaches to services should include all, whatever their specific needs. Taking education as an example, this inclusive approach would emphasise that people are educated in the mainstream classroom and that teachers should adopt "inclusive pedagogy" techniques to ensure that teaching is appropriate for all (Florian et al, 2007). Nevertheless, others have argued that for children with visual impairment this inclusive approach must be **supplemented** with an "additional curriculum" which provides support and education in particular areas (for example Douglas, et al, 2009, Lynch, et al, 2011). Many aspects of employment services are relevant for all people seeking work or voluntary work, but there are some aspects which are particularly pertinent or important for visually impaired people. The focus of our work involves identifying the specialist areas in increasing opportunities for employment and ensuring that they are not lost in the services that visually impaired people receive.

3. Methodology

The research wishes to address two challenges: 1) the inclusion of the views of people the research is intended to support in the running and design of the project and 2) to ensure that the outcomes from the research are relevant and positive for those participating. The project took an action research approach which brings clients and ECs together, working together to change their situations. This reciprocity involved engaging people from the start of the research planning and design to the implementation stages. A two-pronged approach is put forward to develop and trial a set of tools to screen clients and measure distance travelled and to develop and evaluate new interventions that are most appropriate to clients' needs. This is done using a spiral process (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982) that starts from an initial planning stage of developing the screening tool, and inviting practitioners to advise us (a bottom-up approach) about the sort of questions they consider to be important when obtaining information about new clients (phase 1). This was followed by a period of six months where the tool is tested with clients and data is collected for analysis (phases 2 and 3). The next stage of the spiral is for the research team to reflect on the tools and revise the tools for the next action cycle (phases 4 and 5).

This framework would build in informal and then more formal consultations with stakeholders who were either visually impaired or provided a service to adults seeking employment. It would enable participants to be as frank and explicit about their own agendas and not feel that they should have to hide any of their opinions on how they thought the tools should be used.

We used a multi-method approach drawing on a number of tools such as a questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions for phase 1, 2 and 3 of the research. Other data collection tools will be considered for the second action cycle. We will use the data from these tools as well as the screening tool and standard data to build case studies which highlight something illuminating about the clients, the screening process and the distance they travelled. These case studies will provide the basis for discussion with both internal and external stakeholders.

3.1 Ethical procedures – University of Birmingham Ethics Committee

Ethical approval was agreed at the beginning of the project by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee. Additional requests were made when new tools (screening tool, topics for focus group sessions with ECs and clients, questionnaire survey for clients), letters of invitation and consent forms for participants were designed. As the committee provided approval at the various stages of the project, it issued supplementary acceptance letters which were sent to RNIB and then to BIG.

4. Design of the screening tool (Phase 1)

We drew upon four main sources when designing the screening tool. These comprised:

• policy context

• analysis of RNIB/Action client records

• review of existing tools

• focus groups with employment coordinators and clients.

A summary of activity dates from the start of the project (7 June 2010) to the beginning of the first action-research cycle (1 April 2011) can be found in Appendix A.

4.1 Policy context

This section draws heavily on Chris Damm's overview of the changing policy context and its effect on employment services since Labour came to power in 1997. Labour's policy on employment is marked by a massive increase in the prevalence of contracted employment services and payments by results (Damm, 2012). The introduction of contracts based on job outcomes has had a profound effect on the way services are delivered; leading to a faster pace of progress for clients (time-limited contracts), a bigger caseload for advisors and attempts by providers to focus on those most likely to achieve job outcomes (Damm, 2012, p5). The introduction of Work Choice (October, 2010) and Work Programme (June, 2011) can be seen as an acceleration of the previous government's policy model.

A range of issues have emerged as a result of this change in policy, not least the concern that the "hardest to help individuals" are not sufficiently provided for by the current policy. The DWP select committee report (2010) for example observed that within the Pathways to Work programme (a predecessor of Work Choice) there is evidence of "parking", "[..] where providers offer a limited service to those who they feel are unlikely to move into work." In fact, "in almost every scheme involving payment by results" there is evidence that providers have begun to only "register individuals closest to the labour market (creaming) or offering only minimal help to those unlikely to provide a profitable job outcome (parking)" (Damm, 2012, p20).

The rationale underpinning current employment policy is heavily influenced by "the work first theory", promoted enthusiastically in Freud's influential 2007 independent report on the future of welfare to work. "The core element of the theory is that achieving a work outcome as early as possible is the most likely means of ensuring longer term employment for an individual" (Freud 2007 in Damm, 2012, p18). According to Freud, intensive intervention, focusing on assisted job search has "largely solved long term unemployment for mainstream unemployed" (Freud 2007, p9).

As Damm notes, this paradigm is most controversial for those hardest to help individuals. As well as the effect this approach has on employment service providers (described above), the biggest criticism is that this approach places too much emphasis on the individual, without recognition of the barriers disabled people face or the discrimination they endure when trying to find work (Damm, 2012, p29). Alongside this, time-limited contracts do not allow job seekers sufficient time to deal with issues such as low educational attainment, personal debt or family breakdown. Others have argued that government should be funding different outcomes rather than simply job outcomes, such as new qualifications, volunteer placements, long term training and even the achievement of "soft skills" such as improved motivation and confidence (Damm, 2012, p20).

To help illustrate this further, Coleman and Parry's 2011 report on the role of assessment in the Work Programme and make some important observations about "soft skills". They cite a number of studies based on pilot initiatives supporting clients exposed to serious social exclusion, which found that "stabilisation" and the development of a range of soft skills was a vital pre-condition for customers before they could consider employment. "These findings indicate that a distance-travelled approach may be particularly appropriate for assessing customers who are further from work, to monitor the preliminary steps that are important in moving towards employability"(Coleman and Parry, 2011, p41). They suggest "a robust, wide-ranging and comprehensive assessment at an early stage, reflecting the complex characteristics and circumstances of customers" (p5). The assessment process should be based on proven evidence about the different types of customer being assessed.

Coleman and Parry (2011) emphasize the importance of assessment as a diagnostic tool used to identify appropriate support for job seekers and go on to discuss the many and varied assessment tools being used. These can be broadly split between assessment that focuses on customer characteristics (for example demographic characteristics, prior educational attainment, work history and previous type of work) and those that focus on customer attitudes.

They argue that the "limited success of some statistical models [as a predictor of finding and sustaining work] may reflect the emphasis on characteristics rather than attitudes" (p18) and the need to take into account soft skills such as motivation, confidence and self esteem. The advantage of assessment tools that concentrate on "function and capacity" is in their ability "to cover a range of issues and therefore take a holistic view of individuals' needs. They can also allow an assessment of distance travelled to monitor progress. These approaches are likely to be more appropriate for customers with diverse and complex needs" (Coleman and Parry, 2011, p18). Further discussion about measuring soft skills is contained in section 4.3 below.

Coleman and Parry (2011) present evidence that there are a number of core characteristics that are associated with employability, and which should be taken into account in any assessment model: age, gender, children, qualifications, health problems, location, employment background and housing tenure. Attitudes and motivational issues are also important for people who have been out of work for a long time. Research on WORKSTEP, which was part of a broad range of programmes and schemes funded by DWP aimed at supporting people with disabilities, identified a number of key behaviours that could be included in a distance-travelled assessment. These can be grouped under four headings: key skills for work, additional skills for work, behaviour and communication and personal development (Coleman and Parry 2011, p39). Purvis et al (2009) provide some examples under each of the four headings.

1) Key skills for work

Job seeking skills, understand requirements of employment, deliver requirements of emplyment, health and safety, reliability, equal opportunities.

2) Additional skills for work

Time management, adaptability, motivation, concentration, problem-solving.

3) Behaviour and communication

Communication skills, appropriate behaviour, supervision, team working.

4) Personal development

Literacy and numeracy, self-esteem/confidence, personal presentation, living skills, independent travel, health and well-being.

Interestingly, the 21 behaviours identified in the WORKSTEP research and scoring system form the basis of the Work Choice assessment procedure. Prime contractors for Work Choice such Shaw Trust are using STEPS

(a database for recording advisor/client interactions), adopting the distance-travelled model piloted through WORKSTEP. We discuss ECs experience of using STEPS in the discussion section of part two of the report.

It was also important for the research team at this stage to consider the role of advisors within the new assessment model. In various assessment models [from Germany, Australia, Holland, England], in most cases the assessment interview forms only part of the overall process. Advisors use the results from the assessment and overlay personal judgement and discretion when establishing the appropriate support package. "The role of advisors is crucial, in both ensuring flexibility and personal judgement. At the same time, there is evidence that advisors are less effective without systematic support instruments" (Coleman and Parry, 2011, p19). A systematic assessment process can mitigate an advisor's inconsistency whilst at the same time allow for the advisor's experience and judgement to play a role in decision making.

4.2 Analysis of RNIB/Action client records

As a first step the research team reviewed current client records to see if we could identify what factors might influence job-related outcomes. The aim of the analysis of the data collected was to gain a better understanding of the factors that contributed to one of three different client outcomes – Employment, Training or Unsuccessful (finished on the programme without an outcome of employment or training). A further aim was to also assess whether investing in these clients through providing such a job training programme was effective, and to ascertain the characteristics of those who may find it most beneficial.

1,716 records were reviewed, derived from two data sets. Firstly we reviewed 1,317 records that provided some general statistics as well as limited information about employment services. The second data set came from 399 Work Focus records (described above), which offered very detailed information and gave us an opportunity to conduct complex quantitative and qualitative analyses. These analyses demonstrated a relationship between the time that the client spends in the Work Focus programme and their outcome. Those who spend less than 100 days in the programme are less likely to achieve an outcome of employment. The longer the clients stay in the programme, the more likely they are to have a successful outcome. The analysis also found that there is a significant association between the clients' outcome, "geographic region of service", "education level", "time unemployed", and whether they had "ever worked". These conclusions were investigated further and we found education level and time unemployed to be key explanatory variables when seeking to model the data (Hewitt and Douglas 2010).

4.3 Existing tools

As part of the desk-based work, we then reviewed existing tools that have been tested in the UK and overseas. Several existing assessment/record keeping tools were analysed.

4.3.1 Work Star (Outcome Star)

This tool plots clients' progress using a visual star divided into seven core areas: job specific skills; aspirations and motivations (for example knowing what work you want to do); job-search skills (for example interview skills); stability (for example housing); basic skills (for example IT, English, literacy, numeracy); social skills for work; challenges. Each area is assigned a scale of 1–10. It is intuitive and attractive, and has similarities with existing methods (Burns and Mackeith, 2009).

Comments:

- Visual representation of a client's skills and journey towards work with a diagrammatic tool in the shape of a star.
- Intuitive and attractive and you can see "at a glance" where gaps exist in an individual's skills. But not accessible for blind people using screen readers.
- There are likely cost implications associated with changing the product.

We felt it is important to ask specific questions relevant to people with sight loss. For example, we consider it important to discuss specialist areas such as mobility, access to information and computer skills, which may be covered by "job-specific skills" within the model but not in sufficient detail. Assistive technology skills are vital to our client group and so detailed knowledge of client's abilities is, arguably, essential.

4.3.2 The Rickter Scale

This tactile product is currently being used by RNIB Employment Officers in Northern Ireland as part of a contractual agreement. It is intended to be a motivational, multi-sensory assessment and action planning process, designed to measure soft indicators and distance travelled. Soft indicators measure progress towards an outcome, for example motivation indicators could be improved timekeeping, attendance and communication skills. The Rickter Scale uses an A4 size hand-held board with ten headings down the left side with a magnetic slider for each heading. The slider moves along the scale of 1 to 10. The point of focus is client participation. There are also braille versions with overlays down the side and numbering. The Rickter Scale measures 10 areas:

motivation, confidence about the future, communication, support, core skills, work skills, readiness, type of work, job applications and interview preparation (this can be accessed at www.rickterscale.com).

Comments: The Rickter scale was discussed at an EC focus group in July 2011 where the feeling was that using a board would be patronising to our client group. The question posed was – "do our clients really need a tactile representation of a 1 to 10 scale to understand the concept of progression?" Feedback from Northern Ireland was originally mixed, although, as time progressed and with increased use, feedback is now very positive. A colleague within the research team will be visiting shortly to learn more about how the Board works in "real" interview situations. One of the first versions of the screening tool did include questions from the Rickter Scale relating to employment, recognising the importance of soft skills and their role in measuring clients' capabilities. This was removed due to concerns about the size of the screening tool and number of questions. Nevertheless, the project team were conscious of the need to build in to the assessment toolkit soft skills measurement questions or additional tools.

4.3.3 Australian "Jobseeker Classification Instrument" (JSCI)

The JSCI was designed as a screening tool to classify job seekers into categories according to their relative risk of becoming long term unemployed. To determine their classification, job seekers are assessed through a set of standard questions asked by front line staff and each answer is given a certain value which results in a single JSCI score. From their report: "Job seekers with disabilities and workplace support needs will receive either one, two or three points for this sub factor depending on the number of domains of workplace support requirements that are recorded in their JCA report." There are 15 of these domains, for example "moving around safely and communicating with others in the workplace" (this can be accessed at www.deewr.gov.au/Employment/JSCI/Pages/overview.aspx.)

Comments: Again this scale is not specific to visually impaired adults. We considered some factors that are scored, for example Geographic – relative labour market disadvantage associated with living in a particular location, as useful. These items were discussed at first EC focus group and were included in original drafts of the tool. We were concerned by other factors such as placing a score against age and gender, indigenous location or English proficiency without any real justifiable reasons.

4.3.4 Off the Streets and into Work (OSW – The Employability Map)

This measures progression using soft outcomes as indicators in five areas: motivation/sense of direction, lifestyle, readiness for work, basic skills and skills for finding work. Each area is graded via a scale. There are three zones – high, medium, low – in terms of support needed with a three-points scale in each zone. There are detailed descriptions of what kind of behaviours each of the points on the scale represent, to make the process as objective as possible (OSW. 2004). A six-page introduction to the tool is available at www.osw.org.uk.

Comments: Interesting although could be considered as simplistic and lacking finer detail. It is not tailored to our client group in terms of providing a quick guide to employability. There were also credibility issues around the designers of the product.

4.3.5 The Soft Outcome Toolkit – Kirklees Council

This product has been around for at least ten years, created by Kirklees Council using European Social Fund money as part of the Government's EQUAL project (Kirklees Council 2007). We couldn't find a version that worked properly as the product was no longer maintained as funding had expired. The product measured a standard list of soft outcomes – communication, confidence, autonomy, motivation, teamwork, problem solving, self-esteem, coping with pressure, positive attitude and work related values. Clients self score, with the scores being entered into a spreadsheet that generates a brightly coloured bar-graph instantly showing clients scores in each area. Once the tool has been used again, the next set of scores is integrated into the system, making visual comparison easy. Once again this is a visual tool that would be inaccessible to our screen-reader users. Also, the product generates a large numbers of charts and statistics with lots of figures/percentages. This may be of interest to the organisation but less use for the client.

There are a huge range of products on the market that measure outcomes. Having reviewed some of the generic tools used in the field, we then consulted the practitioners, that is ECs to find out what systems or methods they were using to record data about their clients and measure their progress. A first step was to ask ECs to send examples of questionnaires, forms or interview schedules that they were using with clients in their regions. This was followed by a consultation (focus group) in July 2010 with eight ECs representing employment services across England; from North East, Yorkshire and Humber, North West, East of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, London and South East plus South West. A wider consultation was organised through email to ensure as many ECs had the opportunity to discuss the tools they use and to

help the team to identify key areas and questions when interviewing visually impaired people about employment.

4.4 Focus groups with employment coordinators

The aims of the focus group were to identify the attributes (behaviours) and indicators (skills) considered to be important for finding work.

A summary of findings presented under the discussion topic areas are discussed below.

4.4.1 Identifying factors/features that influence clients' distance from the labour market

The eight ECs identified a number of factors or categories that they considered to be important when trying to assess a clients' distance from the labour market.

- A full understanding of clients' "fundamental needs" in order to address individual circumstances before the area of employment can be dealt with, for example housing needs, benefits, mental health, "acceptance of sight loss", other disabilities.
- A review of services offered by other agencies may be relevant, for example "skills step courses" offered by Henshaws, Job Centre Plus, etc.
- Previous employment experience.
- Qualifications, including literacy/numeracy skills.
- English speaking/communication skills (including English as an additional language).
- Mobility and Independent skills.
- ICT skills.
- Self-confidence to know when they are "job ready".
- Transferable professional skills/experience (for example office experience or. physical work experience)
- Clients potentially having unrealistic expectations of what they can do (meta-skills).

4.4.2 Categorising clients and deciding appropriate services

ECs were keen to stress the individual, personalised nature of their work with clients. They found it hard to identify, and perhaps resisted, examples of "client categorisation", either within the documentation used or in their professional judgements. Nevertheless the discussion yielded several examples where categorising clients already took place. Many of these are examples of

screening decisions made by ECs, even though there is no formalised structure for doing this or set of tools that may help with this process.

In some cases ECs, when carrying out an "initial interview" would screen out inappropriate referrals; clients with alcohol problems were not considered to be ready to seek work for example. Clients that were judged "not ready" were referred to other providers or coordinators, to work on issues such as benefits, mobility, housing and so on before employment support was seen as possible. Some cases were "closed", others were left pending and some ECs actively engaged with clients whilst they were receiving support or services elsewhere. For example, mobility training with a local society or literacy and numeracy skills training at a college.

In some cases, clients were asked to do independent research on the local job market or training available. If the clients completed this work and contacted the EC, then further support would be offered.

ECs tailored their intervention strategies based upon an agreement between the client and their own judgement about what was needed. This meant that in some cases clients were "challenged" about what was in their best interests. For example, some clients felt ready to work but were steered towards voluntary work or work placements in the first instance, in order to gain experience of a "real" work situation. Other clients were advised to take literacy classes before embarking upon IT courses. Work placements with some organisations would only be used for "more work ready" clients, because the relationship with the host employer needed to be maintained. Less "work ready" clients might have work placements within Action.

Some used eligibility criteria provided by other organisations for their services – for example Jobcentre Plus criteria for Future Jobs Fund placements. There was some discussion about using placements to gain an idea of what do next with a client. If a placement went well, then the client could be considered to be job ready if no other issues were raised.

Finally, services/interventions were sometimes linked to contracts such as ICT, touch typing, job clubs, motivational training, unpaid work placements or volunteering.

4.4.3 Drafting a screening tool and record keeping

The next stage was to initiate a discussion on how we could integrate those categories that ECs considered to be important to discuss during an initial interview with a client; as well as have the space for ECs to use their "professional judgement".

A conclusion from the previous discussion was that there appears to be no "tool" ECs employ, but rather "professional judgement" is used. Therefore there was some scepticism about this part of the discussion during the focus group, but as the debate unfolded (including defining a method of measuring progress which might not include an "employment" endpoint); a more positive view was taken. This was helpful because (a) there was a sense of EC recruitment to the project, and (b) some possible "points of purchase" for developing an assessment tool were established.

- "Initial interview form" (from which development plan would be generated) appears to be the closest thing to a screening tool; "Skills assessment form" (within Work Choice STEPS system has some similar features).

- Some ECs appear to remove people furthest from labour market from their caseload, referring them to other services such as Remploy or advising clients to re-contact Action when they feel ready to begin looking for employment.

- Some assessment is "what contract could their characteristics fit", to ensure income

- Much discussion about record keeping and demands of prime contractors and how this affects "Action Impact". Some prime contractors have data collection systems that are compulsory (for example Shaw Trust and STEPS). This can lead to duplication of record keeping, which as a result of time pressures sometimes resulted in less than full information being recorded on Action Impact.

4.5 Focus group with clients

As part of the design of the screening tool we wanted to ask clients to discuss the types of services they considered useful in helping them to access work or be more job-ready. We invited a small sample of clients to participate in a telephone based focus group (aged range 37–50) using RNIB's Talk and Support service in September 2010. A summary of the meeting was put on audio CD and sent to participants.

The conversation was based upon four discussion points that covered:

- A brief summary from each participant of any paid work, voluntary work or work placement experiences they have had.

- Examples of services that have helped participants move closer or into work and how they helped.

- Customer segmentation model. Participants were asked to describe which category best described their current situation ("close to work", "require some more support then ready for work", "a long way from work") and what factors they considered in their decision-making.

- Services or support they required to move them closer to their employment related goals and targets.

Four clients had previous work experience, although only one had worked in the last ten years. One client had worked as a teacher, the remaining three having been employed in low-paid, unskilled work. One person had never been employed.

Participants had received useful support in a number of ways, describing:

- accessing IT courses
- job brokerage
- training via an employer
- finding voluntary work
- job centre support
- ATW
- further education courses.

Only one participant was currently receiving support from Action employment services, although two others had received help from RNIB in the past.

One participant said they were "ready to work" and were actively seeking employment, although this was not the participant receiving support from Action. One person felt ready to work with support and training whilst two people said they were "a long way from employment". One person was unsure due to health reasons. The "ready to work" participant wanted specialist knowledge of teaching and teacher training opportunities, plus someone who would advocate on his behalf. This could be through support with applications, particularly those only available through "inaccessible" websites. More than this however, he wanted someone to speak directly with potential employers, that is "give this person with sight loss a chance". The remaining four candidates all spoke in detail about additional health problems that would impede their ability to work, at least full-time and maybe at all.

Four participants found it hard to identify specific services, but anything that would "build confidence" was fundamental. Specifically, they wanted support in learning how to access the building of a potential employer. They also identified support in work and at college, such as a work buddy or classroom mentor. One person wanted career counselling. Two participants asked to speak with the facilitators after the session to find out more about Action employment services.

4.6 Screening tool development and various iterations

This section presents the process of the development of four versions between November 2010 and April 2011 with a final, fifth, pilot version ready for testing for Phase 2 of the research.

Once we had gathered relevant evidence in the field and consulted the main stakeholders (the ECs and clients) and the documentation they supplied us (existing forms they use), we proceeded to plan a set of questions that could be asked to clients when assessing their distance from the labour market. The development of the screening tool consisted of a number of meetings between the tool developers (University of Birmingham and the ENABLER Project Manager) over a period of five months. We also drew on questions that had been used for the "Network 1000" Project. We consulted external advisers (Dr Wolffe) as well as internal stakeholders working in employment, education or related fields:

- RNIB College Loughborough
- British Minority Ethnic Officer
- RNIB Scotland ECs
- Social Enterprise and Employment Development project
- RNIB Trainee Grade Scheme
- RNIB Northern Ireland Employment Services
- Skills In-Sight project.

Three complete working versions were sent to members of the ENABLER steering group for comment over the five months. It was necessary to come up with a screening tool that was not too onerous, easy to use and could give them a "quick" idea of the distance a client was from the labour market. Our first task was to identify a list of relevant categories based on a number of key areas related to the activity of work. The structure of the tool changed considerably between the first and the last version as a result of various inputs from internal and external advisers. Final draft versions of the tool focused on the wording of questions, the ordering areas and sub-areas, agreeing on a scale and system for distance travelled questions, deciding on a scoring system for screening questions and calibrating it to the segmentation model.

The first version of the tool, comprised of a substantial list of questions (over 40 in total) because of the need to understand as much as possible about the individual client and their "readiness" for work. We therefore reviewed all the notes from the focus group discussions as well as all the interview forms being used by ECs in all RNIB/Action six regions. Ostensibly, we wished to cover

as many aspects of employment related skills (for example clients' previous employment experience, their aspirations, required skills for work, what search activities they carried out, etc.) as possible.

The versions were structured into "areas" and "sub-areas", each of which had an associated question(s). We also decided to include questions about other key areas such as ethnic group, awareness of benefit entitlement, length of time on benefit, housing situation, home support and dependents (for example young children, carer role). We were informed that many of these questions were already being asked as part of Action Impact, Work Choice or other compulsory contract agreements and so we decided to omit these questions in the final version.

We also considered it useful, when screening a client about their readiness to work, to ask specific questions about clients' disability and health, for example onset of visual impairment, client's eye condition and acceptance of sight loss and level of functional vision. We included a question about a person's geographical location to see if they live in an unemployment hotspot but were advised to remove the question because of possible lack of sensitivity. We also included questions about "other disabilities" and "ongoing health commitments" which could potentially affect clients' availability to work. There were, however, some issues around the sensitivity of asking these questions and how clients would react to them. After much consideration, we decided to keep two questions about "health related issues" (other disabilities and long-term health) in the final version, but would rely upon ECs' skills and judgement to manage this appropriately whilst ensuring that this important information was collected. A client did not have to answer any question if they chose not to.

The first two versions had additional categories on levels of literacy and numeracy levels, spoken English and vocational training. These were taken out in final versions of the tool. We also included a final section on "self-esteem" which was taken from the Rickter Scale which measured "self-esteem" in ten areas (see section 4.3.2). This section was not fully developed in the first version because of the existing length of the interview and the potential danger of asking clients too many questions in one interview. We did, however, decide to add a final summative question for the EC and the client about their "gut feeling" of beginning paid work in the next 12 months. This question developed into a more sophisticated question for ECs in the final version which asked them to give a level of the client compared with the level given by the screening tool.

The final version was reduced to a slimmer and sharper version with fewer questions. Specific screening questions (marked with an "S") were scored in order to help ECs to decide how far a client was from the labour market

by using an earlier developed RNIB Segmentation Model (categories 1–4). Other questions, distance travelled, would provide useful baseline information about a new client and could help determine the most appropriate support they would require. Essentially, the tool was designed to give ECs a rapid indication of a clients' distance from the labour market by placing them within the segmentation model (see appendix C).

The final version of the screening tool aimed to make the screening procedure more accurate using three simple steps.

a) Summarise the screening questions based on employment experience, education and training, computer skills, access to information, independent travel, and explaining vision.

b) Add up the "scores" and assign clients to Levels 1–4.

c) Interpret the summary (considering context variables: client age, vision, and disabilities other than visual impairment).

The second part of this report presents the results from the analysis of the screening tool.

4.7 Communication of main research results and activities

Heads of Regions, Operations Managers, Team Leaders and ECs have received regular email updates from the beginning of the project. Two project newsletters (July and September 2011) have been produced for ECs and RNIB staff involved in ENABLER; all pre-employment ECs across RNIB Group; all employment staff via the "employment stream". RNIB launched a new employment newsletter on its website in January 2012, through which the research team provide additional regular updates on progress so far. We have also communicated directly with Action staff through the Action intranet (Seven Days of Action), at strategic various points in the project. A third issue of the newsletter will be produced in March 2012 for the ECs and a project briefing will be written for wider distribution to the public in New Beacon. The final stages of the project focus exclusively on wide-scale distribution of the lessons from ENABLER both within RNIB Group and externally, including central government (DWP) and service providers across the sector. A range of additional communication strategies will be employed at this time.

5. Discussion

In this section we summarise some of the key points that helped us to develop a bespoke screening tool as opposed to using or adapting an existing tool.

Phase 1 of the ENABLER project involved various steps in conceptualising and developing a first version of the prototype employment screening tool. The screening tool was designed to (a) categorise clients into "levels" which were indicative of their distance from the labour market (allowing employment services to offer programmes which were appropriate to the clients' needs by offering a **formative** assessment); (b) measure clients progress over time (that is their "distance travelled" towards employment; and therefore (c) offer a **summative** assessment tool for supporting clients and evaluating services.

An action research framework was considered to be the most appropriate way to encourage practitioners (ECs) to reflect on how they decide on appropriate services for clients. Furthermore, we believed that by including ECs in the design and testing process we would maximise buy-in and sustainability later in the project.

In line with our theoretical approach we decided to create assessment documents that drew on inclusive approaches, **supplemented** with "additional" areas of particular relevance to blind and partially sighted people. This would provide support in particular areas rather than using existing products that do not ask questions about specific areas that affect visually impaired adults. After consultation with ECs we saw the necessity to ask specific questions about the sorts of issues that affect blind and partially sighted adults when seeking employment.

We quickly realised at the beginning of the project that ECs were already using a range of data collection methods as part of various employment and training programmes across Action and RNIB. It was important for the project team to take careful steps, when introducing a new tool, not to over-burden the ECs with an additional data collection tool. This phase of the project would have to rely on ECs good-will to test the tool as part of an initial interview they had with new clients. We also had to make it clear that the tool they would be using was a prototype version and not a final, finished screening tool (final prototype can be found in appendix D). Developing five versions of the tool is a testimony of our wish to develop a tool that responded to the ECs' needs.

We also needed to act quickly in order to align ourselves with the Government's new Work Choice programme, which came into effect on 25 October 2010. This coincided with the timescales set out within the project and effectively precluded redesigning an existing product to meet our specific requirements.

The current prototype is the result of extensive discussions at many levels but we still had some unresolved issues around measuring clients' levels of motivation and confidence. As discussed earlier, there are tools in place that try to do this already, such as the Work Star and the Rickter Scale. The current prototype still contains gaps in terms of collecting data about where clients live in relation to unemployment hotspots, as well as obtaining a sense of their literacy and numeracy rates. We will be able to resolve some of these issues once we have tested the tool and reflected on all the questions and considered the implications for Phase 4 of the ENABLER Project.

6. Research questions

The resulting research questions (below) were constructed to find out about the quality of the screening tool once the tool had been tested with clients participating in active Action and RNIB work programmes. These questions are discussed in part two of this report.

• What have we found out about the quality of the screening tool?

• Does the screening tool adequately discriminate clients at different distances from the labour market?

• Is the screening tool able to measure change in distance from the labour market over time?

• What have we found out about the employment services?

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Appendix A: Chronology of activities/key dates

2010

7 June	ENABLER project starts
27 July	Work focus review complete
29 July	EC focus group (8 ECs)
8 September	Client focus group (5 clients)
27 September	Work focus report issued
21 October	1,317 records review report
1 November	1st draft screening tool sent to focus group ECs
8 November	1st draft screening tool sent to internal stakeholders
21 December	2nd draft screening tool sent to focus group ECs

2011

24 January	3rd draft screening tool sent to all ECs in Action
25 January	3rd draft screening tool sent to internal stakeholders
27 January	3rd draft screening tool presented at Work Choice Training Event
9 February	4th draft screening tool sent to 8 ECs identified as key figures from training event
18 February	Email issued to all ECs explaining review process
18 February	Screening tool presented and discussed at members forum in West Midlands
8 March	Non-tabular version issued for comment
1 April	5th draft issued to ECs participating in 1st action-research cycle for use with clients 5th draft also sent to internal stakeholders

The above screening tool drafts and dates relate to versions sent to ECs for comment, with deadlines. From 5 February – 30 March 2011 additional working versions of the screening tool were exchanged amongst steering group members for comment.

Appendix B: Existing tools and recordkeeping forms provided by ECs

We received assessment forms from most Action regions as a result of the focus group and follow up requests by email. An analysis of these forms revealed the following relevant information.

- All regions appear to using different combinations of interview and assessment forms.

- Interview forms ask for basic information that helps to establish a portrait of the client, their competencies and existing barriers to employment.

- SW Team use a "Soft Skills Assessment Record" which is completed at the first review, midway through the programme/training and at the 'exit' interview. The assessment uses a scale of 1–6 to measure clients' personal attributes and characteristics. Clients are asked to rate themselves from Level 1 (poor) to Level 6 (good) and sign each of these assessments. The assessment covers areas such as personal presentation skills, communication skills, motivation, personal hygiene and appearance, attitude to work and others.

- A WETCHA (Work, Education, Training, Circumstances, Health and Aspirations) Assessment is used by one region. This is similar to the "Interview Record" described above.

- Action and Development plans were also shared with the project team ("SMART Goals" or RNIB's "Individual Action Plan").

In spite of ECs expressing anxiety/suspicion of screening tools for categorising/ profiling clients in the focus group, it seemed at least four of the regions make use of methods of collecting data for this purpose. This suggests that either the instruments are not used systematically or data collected is not used to make decisions about clients (or a combination of the two). Nevertheless, the forms already available offered a structure and format which could be used to develop the ENABLER assessment tool.

Appendix C: Client segmentation model

Based on the number of registered blind and partially sighted people (75,000) and those in paid employment (25,000), we suggest that the 50,000 people who are not in work can be split into four distinctive groups as below (all figures are approximate).

Level 1 – Work entry (10 per cent or 5,000)

People in this group are articulate, independent and used to advocating on their own behalf to obtain support and services. For example, they will have made contact with service providers independently and are interested in support to regain (or retain) employment. Typically they will have fairly recent work experience and they may have been through higher or further education or additional vocational training. Our employment involvement will consist of job brokerage and engagement through Access to Work or Disabled Students Assessment. These people may have contact with RNIB through other services such as customer services.

Level 2 – Transitional (15 per cent or 7,500)

These people are fairly independent and want to work. They may have some work experience and some qualifications. Evidence of motivation and independence can be found in this group of people's use of optical devices for example, and other techniques to access information though initially they may need some support to do this. Motivation to work can be found in efforts to apply and interview for jobs, also to do voluntary work while looking for employment. Engagement will be via our employment services such as (previously) Pathways, Work Preparation, Access to Work, New Deal for Disabled People, or perhaps via RNIB's Trainee Grade Scheme or working in the Social Firm sector.

Level 3 – Long term (25 per cent or 12,500)

This group of people might want to work but face barriers such as a lack of IT skills, a lack of motivation to work and also knowledge of the labour market. They often have outdated views on what working consists of. These individuals tend to have weak or limited disability-specific skills for daily living and accessing information, such as the ability to use optical devices or alternatives to vision such as braille or access technology for reading and writing. They may be engaged with our employment services but are further away from the labour market and will require intensive input and support.

Level 4 – Potential customers (50 per cent or 25,000)

People at this level may have used employment support services over and over again, attending course after course; or conversely people who have had no previous contact with any employability organisations or indeed any support agencies. People who have spent many years attending different employment-related courses or training often have little idea what they can do in the current labour market. They have little or no work experience and none recently. They also tend to be "unrealistic" in their career goals, evidenced by descriptions of distant activities as brilliant and exceptional rather than ordinary and unexceptional. Whether they have had regular contact with services or none at all, Level 4 clients will have limited or an absence of disability-specific skills. Typically they also face multiple barriers that may include additional disabilities such as learning disabilities. These barriers also include poor independence skills, poor literacy and numeracy skills, little or no IT skills and no expectation or motivation to work.

Implications

We have traditionally provided services to people in Level 1 and 2 groups, but much less so with those within Levels 3 and 4. Yet many of people who are referred to us are Level 3 clients, who need much more sustained, structured support. Level 4 customers in particular can be seen as potential customers of RNIB and Action for Blind People's wider services initially, rather than our employment services. These people may have little or no opportunities for social interaction and we can support them by ensuring that our own services reach them, and influencing others to do the same.

Appendix D: ENABLER Employment screening tool Guidance

What is it?

The Employment screening tool (EST) gathers information about each client's circumstances and work related activities and skills, in particular the key factors that could determine a client's distance from the labour market. It is completed by the ECs and their clients seeking work at the beginning of a work programme. Specific screening questions (marked with an "S") are scored in order to help you to decide how far a client is from the labour market by using an earlier developed RNIB Segmentation Model (categories 1–4). Other questions provide useful baseline information about a new client and can help determine the most appropriate support they will require. The EST is designed to give you a rapid indication of a client's distance from the labour market by placing them within the model. It is structured into "areas" and "sub-areas", each of which has an associated question(s).

Why do we need it?

Screening is helpful in providing evidence:

- to assist your decision-making when assessing the most effective ways of supporting your clients into work

- for internal service planning to highlight where there are gaps in provision and where new services are needed

- for the DWP in relation to distance from the labour market of those we work with

- in contract negotiations at national and regional level.

How will it help me to do my job?

There are short, medium and long term benefits to supporting this project by completing the screening tool. In the short term we can offer you a method of analysing the data which may give you additional insight into the types of services that are relevant to each client. In the medium term (that is in three months and mid-way through this first phase of research) the project team will analyse the data you have collected and will offer feedback on what they think it means. In the long term your work on this project will contribute to the design of

better services for blind and partially sighted job seekers within RNIB Group and elsewhere. We understand that this is extra work, but we need you to not only support the project but also to persuade your clients to join this action research project too.

How to complete the questionnaire

The questionnaire can be completed by hand or electronically and in one meeting. Given the sensitive nature of some questions this may not be the first contact document used with your clients. It should be used in combination with existing data collection methods such as Action Impact, STEPS and/or paper documentation. Each client needs to sign a consent form to confirm they are happy to join the project. Asking each question as it is written will help gather standardised information across the whole of England. However, we appreciate the sensitive nature of some questions and the importance of building trust and rapport with the client. We will rely upon your skills and judgement to manage this appropriately whilst ensuring that this important information is collected. That said, a client does not have to answer any question if they choose not to. If this happens, we request that you record this as "does not wish to say or discuss".

When should it be used

Twice – once when the EC meets a new client and completes an initial assessment and then again approximately six months later. Using the EST again after six months will help measure the progress a client has made (or 'distance travelled') towards employment whilst engaging with our employment services.

What to do with the questionnaire

Send a copy of all completed handwritten copies to Alex Saunders, ENABLER Project Manager, RNIB, Evidence and Service Impact Team, 105 Judd Street, London WC1H 9NE or email electronic copies to **alex.saunders@rnib.org.uk**

Appendix E: ENABLER Project – Employment screening tool

Basic Client Information

Name	
Address	
Telephone	
Mobile	
E-mail	
Date of birth	
Employment Coordinator	
1st or 2nd interview	
Date completed	

Employment activity

This section asks the client about their time out of work, their work experience and their target job.

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
S, Q1	Time not working	Q1: Can you tell me how long you have been out of work? (choose one) 1. 0–6 months 2. 7–12 months 3. 13–24 months 4. 25 months or more 5. Never worked	Answer (1–5): If greater than two years note how long:
Q2		Q2: I'm interested in whether you have done any of the following activities while not in work. While not working have you: Note: those who are long term unemployed may have engaged in these activities, but long ago. If client responds "Yes" to any of the questions, record when it took place eg 2 months ago, 2 years ago and so on.	
		a. completed any job preparation courses?	Yes/No If yes, details (including date):
		b. participated in any work placements? (If so, when and what was it?)	Yes/No If yes, details (including date):

	c. participated in any voluntary work? (If so, when and what was it?)	Yes/No If yes, details (including date):
	d. prepared a C.V.?	Yes/No If yes, details (including date):
	e. applied for any jobs? (If so, what type of jobs did you apply for?) (If "no", go to next question on "employment experience")	Yes/No If yes, details (including date):
	f. attended any job interviews?	Yes/No If yes, details (including date):
Q3	Employment history	Q3: These questions are about your work history.	
	(a) In terms of work, have you ever (choose one): 1. Had paid work 2. I have never had paid work	Answer (1–2):

S, Q4	Worked with visual impairment	Q4: [If ever worked] Have you any experience of employment whilst having a visual impairment? 1. Yes, I have worked with a visual impairment 2. No, I have never worked while I have had a visual impairment	Answer (1or 2): If 1, ask for brief description:
Q5	Target job	Q5: Do you have an idea of the kind of work or particular job that you would like? On a scale of 1 to 4, if 1 is "have a very clear idea" and 4 is "have no idea" (If client answers "4" skip next question and go the next section on "Job search skills")	Answer (1–4):
Q6	Skills for target job	Q6: (If the client has an idea of the target job) Do you think you have the skills which will help you get [this or a] job or kind of work you are interested in? On a scale of 1 to 4, if 1 is "Yes I do have the skills" and 4 is "I don't have the skills" (score don't know as "4")	Answer (1–4):

Note: EC can comment on whether the client has realistic expectations based on the above responses and their knowledge of the client. However if they feel that the client has unrealistic expectations this must be shared with the client:

Job search skills

I'm now going to ask you some questions related to your current job search.

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
Q7	Employment search activity	Q7: The following question is about the job searching tasks you have done in the last month? Note: this may be clear from previous questions, but still ask.	
		a. Can I check, did you do any job searching tasks last month? (If Yes – continue If No – go to the next section on "Education and training" If Unsure (eg what do you mean?) continue.	Yes/No/Unsure Write any additional notes:

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
	b. In terms of carrying out job search (internet, newspapers, etc.)	Answer (1–3):
	1. more than 5 hours per week	
	2. up to 5 hours per week	
	3. no job search of this kind	
	c. Attended job centre once a week or more?	Yes/No
	d. Applied for one job or more?	Yes/No
	(If client hasn't applied for any jobs, go to the next section on "Education and training".)	
	e. Attended one interview or more?	Yes/No

Education and training

I'm now going to ask you some questions about any qualifications you have and any training you have taken.

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
S, Q8	Educational attainment / qualifications	Q8: Can you tell me about any school, college or higher education qualifications you have?	Note down relevant qualifications and code (levels 0 to 5) at a later stage. (see attached sheet for guidance)
Q9		Q9: Are you currently doing any courses (including vocational courses) such as a computer course (eg CLAIT), evening classes? [Write courses and what qualification, if any, the client will receive]:	Yes/No Write or type notes:

Computer skills

Being able to use computers at work is becoming more important. So, I'm going to ask you some questions about your knowledge of computers and any other devices.

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
S, Q10	Computer use and access technology	Q10: Do you ever use a computer? 1. Yes 2. No [If "no", provide some explanatory notes if possible] If "no", go to question about "mobile phone")	Yes/No Add any explanatory notes:
Q11		Q.11: Do you consider yourself to be a confident computer user? [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"]	Answer (1–4):
Q12	Access technology	Q12: Do you use a computer:	

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
	a. **without** any additional access technology	Yes/No
	b. with some additional changes (eg using Windows accessibility options to increase font size, size and colour of cursor)	Yes/No
	c. with screen magnifier software (eg Supernova, Zoomtext, Hal, Lunar)	Yes/No
	d. with screen reading (speech) software (eg JAWS, Zoomtext, Supernova)	Yes/No
Computer applications	Q13: Thinking about carrying out the following computer tasks (using the appropriate access technology if needed), how confident would you be: (Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident")	
Q13		
Word processing	a. Writing a document using a word processor [eg using Microsoft Word].	Answer (1–4):

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
Email	b. Using email.	Answer (1–4):
Internet	c. Using the Internet using a web browser.	Answer (1–4):
Spreadsheets	d. Using spreadsheets.	Answer (1–4):
Specialist database software	e. Using specialist database software.	Answer (1–4):
Mobile phones	f. Have you got a mobile phone? (If "no", **skip** question about "mobile devices")	Yes/No
	g. Using a mobile phone [such as an iPhone, Blackberry] to do tasks other than phone calls (eg emailing, diary entries). (How confident would you be:) [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"]	Answer (1–4):

Access to information

Can I ask you some questions about how you access information?

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
S, Q14 Reading: Braille	Q14: Do you read braille? [If client reads braille, prompt for details about contracted/uncontracted] 1. Does read not braille 2. Grade 1 (Uncontracted) braille 3. Grade 2 (Contracted) braille (If does not read braille skip next question)	Answer (1–4):
Q15	Q15: In what ways do you write/produce braille?	
	a. Manually using a Perkins Brailler (or equivalent)	Yes/No
	b. Through a computer and embosser	Yes/No
	c. Electronic braille note taker (eg BrailleNote)	Yes/No
	d. Anything else?	Note:

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
S, Q16	[Only ask this question if necessary, ie if it is ambiguous at this point] Q16: Can you read print? (Instructions: If "Yes" [client does read print], move to next question. If "No" [client does not read print], establish through conversation whether this is related to a literacy difficulty or visual access, or both)	Yes/No If No, write notes:
Q17	Q17: Do you ever use a magnifier for reading? (A magnifier is sometimes called a Low Vision Device, or Magnifying glass) (If "yes", continue If "no" skip next question)	Yes/No

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers	
Q18	Reading print (with magnifier)	Q18: Thinking about reading print (with the aid of a magnifier or visual aid), can you: Note: Only ask required questions, eg if a person can read ordinary newspaper print, then is can be assumed they can read large print book or newspaper headline.		
		a. Read ordinary newspaper print	Yes/No	
		b. A large print book	Yes/No	
		c. A newspaper headline	Yes/No	
Q19	Reading print (without magnifier)	Q19: Thinking about reading print (**without** the aid of a magnifier or visual aid), can you: Note: Only ask required questions, eg if a person can read ordinary newspaper print, then is can be assumed they can read large print book or newspaper headline.		
		a. Read ordinary newspaper print	Yes/No	

Areas		Questions and choices	Answers
		b. A large print book	Yes/No
		c. A newspaper headline	Yes/No
Q20	Reading: Print size	Q20: Do you have a preferred print size?	Write print size:
Q21	Writing: Print	Q21: The following questions are about writing.	Yes/No
		Can people read your handwriting?	Yes/No/Unsure
		1. Can you "touch type" on a computer? Note: this is typing without the need to look at the keyboard.	Yes/No

Independent travel

I'd like to ask you some questions about your mobility and travel, if that's ok?

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
S, Q22	Local mobility	Q22: How confident do you feel about travelling independently from your home to local shops and services? Note: this is likely to be on foot or equivalent. [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"] [If client only travels "with the support of others" or similar – score 4. Note: this question is about independent travel (ie travel alone)]	Answer (1–4):
Q23	Mobility by public transport	Q23: How confident do you feel about travelling independently to an unfamiliar place using public transport? [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"] [If client only travels "with the support of others" or similar – score 4. Note: this question is about independent travel (ie travel alone)]	Answer (1–4):

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
Q24 Supported travel	Q24: If you were travelling with the support of family, friends or using 'services' (such as taxis, shopmobility, community services). How confident do you feel about travelling to a familiar place with this help? [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"]	Answer (1–4):
Q25	Q25: If you were travelling with the support of family, friends or using 'services' (such as taxis) How confident do you feel about travelling to an unfamiliar place with this help? [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"]	Answer (1–4):

Vision

In this section I am going to ask some questions about your eye sight. These questions are important because they help me understand how your level of vision impacts on your day-to-day life and in relation to finding a job. If you do not want to answer certain questions just let me know and we'll miss them out.

Note: if the client prefers not to answer questions please make a note.

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
Q26	Registration status	[If answer is already known, note answer and move to next question] Q26: As far as you know, are you registered as blind or partially sighted? 1. Registered as blind (severely sight impaired) 2. Registered as partially sighted (sight impaired) 3. Registered, but unsure of status 4. Unsure 5. Not registered	Answer (1–5): Write eye condition here if the client shares this information:
Q27	Impact of sight loss	Q27: I would like to get a sense of how your visual impairment is impacting on your life. Could you give me an idea of how it is affecting your day-to-day life?	Write notes:

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
Changing vision	Q28: The following questions are about how your vision may be changing.	
	a. How long have you had a visual impairment? Clarify if needed: That is, when it affected everyday things such as reading, shopping, watching TV, doing your job.	Number of years (or age):
	b. How would you describe what you are able to see now compared with a year ago? 1. Greater than a year ago 2. Less than a year ago 3. About the same 4. Don't know	Answer (1–4):
	c. [If client has light perception or more.] Does your vision change from day to day?	Yes/No/unsure

Q28

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
		d. Thinking about the future, have you been given any information about whether your vision is likely to: 1. Improve [more vision] 2. Deteriorate [less vision] 3. Stay the same 4. Unsure	Answer (1–4):
S, Q29	Explaining vision	Q29: Some potential employers may assume people cannot perform some tasks because of their visual impairment. Do you feel confident discussing with a potential employer the skills you have which challenge these views? [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"]	Answer (1–4):

Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
S, Q30	Requesting adjustments	Q30: Do you feel confident discussing with a potential employer any adjustments you may require in the work place [linked to your visual impairment]? [Prompt if necessary: If 1 is "very confident" and 4 is "not at all confident"]	Answer (1–4):
Q31		Q31: Are you aware of the support available to blind and partially sighted people in employment (eg Access to Work)?	Yes/No

Health related issues

	Areas	Questions and choices	Answers
Q32	Other disabilities	Q32: Do you have any other long term disability (other than your visual impairment) that may impact or restrict your search for work?	Yes/No/Unsure Note additional relevant information.
Q33		Q33: Do you have any long term health condition that may impact or restrict your search for work?	Yes/No/Unsure Note additional relevant information.
		Note: EC can also comment about concerns they have about additional support needs. However, any notes made here must be shared with the client:	

Qualifications key for Screen Tool

Entry level of no qualifications – Level 0

- Functional Skills at entry level (English, maths and ICT)
- Entry level certificates and Diplomas
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)
- Foundation Learning Tier pathways at entry level
- Skills for Life

Qualifications at NVQ 1 (or equivalent) – Level 1

- GCSEs grades D–G
- BTEC Introductory Diplomas and
- Certificates level 1
- OCR Nationals
- Foundation Learning Tier pathways
- Key Skills at level 1
- NVQs at level 1
- Skills for Life

Qualifications at GCSE (A*–C) / NVQ 2 (or equivalent) – Level 2

- GCSEs grades A*–C
- BTEC First Awards, Diplomas and Certificates at level 2
- OCR Nationals
- Key Skills level 2
- NVQs at level 2
- Skills for Life

Qualifications at A-level (or equivalent) – Level 3

- A-levels
- GCE in applied subjects
- International Baccalaureate
- Key Skills level 3
- NVQs at level 3

- BTEC Diplomas, Certificates and Awards at level 3
- BTEC Nationals
- OCR Nationals

Qualifications below degree level – Level 4

- NVQs at levels 4 and 5
- BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards levels 4 and 5
- HNCs and HNDs
- Certs of Higher Education
- Higher national certificates/diplomas
- Diplomas of higher education
- Foundation degrees

Degree (or equivalent) or higher – Level 5

- National Diploma in Professional Production Skills
- BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards (levels 6 and 7)
- Diploma in Translation
- Bachelors degrees (with and without hours)
- Graduate certificates and diplomas
- Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
- Award, Certificate and Diploma in strategic direction
- Masters degrees
- Integrated Masters degrees
- Postgraduate certificates and diplomas
- Doctoral degrees

Prototype screening tool summary sheet

This sheet is used to help Employment Coordinators to use some of the information collected through the questions to give a rapid indication of a client's "distance from the labour market". In this first prototype clients are assigned into one of four levels based on the RNIB Segmentation Model:

- Level 1 – Work entry
- Level 2 – Transitional
- Level 3 – Long term
- Level 4 – Potential

The ENABLER research project aims to make this screening procedure more accurate, but this prototype method involves three simple steps.

Three steps:

a) Summarising the screening questions based on employment experience, education and training, computer skills, access to information, independent travel, and explaining vision

b) Adding up the "scores" and assign clients to Levels 1–4

c) Interpreting summary (considering context variables: client age, vision, and disabilities other than visual impairment).

a) Summarising the screening questions

Employment experience

Question	Score
Q1. Time not working (1–5)	
Q4. Worked with a visual impairment (1–2)	
Total score (2–7):	
"Closer to work" or "Further from work":	

If the total score is between 2 and 4 (inclusive), then "Closer to work" (C)
or
If the total score is between 5 and 7 (inclusive), then "Further from work" (F)

Education and training

Question	Score
Q8 Educational attainment (0–5)	
"Closer" to work' or "Further from work":	

If the score is between 4 and 5 (inclusive), then "Closer to work" (C)
or
If the score is between 0 and 3 (inclusive), then "Further from work" (F)

Computer skills

Question	Score
Q10 Computer use (1–2)	
"Closer to work" or "Further from work":	

If the score is 1, then "Closer to work" (C)
or
If the score is 2, then "Further from work" (F)

Access to information

Drawing upon Q14 (Read braille) and Q16 (Read print)

"Closer to work" or "Further from work":	

If the client **can** read print and/or braille, then "Closer to work" (C)
or
If the client **cannot** read either print or braille, then "further from work" (F)

Independent travel

Question	Score
Q22 Local mobility (1–4)	
Q23 Mobility by public transport (1–4)	
Total score (2–8):	
"Closer to work" or "Further from work":	

If the total score is between 2 and 4 (inclusive), then "Closer to work" (C)
or
If the total score is between 5 and 8 (inclusive), then "Further from work" (F)

Explaining vision

Question	Score
Q29 Requesting adjustment (1–4)	
Q30 Explaining vision to employer (1–4)	
Total score (2–8):	
"Closer to work" or "Further from work":	

If the total score is between 2 and 4 (inclusive), then "Closer to work" (C)
or
If the total score is between 5 and 8 (inclusive), then "Further from work" (F)

b) Adding up the scores

Applying final six scores to the segmentation model:

Level 1: if 6 categories are "Closer to work"
Level 2: if 4 or 5 are "Closer to work"
Level 3: if 2 or 3 are "Closer to work"
Level 4: if 1 or 0 are "Closer to work"

Client level is:

Interpreting scores – your professional judgement

The method described above will generate a "level" for a given client. Importantly, your professional judgement is important in the process of interpreting this assessment. For example, evidence suggests that other variables are important predictors of likelihood of employment as well. Three important variables are client age, vision, and disabilities other than visual impairment. These variables in particular should be considered when discussing with the client the most appropriate interventions for them.

Revised client level is:

Considering (1) calculation above, (2) other evidence I have gathered, and (3) discussion with the client.

About RNIB and Action for Blind People

RNIB works with Action for Blind People to draw on a wide range of skills and resources to support blind and partially sighted people. Our close relationship enables us to provide a unique combination of complementary strengths and expertise to support an ever increasing number of blind and partially sighted people.

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