



Pre-employment programme overviews: for trainers working with blind and partially sighted people

RNIB

supporting blind and
partially sighted people



Action for blind people

Part of **RNIB** Group

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Introduction

The purpose of the **Pre-employment programme** is to provide blind or partially sighted people who are not in work with a structured learning environment where they can:

- determine what knowledge, skills, and work behaviours (soft skills) they have to offer prospective employers
- develop the problem solving and communication skills that enable them to successfully compete for jobs and develop healthy relationships in the workplace
- explore career options in relationship to current labour market trends
- refine and practice their job seeking skills, including how to generate on-line and paper applications, produce a CV, and interview successfully
- receive feedback on in-demand soft skills based on observed behaviours in a simulated work environment
- benefit from support and encouragement provided by qualified trainers who understand the ramifications of working without sight or with impaired sight.

The **Pre-employment programme** overviews are designed to provide trainers with a quick synopsis of each day's content to be delivered during this fifteen-day training programme.

Each overview includes the participant outcomes anticipated for the day, the rationale for including such information in a training programme for blind and partially sighted people, and a brief description of the content to be covered.

Please note that participants can only achieve the outcomes identified if they actively participate and complete all the sessions. This training is client-directed and facilitated by trained staff who do not do work for people but rather facilitate so that they can accomplish assignments themselves.

Further details on how to deliver the content, listings of relevant resources, recommended readings, assessment tools, and programme handouts are included in the separately published **Pre-employment programme Trainer's Manual**.

The Pre-employment programme overviews describe a proposed training schedule as follows:

Day one: Introduce the group to the structured learning process (Module one: The group and me)

Day two: Describe the local labour market and provide an overview of career exploration resources (Module two: Labour market realities)

Day three: Describe critical work elements from the worker's perspective (Module three: The perfect job)

Day four: Teach the importance of self-analysis in the job/self matching process (Module four: Self-awareness)

Day five: Discuss career and job search tools (Module five: Career resources)

Day six: Define the discrepancy analysis process and provide an overview of access technology in the workplace (Module six: Identifying jobs and the tools to do them)

Day seven: Identify positive communication skills and facilitate the participants' initial presentations (Module seven: Communication skills and presentations)

Day eight: Discuss strategies for finding jobs (Module eight: Looking for work is harder than working!)

Day nine: Describe how to set straight employers' stereotypes of people with sight loss (Module nine: Myth busters – The reality of working with a visual impairment)

Day ten: Explain techniques for producing a disability disclosure statement (Module ten: How and when to disclose disability in the job search process)

Day eleven: Discuss and evaluate participants' job maintenance skills (Module eleven: The perfect worker)

Day twelve: Introduce techniques for producing and submitting applications, CVs, and cover letters on-line or in-person (Module twelve: The paper trail)

Day thirteen: Provide an interview skills workshop and practice via participants' final pre-interview presentations (Module thirteen: What you see is what you get – it's all in the presentation!)

Day fourteen: Perform mock interviews (Module fourteen: It's showtime: an interview performance)

Day fifteen: Provide participants with feedback on their mock interviews and facilitate closure activities (Module fifteen: Interview feedback and final thoughts from the group).

Module one: The group and me

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- learn about the group parameters (rules) and commit to the process with a signed Learning Agreement
- network with staff and members of the group (communication skills)
- initiate a list of strengths and attributes (self-assessment)
- recognise the importance of self-awareness as a component of the job search process
- identify the anticipated programme outputs: a self analysis, 3–5 job analyses, discrepancy analysis (comparing self to jobs analysed), list of possible jobs and prospective employers, personal data sheet, curriculum vita, points to cover in an interview, format for cover letters and thank-you notes, defined goals (short- and long-term) and action plans for goal implementation, as well as an instructor recommendation.

Rationale

Based on participant feedback from the Work Focus Employment Programme and publications describing best practices in career guidance, this module addresses the importance of establishing and maintaining work norms, developing the soft skills needed for employment success, and initiating the self-awareness and career exploration process in preparation for matching oneself to a job. This module also encourages participants to begin to think “outside the box” about themselves and the careers for which they are qualified and interested in doing, while recognizing the challenges faced by blind and partially sighted people wishing to return to work or establish themselves in careers for the first time in their adult lives.

Content

This module includes:

- Introduction of participants and staff.
- Instruction: How Finding a Job Requires Self/Job Matching.
- Activities: Short discussion of group expectations and anticipated outcomes, Speed Networking Exercise, Breaking-into-the-Group Exercise, Complete Learning Agreement; and share Career Portfolio Checklist, Timesheet, and RNIB Work Focus Toolbox worksheets to document progress over course of training participation.
- Assignment: Strengths/Problems Checklist.

Module two: Labour market realities

Outcomes

This module provides blind or partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- acquaint themselves with local labour market resources
- learn about career counselling theories
- complete the Self-Directed Search (SDS) to determine their work personality code
- implement a problem solving strategy for career exploration
- learn the purpose and function of a Personal Data Sheet (PDS).

Rationale

Sighted job seekers learn a great deal about the local labour market through incidental or opportune learning: reading print (newspapers, magazines, posters, television) and casually observing businesses' physical surroundings, the work being performed on site, by whom, and with what tools; as well as promotional materials (advertising on billboards, trains and buses, or in windows, for example). Job seekers who are blind or partially sighted frequently require instruction to learn about businesses and the local or national labour market, and to determine how to find pertinent information about market resources for future reference. This is because they have limited access to the pictorial and written resources easily available to fully sighted people.

Content

This module includes:

- **Instruction:** Introduction to career counselling theories and the labour market: what's hot and what's not!
- **Activities:** Discussion of local labour market resources, the Problem Solving Model, and the importance of a Personal Data Sheet. Complete Problem Solving Worksheet, Bolles' Party Activity and the Self-Directed Search (SDS). Discuss the Holland code interpretations in reference to the UK labour market and jobs available. Share Preparing for work in the 21st Century handout and discuss.
- **Assignments:** Complete strengths/problems checklist and begin working on the Personal Data Sheet.

Module three: The perfect job

Outcomes

This module provides blind or partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- understand how to evaluate the parameters that make a job more or less ideal for an individual
- learn about goal setting and how daily detail goals (to do lists), achievement, and personality goals differ from one another
- understand the importance of making all goals SMART – Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.

Rationale

This module is founded on the idea that blind and partially sighted people are often told by family members, teachers, and counsellors what jobs are available that they think are suitable, based on what they think can or cannot be done without good sight. Participants in Pre-employment programmes need to have the opportunity to think about what's important to them: what they think would make a job perfect. In order to progress from exploration and planning to implementation (from economically inactive to considering prospective jobs and applying for jobs), it is critical for job seekers to understand the nature of decision making and goal setting.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: The Perfect Job and How to Develop Goals (types of goals and importance of SMART goal setting).
- Activities: values clarification activities; complete perfect job worksheet and interests worksheet.
- Assignments: write out interests, abilities, values (using the values word list) and what challenges they believe they face related to looking for work. The latter will form the basis for their preliminary goal setting. Write out initial to do list to share with other participants on day four.

Module four: Self-awareness

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- understand the importance of self-awareness in relation to job seeking and career retention
- consider what attributes they have of importance to employers and others
- evaluate others' perceptions of them and how they can use that insight in preparation for their job searches and to facilitate career retention.

Rationale

Often job seekers who are blind or partially sighted have difficulty understanding how their personal attributes, talents, and behaviours compare to the norm because they are unable to see, or clearly see, how other people behave at a distance and cannot easily read facial expressions or body language to judge the reactions of other people to them. The Johari's Window exercise helps participants gain a greater awareness of how they view themselves, how others view them and why these different perceptions may be important.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: What self-awareness is (use Johari's Window and the lifeline activity to help describe the self-awareness process).
- Activities: Discuss the importance of setting meaningful goals based on feedback from others and self-analysis. Describe how goal setting can create desire, energy, and focus. In-group goal setting exercises: Define how you think and feel about yourself; then, how you think and feel about others. Share initial impressions of each other (all participants write their initial impressions of group members and share those aloud...three words, at least two must be positives and one can be a constructive criticism of an observed behaviour.)
- Assignments: Complete Lifeline Activity, Epitaph Exercise, and begin to write out questions for informational interviews.

Module five: Career resources

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted participants with the necessary information and tools to:

- Use a wide range of career and job search resources, including informational interviewing.
- Refine their vocational and career goals.
- Broaden the scope and range of their job searches.
- Independently construct their career path using a variety of self-directed assessment tools and completed worksheets to evaluate how well their personal attributes match up to jobs.

Rationale

Blind and partially sighted job seekers have indicated that they need to learn more about career and job search tools that can help them make informed career decisions. Module five presents the participants with a range of career and job search tools. Leading to the discrepancy analysis, the participant completes a range of self-directed assessments (values, clarification, job analysis form, lifeline activity). Several assessments are reviewed and repeated, if necessary. The purpose of doing so will allow the participants further opportunity to absorb, reflect and determine if their career choices have altered as a result of analyzing additional career resources.

Content

This module includes:

- Review career resources, the importance of job analyses, and how to capture the information needed to complete a job analysis for jobs of interest.
- Discuss informational interviewing, in relation to career exploration and working on job analyses.
- Review self-evaluation: Interests, abilities, and values; assessment tools completed to date; and feedback from others to complete self-analysis.
- Assignment: Review achievements to date and complete three to five job analyses.

Module six: Identifying jobs and the tools to do them

Outcomes

This module provides blind or partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- Complete a discrepancy analysis.
- Learn about the access technology available to people with visual impairments to work effectively and efficiently.
- Complete a self-directed Access Technology (AT) analysis – identify the AT tools needed to perform competently in a chosen field.
- Develop an action plan to acquire AT.

Rationale

To evaluate the viability of career options, job seekers need to compare their strengths (interests, abilities, values, work personality) and limitations with jobs they've researched to determine where their qualifications match the jobs they're considering. This is accomplished through a process called discrepancy analysis. Once they have completed a discrepancy analysis, participants can decide to address discrepancies (through training or practice); change their tools, techniques, or the environment (accommodations or modifications); modify the job to share elements of it with others, if appropriate; or whether they need to abandon that particular job option and consider something in a related field. In addition, many jobs in the 21st century require the use of computer equipment or other technology and for blind and partially sighted participants and this requires them to evaluate their comfort with access technology to determine what additional training or tools they may need.

Content

This module includes:

- Activities: Discussion of the discrepancy analysis process.
- Instruction: AT presentation with as much "show and tell" as possible. Provide AT Supplier List and encourage participants to research additional suppliers and add them to their lists.
- Assignments: Complete Discrepancy Analysis Worksheet and Self-directed AT Assessment

Module seven: Communication skills and participants' presentations

Outcomes

This module provides blind or partially sighted people with the necessary information to:

- Discuss the range and scope of different communication styles (passive, assertive, and aggressive).
- Understand how people with visual impairments can acquire an awareness of nonverbal communication skills such as body language and facial expression.
- Understand the social demands of sighted peers.

Rationale

According to existing research and anecdotal reports, one of the significant challenges blind and partially sighted individuals face is their difficulty with the interpretation of nonverbal communication, such as facial expression and body language and, conversely, with producing nonverbal cues for others. Obviously, individuals without sight cannot use vision to read others' nonverbal communication cues. It can also be difficult for partially sighted people to pick-up on these nonverbal cues because they often cannot get close enough to the other person to easily see their expressions and body language or the nonverbal cues are too subtle or too quick to be readily discernable to someone with impaired vision. Compounding the problem is the fact that sighted people do not think to verbalize how they feel, there may be cultural or ethnic customs inhibiting demonstrative signalling of feelings, or they may simply not realize that someone with vision, albeit impaired vision, might not be able to see their nonverbal communication cues.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: Communication skills presentation based on creative dramatics (addresses voice, tone, gestures and how to express oneself when stressed).
- Discussion of communication as an integral skill needed at work and role play scenarios that require the use of nonverbal communication skills and assertiveness.
- Assignments: Complete communication skills worksheets.

Module eight: Looking for work is harder than working!

Outcomes

This module provides blind or partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- Successfully network with others.
- Learn techniques to engage with others when attending events where sighted attendees will be present.
- Learn strategies for maintaining network contacts.
- Develop an action plan to acquire Access Technology.

Rationale

Once participants have evaluated the viability of career options and identified what jobs they are interested in pursuing, they must determine how best to uncover job leads. They will likely know the most common methods for finding work: following up on job advertisements and working with job placement services; however, they may not have discovered how to find hidden or unadvertised jobs. This module helps participants learn about alternatives to traditional job seeking and gives them the skills to seek out careers of their choosing using research skills and communication skills such as networking to uncover job openings or opportunities.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: How People Find Jobs and Networking DOs and DON'Ts
- Activities: Discussion of strategies for networking with special emphasis on techniques which do not require vision, how to maintain network contacts (use of filing systems for keeping up with names and contact information, note taking following events, and appropriate follow-up techniques).
- Assignment: Develop a personal network list. Start looking for information about prospective employers and their companies to submit in advance of mock interviews.

Module nine: Myth busters – the reality of working with a visual impairment

Outcomes

This module provides blind or partially sighted participants with the necessary information to:

- Understand services available while in employment and while engaging with employers, such as Access to Work and other Job Centre Plus resources.
- Learn their legal rights regarding employment.
- Respond to employers' possible objections to hiring someone with a disability.
- Determine when to disclose their disability in the hiring process and feel more confident in doing so.

Rationale

Many people in the general public underestimate the abilities of people with disabilities, including those who are blind or partially sighted. The misperceptions of the public (and employers) are due to both the low incidence of blindness (most people have not met anyone with a severe visual impairment) and information conveyed through social networking channels over time (oral histories, literature, television, films, etc.). To alleviate others' stereotypical notions, participants must first know what misperceptions they may have and then how best to counter their concerns. Job seekers need to prepare how they would like to discuss their visual impairment with a prospective employer so that they won't be caught unaware by employers' concerns. This module also supports participants to proactively address with co-workers, prospective customers or clients, and the general public any stereotypes that they may encounter particular to sight loss.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: What do sighted people think about blindness and partial sight?
- Activities: Group debates myths vs. facts when employing people with disabilities. A second group exercise allows the participants to create a business case which will allow them to have a greater understanding of the employer's perspective when hiring staff. A number of statutory employment services such as the Access to Work programme are discussed. In addition, participants talk with one another and trainer(s) about their legislative rights and responsibilities.

Module ten: How and when to disclose disability in the job search process

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- Examine ways to present themselves in a positive light.
- Respond to employers' possible objections to hiring an individual with a disability.
- Build confidence concerning disability disclosure.
- Produce a written disclosure statement.
- Present their disclosure statement.

Rationale

There are a lot of issues related to job seeking and disability: what to disclose, when in the job search process to disclose, and how to present disability constraints positively while responding to concerns that people without disabilities may have about how tasks can be performed with adjustments or modifications. These issues need to be dealt with in a safe environment where participants can determine for themselves how they will handle this issue. By creating a disclosure statement and practicing it with peers, participants can assess the effectiveness of their approach and modify it according to the impact it has on their colleagues in the group.

Content

This module includes:

- Activity: Revisiting module nine to discuss, "The Reality of Working with a Visual Impairment", as a group exercise. The participants review their disclosure statements on a one-to-one basis with the tutor. Trainers video tape participants as they present the disclosure statement to the group.

Module eleven: The perfect worker

Outcomes

This module provides blind or partially sighted participants with the necessary information and tools to:

- Successfully maintain employment by understanding the expectations of supervisors and colleagues.
- Recognise how employer expectations change over time.
- Receive feedback from others (trainers and peers) regarding work performance over the course by completing a Worker Evaluation.
- Develop an action plan to correct any soft skill deficits that might interfere with job maintenance.

Rationale

Participants need to receive honest, open feedback from trainers and their fellow **Pre-employment programme** participants to evaluate their soft skills (work habits and behaviours) in the workplace. Due to lack of visual input or casual observation, many participants who are blind or partially sighted receive minimal social cues (subtle body language and facial expression indicating approval or disapproval of behaviour) and without concrete feedback that is written and verbalised they are unaware of the impact of their behaviour on others. This module provides them with this specific, written and verbalized feedback, focusing on their behaviour in the workplace. This feedback provides the participant with ideas to consider in developing an action plan to change behaviours that are not well-received; thereby circumventing job maintenance problems in the future.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: The Perfect Worker
- Discussion of critical areas of concern to employers (attendance, punctuality, honesty, cooperation, etc.) and behaviours demonstrated by ideal employees.
- Activity: Participants complete a self-analysis using The Perfect Worker Worksheet and then evaluate each other using the Worker Evaluation Form (these forms are completed on each participant by all staff and participants, then compiled as a written synthesis that is shared with each individual...allowing anonymity). They begin work on an action plan to correct any soft skills deficits that are identified.
- Assignment: Continue looking for information about prospective employers and their companies to submit in advance of mock interviews.

Module twelve: The paper trail

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- Explain the purpose and function of a CV, cover letter, and applications.
- Complete an application, CV, and cover letter (electronic or hard copy versions).
- Avoid common errors when completing an application, CV or cover letter.

Rationale

Without sight or with limited sight, one of the greatest challenges to the job seeking process is dealing with the necessary paperwork inherent in the application process. While many employers now use an electronic application process, a significant number still rely on hardcopy applications and CVs to secure information about prospective candidates for job vacancies. Therefore, blind and partially sighted candidates must understand how to work with Personal Data Sheets (PDSs) and scribes to complete paper applications or use a PDS while completing on-line applications. Blind and partially sighted people may never have seen samples of CVs or cover letters in their preferred format and therefore have little or no understanding of the subtleties of format and structure. This module provides them with examples of CVs and completed applications in formats they can access to review how others have approached this task.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: Dos and Don'ts of Completing Applications
- Discussion: How to get started—is the application form accessible? What needs to be included? How to: complete a person specification, email a job application, apply in person and apply on-line
- Instruction: How to Produce an Exemplary CV
- Discussion: CV contents options
- Instruction: Purpose, Content, and Focus of a Cover Letter
- Activity: Finalize CV and cover letter.

Module thirteen: What you see is what you get – it's all in the presentation!

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- Effectively prepare for a competitive interview
- Present their disclosure statement
- Evaluate their presentation performance based on feedback from group members.

Rationale

In order to prepare for competitive interviews, participants need input from trainers who've successfully secured jobs and researched techniques that others are using to succeed in this effort. This module allows group participants an opportunity to apply what they learned in earlier modules. The additional practice in presenting enables individuals to build confidence and doing a presentation related to disability disclosure helps prepare them for the actual interview.

Content

This module includes:

- Instruction: How to Conduct a Successful Interview
- Discussion: Advantages to researching a company, reviewing the job description, thinking about potential questions, creating a travel plan, dressing appropriately, etc. in advance of an interview.
- Activities: Participants have a second opportunity to present (this time they present their final disclosure statements to the group). Presentations may be videotaped or audio recorded and participants have the opportunity to assess both of their presentations (see module 10).

Module fourteen: It's showtime... an interview performance

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- Apply what they've learned in the course to successfully complete a simulated job interview, which is videotaped for future reference.

Rationale

Job seekers infrequently take the opportunity to practice their interview skills and this module is designed to give that chance to group participants. In addition, it's rare that interviewees have the chance to see themselves perform in a job interview and blind and partially sighted people need input, ideally through close observation of self, or through insights from others viewing their video performances, to understand what works best for them in an interview situation. By performing and receiving feedback in a controlled environment, participants can practice and improve their presentation style. Thus participants are able to gain confidence in their ability to perform.

Content

This module includes:

- Activity: Mock interviews (with an unknown interviewer, if possible, or someone other than the primary trainer), which are videotaped

Module fifteen: Mock interview feedback and final thoughts from the group

Outcomes

This module provides blind and partially sighted people with the necessary information and tools to:

- Collect feedback from others concerning their performance in the mock interview process.
- Objectively evaluate their mock job interviews.
- Gain a greater understanding of participants' perceptions of their performance during the pre-employment skills training programme.

Rationale

Typically job candidates receive little or no feedback on their interview performance, due to employers' reticence to speak candidly about interviewees' efforts either because of concerns related to potential litigation or social constraints. This reticence is compounded by disability issues and the general public's lack of awareness concerning the abilities of individuals who are blind or partially sighted. Therefore, participants need to have the chance to assess their interview skills by listening to or viewing the mock interview videos; as well as, learning how others in the group have commented on their taped performances.

Candid feedback from peers and trainers that focuses on what others see, hear and feel can help blind and partially sighted people to see themselves as others see them – what attributes others see as their true talents and strengths. This activity also allows participants to practice giving and receiving feedback.

Content

This module includes:

- Discussion: Importance of receiving feedback and learning from others how to improve one's performance in interviews and other work-related social situations.
- Activities: mock interview video critique (discuss and share hard copies of the interview critique forms as well as the compilation DVDs with their interviews); person-out-of-the-room exercise.

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Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

The BIFOCAL VI project is designed to support blind and partially sighted people who are unemployed and require pre-employment training to address their special needs to achieving employment. The BIFOCAL VI project stands for Building Improved Flexible pre-Occupational Courses in Appropriate Language for Visually Impaired.

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