



ENABLER report: Six month trial of the ENABLER screening tool Part Two: Phase 2 and 3





March 2012

Authors: Graeme Douglas, Paul Lynch
and Alex Saunders



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Contents

	Executive summary	6
	1. Introduction and context.....	10
	1.1 Aims and research questions.....	11
	2. Methods	12
	2.1 First application of screening tool	12
	2.2 Focus group with ECs.....	12
	2.3 Second application of screening tool	12
	2.4 Client interviews.....	13
	2.5 Additional data sources.....	13
	2.6 Ethics	13
	2.7 Analysis and reporting	14
	3. Results: Analysis of the initial screening tool	15
	3.1 Introduction	15
	3.2 Distance from the labour market (Levels 1 to 4).....	15
	3.3 Screening questions and formula	16
	3.4 Employment experience	18
	3.5 Education and training	19
	3.6 Computer skills	21
	3.7 Access to information.....	22
	3.8 Independent travel	24
	3.9 Vision and explaining visual impairment.....	25
	3.10 Health related issues	27
	3.11 Key points	27

4. Results: Distance travelled	29
4.1 Introduction	29
4.2 Sample	29
4.3 Distance from the labour market (Levels 1 to 4)	30
4.4 The estimated distance travelled since first screening	31
4.5 Insights into the qualities of the screening tool questions	33
4.6 Key points	34
5. Results: Clients' views of the service they received	35
5.1 Telephone questionnaire for clients	35
5.2 Purpose of the questionnaire	35
5.3 Results	36
5.4 Key points	49
6. Results: Focus group discussion with ECs	51
6.1 Structure	51
6.2 Amount of time to complete the tool	51
6.3 Development programme	52
6.4 Accessibility	52
6.5 Using the 1–4 scale	52
6.6 Identifying levels using the “formula” and segmentation model	53
6.7 References to specific sections	54
6.8 Initial conclusions	55
6.9 Key points/suggested changes	56

7. Results: Case studies	57
7.1 Introduction	57
7.2 Approach and sources of Information	58
7.3 Case 1: Connie – Level 1	59
7.4 Case 2: Steve – Level 1	61
7.5 Case 3: Derek – Level 2	64
7.6 Case 4: John – Level 2	67
7.7 Case 5: Dennis – Level 3	69
7.8 Case 6: Grace – Level 3	72
7.9 Case 7: Kathy – Level 4	75
7.10 Case 8: Susan – Level 4	77
8. Discussion and next phase	79
8.1 What have we found out about the quality of the screening tool? ..	79
8.2 What have we found out about the employment services?	84
8.3 Final reflection.....	85
8.4 Next phase of work	87
9. References	88

Executive summary

ENABLER is a three-year Big Lottery funded research project delivered in partnership between RNIB, Action for Blind People (Action) and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham. The project harnesses the experience of blind and partially sighted job seekers to develop a standardised assessment model and best practice guidelines, as well as inform the design of new service interventions that move people closer to the labour market.

This report is the second in the series of three. These reports, taken together, describe the project's work through to completion. This second report presents the findings of a six month trial of the ENABLER assessment toolkit (which comprises a screening tool, segmentation model and scoring sheet). This toolkit was developed in Phase 1 of the ENABLER project. This trial reflects work carried out in Phase 2 and 3.

The following data was collected in the trial:

- First application of the screening tool
- Focus group with employment coordinators (ECs)
- Second application of the screening tool
- Client interviews
- Additional data sources taken from client service records.

This data was used to answer the following research questions:

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

More specifically:

- 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?
- Do stakeholders think the screening tool is useful, appropriate and sensitive?

2) What have we found out about the employment services?

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

Key findings in relation to this research question are:

- Employment coordinators (ECs) agree with the current formula for calculating client distance from the labour market in about 50 per cent of cases.
- Where EC and the formula differed it appears that ECs most commonly would judge clients to be further from the labour market (though not always).
- There is evidence that clients' scores of their own distance from the labour market are more positive than those offered by ECs or the screening tool formula.
- Areas in which the current formula could be modified to include different questions (which differentiate and discriminate more effectively) are: computer skills; and access to information.
- Areas in which the current formula could be modified to use different criteria for categorising responses as closer or further from the labour market might include: education level; independent travel; and explaining visual impairment.
- Approaches to using more static (or medical) aspects of clients' lives as part of the screening process needs further thought (for example level of vision, additional health or disability issues).

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

Key findings in relation to this research question are:

- Over the period between the first and second screening assessment there is some evidence that clients (as a group) have moved closer to the labour market (as scored by ECs and the screening tool formula).
- Few questions within the screening tool identified general group changes over the period between the first and second screening assessment. Possible exceptions are: more clients have completed job preparation courses; more have prepared CVs; more have clearer idea of the target job; more have awareness of support available in employment (for example Access to Work); more have increased confidence using mobile phones for non-phone calls (texting, "smart" applications).
- Caution is required interpreting and generalising the findings because of limitations of the research design (limited numbers, limited and inconsistent length of time between first and second screening assessment, and clients having experienced different types of service).

- Clients appear to be relatively positive about the services they have received in terms of reducing their distance from the labour market (“distance travelled”), improved job search behaviours, knowledge of employment opportunities, and confidence. However, this progress appears not to be evident in the changes observed across the two measures of the screening tool.

Do stakeholders think the screening tool is useful, appropriate and sensitive?

Key findings in relation to this research question are:

- Although recollection was not always clear, clients were broadly positive about the aims, purpose and realisation of the screening tool. In the main clients felt that the screening tool was sensitive, although useful specific areas of development were raised.
- ECs remain positive about the approach taken and purpose of the screening tool. The focus group involved constructive discussion about developing and improving the screening tool.

What have we found out about the employment services?

Key findings in relation to this research question are:

- Over the period between the first and second screening assessment there is some evidence that clients (as a group) have moved closer to the labour market (as scored by ECs and the screening tool formula).
- Clients appear to be relatively positive about the services they have received in terms of reducing their distance from the labour market (“distance travelled”), improved job search behaviours, knowledge of employment opportunities, and confidence. However, this progress appears not to be evident in the changes observed across the two measures of the screening tool.
- Over half the clients felt they had some involvement in the design of the services they were receiving, and the majority were broadly satisfied with their involvement.
- Well over half clients said they felt more optimistic as a result of the service (and, although of concern, only three clients felt less optimistic).
- Nevertheless, positive comments were by no means universal. Some concern and disappointment was expressed by some clients about the quality of support they had received (particularly analysis of the unstructured comments appears to reveal a number of clients who were less satisfied). This seems to be particularly true of those who were on Work Choice in England, or were from clients who appeared to be unsure of the scheme/service they were receiving.

- Caution is required interpreting and generalising the findings in relation to evaluating the employment services involved in this research. This is because of the limitations of the research design (limited numbers, limited and inconsistent length of time between first and second screening assessment, and clients having experienced different types of service). Even so, the research provided some useful, if incomplete, data.

Next steps of the project

The report presents a series of actions in relation to the development of the ENABLER assessment toolkit for the next phases of the ENABLER project. Phase 4, 5 and 6 of the project will continue to refine the new assessment tools, but will also seek to inform the design of new service interventions that move people closer to the labour market. Findings from phases 4, 5 and 6 of the project are presented in the third and final report. These three reports, taken together, describe the project's work through to completion.

1. Introduction and context

ENABLER is a three-year Big Lottery funded research project delivered in partnership between RNIB, Action for Blind People (Action) and the Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research (VICTAR) at the University of Birmingham. The project harnesses the experience of blind and partially sighted job seekers to develop a standardised assessment model and best practice guidelines, as well as inform the design of new service interventions that move people closer to the labour market.

From June 2010 ENABLER developed an “employment screening tool”, which gathers information about clients’ circumstances and work-related activities and skills. Specific screening questions are scored in order to help Employment Coordinators (ECs) consider how far a client is from the labour market, whilst additional questions help determine each client’s progress, or “distance travelled”, using Action’s services. In April 2011 ENABLER began trialling the screening tool in all Action regions as well as RNIB Scotland, RNIB College Loughborough and RNIB Trainee Grade Scheme (TGS).

This second ENABLER report presents a summary of data collected during the trialling of the employment screening tool and segmentation model as part of ENABLER Project Phase 2 and 3. This report follows-on from the first report which describes the various design stages that led to the prototype employment screening tool. The report is based upon the data collected from 62 blind and partially sighted people. This sample was taken from different employment schemes run by Action and RNIB Scotland. Each person (EC and client) gave their consent to participate in the research cycle of the project, either in agreeing to complete the screening tool, take part in a focus group discussion and or a telephone interview.

This report is divided into four sections:

- Aims and research questions
- Methods
- Analysis and reporting (containing five separate sections)
- Discussion and next steps

1.1 Aims and research questions

The overall aims of the two phases of the project were:

- Phase 2: establish a baseline of blind and partially sighted people's experiences of, and the impact achieved, by current interventions and test the current segmentation model and employment screening tool.
- Phase 3: analyse clients' progress over six months.

These two phases of the ENABLER Project sought to consider the assessment qualities of the screening tool, in particular in relation to assigning levels to individuals according to their “distance from the labour market” as well as measuring progress (or “distance travelled”) over time. It considers the feedback made by a group of ECs who had been using the tool with clients over four months in four regions covered by Action in England and one from RNIB Scotland. It also sought the views of the clients who participated in either one or both screenings.

The trialling period of the project was based around two overarching research questions:

1. What have we found out about the quality of the screening tool?
2. What have we found out about the employment services?

2. Methods

The trial drew on a range of methods with data being collected from the following sources:

- First application of screening tool
- Focus group with ECs
- Second application of screening tool
- Client interviews
- Additional data sources.

2.1 First application of screening tool

ECs were asked to carry out a first screening tool with new clients from 1 March till the end of August 2011. All completed tools were entered onto a spreadsheet for analysis and comparison with results from the second screening. A total of 62 clients signed up in the first cycle (46 Action regional teams; 4 RNIB College Loughborough; 5 RNIB Trainee Grade Scheme; 7 RNIB Scotland).

2.2 Focus group with ECs

A focus group discussion was set up four months after the screening tool had been launched (March 2011). ECs were invited from all regions (England and Scotland) and programmes participating in the trial. ECs attending the meeting were expected to have used the tool with at least two clients and provide feedback on the process of completing the tool with clients and to propose changes for the next iteration in terms of wording of questions, scoring and emphasis. The discussion was led by VICTAR and regarded for analysis.

2.3 Second application of screening tool

ECs were asked to complete a second screening tool with the client after six months in order to compare with the baseline data collected during the first application of the screening tool. Recruiting across the whole cycle also had an effect on the number of follow-up interviews we were able to complete. We were able to complete second screening tool interviews with clients recruited between April – August, but clients signed-up after this time did not have a second screening tool completed. Not enough time would have elapsed between the two interviews for them to be meaningful. Clients who had left the service had either found work or for some other reason, did not complete a second screening tool.

2.4 Client interviews

The main purpose was to ask clients to reflect on the quality of services they had been receiving and was not a monitoring exercise of individual ECs. It was important to find an approach that would be acceptable to the ECs. It was agreed at the focus group with ECs that the research team should ask the clients directly about their experiences of being on a work programme once they had completed a second screening tool. The interview schedule was piloted with four clients resulting in minor changes. The interview schedule was put on an online survey hosted at the University of Birmingham and then exported to SPSS for analysis.

Telephone interviews were pre-arranged with clients in order to find a suitable time of the day and location to phone them. They took approximately 30 minutes between October and the end of November 2011.

2.5 Additional data sources

We were able to draw on additional data sources that were made available for these phases of the cycle. These included access to “Action Impact” data, development plans and progress review sheets for TGS and summaries compiled from various reports at Loughborough College. In some cases, notes were gathered from clients’ files when available and several ECs sent summary report of their work with clients.

A number of factors affected the quality of this additional information. We did not have access to data recorded on the Work Choice STEPS system, which meant we may not have seen the full range of EC/client interventions. Some contracts demanded paper-based data recording systems and, again, access to this information varied across teams. Information recorded through Action Impact varied in detail, either through time pressures and or because information had been stored elsewhere (explained above). Finally, the “voluntary” nature of this research phase should be noted. Up to 20 ECs and team leaders voluntarily added to their own workload by testing the screening tool with their clients. The project team were extremely grateful for this support and commitment from Action/RNIB teams, but inevitably there were times when service delivery work took priority over ENABLER’s testing and data collection requirements.

2.6 Ethics

Ethical approval was agreed at the beginning of the project by University of Birmingham Ethics Committee and additional requests were made when new tools were developed (a final version of the screening tool for trialling, topics

for focus group with ECs and a questionnaire survey for clients). Letters of invitation and consent forms for participants were also submitted and approved. The Research Committee issues supplementary acceptance letters which were sent to RNIB.

All EC and clients' views have been treated confidentially (for example the case studies use fictional names).

2.7 Analysis and reporting

In the main findings are reported under headings in relation to the different methods used in the trial, that is:

- Analysis of the initial screening tool
- Distance travelled (comparison of the first screening tool assessment to the second screening tool assessment)
- Clients' views of the service they received (gathered through interviews)
- Focus group discussion with ECs.

There is overlap between the different sections and cross references are made. Each section concludes with a summary of "key points" which are re-visited upon in the final discussion. In addition to this, all the data is drawn upon to construct eight illustrative client case studies.

Throughout the report we are cautious about the use of the data. In some of the sections we make use of percentages (rounded to the nearest integer) to aid summary descriptions and comparisons. However, the small sample size means that these must be used with particular caution. We also make use of "quantitative language" and try to use this in a consistent manner, for example referring to sample sizes; using unambiguous proportional language (such as "half", "over half", "over three-quarters", etc); "some" refers to more than one participant, but less than half; "the majority" refers to over half of the participants; "the vast majority" and "most" refers to over three quarters of participants.

3. Results: Analysis of the initial screening tool

3.1 Introduction

The key purpose of this section of the report is to consider the assessment qualities of the screening tool, in particular in relation to the approach adopted to distance from the labour market. Findings from the analysis of each section of the screening tool are presented in turn; first client responses to the “screening questions” and then their responses to other related questions. The section concludes with some initial recommendations in relation to changes to the screening tool and the approach to categorising clients (the “formula”).

It should be noted that the research draws upon a relatively small sample group (n=62). When reporting findings we use percentages for ease of comparison but these are used with caution and are always rounded to the nearest percent.

3.2 Distance from the labour market (Levels 1 to 4)

Over half of the clients (58 per cent) were placed in Level 2, with half the number (n=18) falling into Level 3. The smallest number of clients fell into Levels 1 and 4 (10 per cent and 3 per cent respectively, just six clients in total).

Table 1: Levels based on the 10 screening questions and scoring system

Level	Total sample n	Total %
1	6	10
2	36	58
3	18	29
4	2	3
Total	62	100

ECs were asked to provide their own levels based upon definitions provided and their knowledge of the clients. ECs' judgements appear to provide a greater spread across the levels (most notably more clients in Level 1 and Level 4). The table below gives another perspective on the amount of agreement between formula and EC levels.

Table 2: ECs' interpretation of the scoring

Level	Total sample n	Total %
1	11	18
2	22	35
3	18	29
4	11	18
Total	62	100

In terms of agreement between ECs and the scoring system, agreement was observed in the case of about half the clients. Disagreement was most common when ECs judged clients to be further from the labour market (30 per cent of clients).

Table 3: EC and scoring level agreement

Level	n	Total %
Agreement	33	53
EC scored 1 level further from labour market (+1)	15	24
EC scored 2 levels further from labour market (+2)	4	6
EC scored 1 level closer to labour market (-1)	10	16
EC scored 2 levels closer to labour market (-2)	0	0

3.3 Screening questions and formula

The screening calculation is based upon the responses to ten screening questions covering the six areas (employment, education, computer skills, access to information, independent travel, and vision). For simplicity of calculation each client was assigned a “further” and “closer” to the labour market summative score for each of the six areas. It is the combination of these six scores that gives the client's level.

It is useful to review each of the six areas used in the screening calculation to examine how they differentiate clients as closer or further from the labour market.

Table 4: Scoring of screening questions covering the six areas (and associated 10 questions) (n=62)

Area	Questions	Further %	Closer %
Employment experience	Q1. How long out of work? Q4. Have you ever worked while having a visual impairment?	55	45
Education and training	Q8. Highest educational qualification	70	30
Computer skills	Q10. Do you ever use a computer?	13	87
Access to information	Q14/Q16. Can you access information through print or braille?	7	93
Independent travel	Q22. How confident do you feel about travelling independently from your home to local shops and services? Q23. How confident do you feel about travelling independently to an unfamiliar place using public transport?	39	61
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? Q30. Do you feel confident discussing with a potential employer any adjustments you may require in the work place?	18	82

Looking at the result in the six areas, the screening tool does not differentiate clients very well in the areas of computer skills, access to information and explaining vision. The screening questions on employment experience, education and independent travel show a greater spread between the two categories. Results for each area will be discussed in the next section.

3.4 Employment experience

3.4.1 Screening questions

The screening questions for this area consisted of two questions – one in relation to length of time not working and the second on whether the client has worked with a visual impairment.

In terms of the time not working, 13 clients had been for between 0 and 6 months. Over 50 per cent had been unemployed for more than two years, or had never worked (by definition these people who were longer term unemployed were further from the labour market following our formula).

Table 5: Length of time unemployed (screening question)

Period	Total Sample n	Total %
0–6 months	13	21
7–12 months	9	15
13–24 months	7	11
25+ months	25	40
Never worked	8	13
Total	62	100

Clients were asked if they had any experience of employment whilst having a visual impairment – 27 per cent responded that they had never worked with a visual impairment.

3.4.2 Distance travelled questions

Clients were asked about the level of employment activity they had undertaken while unemployed. This includes job preparation courses, work placements, voluntary work, CV preparation, job applications and attended interviews. Percentages for all these activities were fairly low – CV preparation being the most common activity (80 per cent), and applying for jobs being the only other activity undertaken by more than 60 per cent of clients (68 per cent).

Table 6: Employment activity while not working (non-screening questions)

	Yes %	Base n
Job preparation courses	34	61
Work placement	21	62
Voluntary work	52	61
CV preparation	80	61
Applied for jobs	68	60
Attended job interviews	52	60

Clients were asked if they had a clear idea about the type of work they would like to do using a scale of 1 to 4 (1 is “have a very clear idea” and 4 is “have no idea”). Around 48 per cent said they had a clear idea about the type of job that they would like to do. About 20 per cent had either no idea or only had a very small idea of what job they would like to do. Perhaps surprisingly, clients appeared to be relatively positive about having the necessary skills in finding the work they wanted (about 40 per cent feeling very confident in this respect). Interestingly, of the 24 clients who felt this way, only three were scored as Level 1 (that is closest to the labour market). This suggests some clients make unrealistic assessments of their own proximity to the labour market.

Clients were asked a number of questions about job search skills and the amount of time they spent searching for jobs. Seventy-five per cent said they had carried out job searching in the last month: 14 (23 per cent) said they searched for more than five hours per week; 32 (52 per cent) said they searched for up to five hours a week; and the remaining 16 (26 per cent) said they had not carried out any job search activities in the previous month. Those who had not carried out any job search activities tended to be those judged furthest from the labour market.

Based upon the 46 clients who had been actively seeking for work the previous month: 12 (26 per cent) had visited the job centre each week; 30 (65 per cent) had applied for jobs; 19 (41 per cent) had attended interviews.

3.5 Education and training

3.5.1 Screening questions

Clients were asked about their educational qualifications. Inevitably, clients have a number of different qualifications but for ease of analysis this data was

collapsed into five categories of clients' **highest** qualification (ranging from no qualifications to a degree and postgraduate qualifications). Eighty-nine percent described themselves as having some form of qualification and twenty-three per cent had achieved a degree or higher. Nineteen clients (30 per cent) reported having "qualifications below degree" (for example BTECs, foundation degrees, HNDs) or higher. These clients are categorised as "closer" to the labour market by the current screening tool formula. This percentage would be increased to approximately 50 per cent if a more "liberal" definition of "qualifications at A-level (or equivalent)" or higher was used. Some ECs (through the focus group) and one client (through the project steering group) suggested a more liberal criteria of this kind.

Table 7: Frequencies of clients' highest educational qualification (screening question) (n=62)

Highest qualification	Definition	Total Sample n (%)
0 (Further)	Entry level of no qualifications	7 (11%)
1 (Further)	Qualifications at NVQ 1 (or equivalent)	8 (13%)
2 (Further)	Qualifications at GCSE (A*–C) / NVQ 2 (or equivalent)	15 (24%)
3 (Further)	Qualifications at A-level (or equivalent)	13 (21%)
4 (Closer)	Qualifications below degree level	5 (8%)
5 (Closer)	Degree (or equivalent) or higher	14 (23%)
Total		62 (100%)

3.5.2 Other questions

Clients were also asked if they were currently participating in any courses (including vocational courses) such as computer courses or evening classes: around one-quarter (n=16) said they were. Courses included NVQ in business administration or in customer services, training in sports massage or doing CLAIT (n=2).

3.6 Computer skills

3.6.1 Screening questions

Clients were asked a basic question about whether they “ever used a computer”. A very high proportion (87 per cent) said they did use computers (“closer” to the labour market) and around 13 per cent said they did not use a computer (“further” from the labour market).

Related questions (below) about the use of computer use may prove better screening tool questions.

3.6.2 Distance-travelled questions around computer skills

Clients were asked to rate their level of confidence at using a computer using a scale of 1 (very confident) to 4 (not at all confident). Over half of clients (52 per cent) said they were “very confident”, around thirteen percent (n=8) said they were confident. Twenty-five per cent said they were not very confident (n=14) or “not at all confident” (n=1). A similar style of question was used in relation to different computer applications (presented in the table below). There was greater confidence amongst clients using word processing, web browsing, and email applications. This raises some questions about the relativity of the “confidence” construct, and while it offers a valuable insight it has limitations.

Table 8: Frequencies of how confident clients felt using different computer applications (Those who used computers, n=56)
Non-screening questions

Application	Very confident n (%)	2 n (%)	3 n (%)	Not at all confident n (%)
Word-processing	39 (70%)	6 (11%)	6 (11%)	5 (9%)
Email	37 (66%)	9 (16%)	5 (9%)	5 (9%)
Web browsing	38 (68%)	7 (13%)	7 (13%)	4 (7%)
Spreadsheets	20 (36%)	14 (25%)	5 (9%)	17 (30%)
Database software	17 (30%)	14 (25%)	9 (16%)	16 (28%)

The vast majority of clients said that they used mobile phones (n=57, 92 per cent), although fewer appeared to use them for applications beyond telephone calls (for example emails).

The next set of questions asked if clients used the computer with or without additional technology. These four sub-questions asked clients

to say whether they required any additional changes to the computer interface and if so, whether they required software that magnifies the information on a screen or required screen-reading software (responses are linked to client's level of vision, but it is clear quite high proportions of the clients used specialist access technology beyond standard operating system tools).

Table 9: Use of additional access technology (those who used computers) Non-screening questions

	Yes %	Total n
Without access technology	22	55
With additional changes (eg using Windows accessibility options)	51	53
With a screen-magnifier (eg Supernova, Zoomtext)	50	52
With a screen reader (eg JAWS, Zoomtext, Supernova)	41	51

3.7 Access to information

3.7.1 Screening questions

In this area the current screening tool formula draws upon the combined answers of two questions – whether the client can access information through braille or print. A very high proportion of clients (n=55, 93 per cent) could access information through print or braille (or both). Alternative questions in these areas which better capture relative speed, flexibility and skills in information access and handling may be more helpfully used in screening and this is discussed further below.

Table 10: Frequencies of clients' accessing information through print or braille (screening question)

Information access method	Total Sample n (%)
Print	54 (87%)
Braille	12 (20%)
Print or braille	58 (93%)

3.7.2 Other questions

Clients were asked other questions about how they accessed information. These questions may offer better screening questions which differentiate and discriminate clients more effectively.

In terms of braille technology used: nine clients reported using a Perkins Braille; five a computer and embosser; four an electronic braille note taker and one reported a Braille Dymo (this produces labels that can be stuck onto objects and furniture).

As noted above, over three-quarters of the sample group (n=50) said they could access print. Clients reported preferring a range of print sizes (the most commonly a font size N16–18, although larger font preferences were also commonly reported). Nevertheless, only 70 per cent (of those who could access print) said they used a low vision aid. The following table presents reported functional vision in relation to print reading (with and without the aid of a magnifier).

Table 11: Reported functional vision accessing print with and without a magnifier (not screening questions)

Question	Without a magnifier n (%)	With a magnifier n (%)
Read normal newspaper print	11 (20%)	31 (66%)
Read large print	21 (38%)	9 (19%)
Read newspaper headlines	9 (16%)	1 (2%)
Read none of the above	14 (26%)	6 (13%)
Total	55 (100%)	47 (100%)

Another important aspect of accessing information is in relation to writing. Just over half the clients felt that others could read their handwriting (with the other half feeling that it was not possible, or they were unsure). Almost 60 per cent of clients reported they could touch type.

3.8 Independent travel

3.8.1 Screening questions

In this area the current screening formula draws upon responses to two questions, both related to confidence travelling independently. Firstly, clients were asked about their confidence in travelling independently from their home to local shops and services on foot or equivalent: 66 per cent said they felt very confident (while only 8 per cent said they did not feel at all confident). Secondly, and in contrast, clients were asked about travelling independently to an unfamiliar place using public transport. In this case only 23 per cent felt very confident (and 34 per cent did not feel confident at all).

Table 12: Confidence travelling independently (screening questions)

Question	Very confident n (%)	2 n (%)	3 n (%)	Not at all confident n (%)
Independent: From home to shops and services	41 (66%)	12 (19%)	4 (7%)	5 (8%)
Independent: To an unfamiliar place using public transport	14 (23%)	12 (19%)	15 (24%)	21 (34%)
With support: travelling to a familiar place	59 (95%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
With support: travelling to unfamiliar place	47 (76%)	6 (10%)	6 (10%)	2 (3%)

Confidence with independent travel appears to differentiate clients well, and unsurprisingly clients are more confident travelling independently in familiar environments. Clients are more confident again if they are travelling with support from family, friends or services – 95 per cent said they felt very confident travelling with support in familiar areas; 76 per cent felt very confident travelling with support to an unfamiliar place.

Another aspect of independent travel which was raised by clients through the screening process is travelling in the hours of darkness. Lighting conditions and time of day has an impact upon ease of independent travel and associated confidence for some clients and this might be a useful addition to future drafts of the screening tool.

3.9 Vision and explaining visual impairment

3.9.1 Screening questions

This area of the screening tool focussed upon how confident clients felt discussing their visual impairment with potential employers (the more confident they felt, the closer to the labour market they were). Responses to two questions were combined in the current screening formula. Both screening questions generated similar responses.

As some potential employers may assume people cannot perform some tasks because of their visual impairment, it was useful to find out how confident clients felt discussing the skills they had to challenge the views of potential employers. Sixty-per cent said they were very confident about discussing their vision and their skills with potential employers. Around 20 per cent said they felt confident and just over ten per cent said they were not at all confident.

A follow up question was asked about whether clients felt confident discussing with potential employers any adjustments they may require

in the work place (linked to their visual impairment). Again, just over sixty per cent said they felt very confident requesting adjustments. About sixteen per cent said they did not feel confident (eight per cent) or not at all confident (eight per cent) requesting adjustments.

Table 13: Confidence discussing you vision with an employer (screening questions)

Question	Very confident n (%)	2 n (%)	3 n (%)	Not at all confident n (%)
Confident discussing the skills you have?	37 (60%)	13 (21%)	5 (8%)	7 (11%)
Confidence discussing adjustments	38 (61%)	14 (23%)	5 (8%)	5 (8%)

Based upon the current formula 83 per cent of client were categorised as being 'closer' to the labour market. The formula could be adjusted to discriminate clients more effectively – that is more demanding criteria could be used so that clients must report greater confidence to be categorised as closer to the labour market.

Partly linked to the general theme of self advocacy (although not used as a screening question), clients were asked about their knowledge of available support to blind and partially sighted people in employment

(for example Access to Work). Over three-quarters said they were aware of such support.

3.9.2 Other questions

In addition to the screening questions, clients were asked a series of questions in relation to their visual impairment and their visual functioning. Unsurprisingly, clients gave a range of responses reflecting a range of circumstances in relation to their vision – for example onset of visual impairment varied enormously amongst the clients (some having become visually impaired as little as a year earlier, while others having been visually impaired all their life).

In terms of registration status, just over half of clients (56 per cent) said they were registered as blind (severely sight impaired) and 34 per cent said they were registered as partially sight impaired (sight impaired).

The remainder (n=6, 10 per cent) said they were not registered at all.

Clients were asked three questions in relation to the stability of their vision (changes in the previous year, changes on a day-to-day basis, and the changes they expected in the future). Responses (see table) confirm that many of the clients experience and anticipate changes in their vision (although this is rarely an improvement).

Table 14: Reported changes and fluctuation in vision (Non-screening questions) (n=62)

Amount of change	n (%)
Changes in vision over the previous year	
Greater than a year ago	2 (3%)
Less than a year ago	19 (31%)
About the same	38 (61%)
Changes from day-to-day	
Yes	28 (45%)
Predicted vision in the future	
Improved vision	2 (3%)
Deterioration in vision	22 (35%)
Stable vision	27 (44%)
Unsure	10 (16%)

3.10 Health related issues

Although not used as part of the screening formula in relation to distance from the labour market, clients were also asked about health related issues and other disabilities (in addition to their visual impairment).

Just under 20 per cent said they had an additional long term disability (other than a visual impairment) that could restrict their search for work. A slightly higher proportion (27 per cent) reported a long term health condition that could impact or restrict their search for work. Reported health conditions included: diabetes (n=3); high blood pressure (n=3); back pain (n=3); and stroke (n=2). Reported disabilities included: hearing impairment (n=4); autism; and dyslexia.

3.11 Key points

The following key conclusions are presented:

- Employment coordinators (ECs) agree with the current formula for calculating client distance from the labour market in about 50 per cent of cases.
- Where EC and the formula differed it appears that ECs most commonly would judge clients to be **further** from the labour market (though not always).

- Areas in which the current formula could be modified to include **different questions** (which differentiate and discriminate more effectively) are:
Computer skills; and Access to information;
- Areas in which the current formula could be modified to use **different criteria** for categorising responses as closer or further from the labour market might include: Education level; independent travel; and explaining visual impairment.
- Approaches to using more static (or medical) aspects of clients' lives as part of the screening process needs further thought (for example level of vision, additional health or disability issues).

4. Results: Distance travelled

4.1 Introduction

The key purpose of this section of the report is to consider the data collected from the application of the screening tool a second time. This provides an insight in two areas. Firstly, it provides evidence of clients' movement closer to or further from the labour market (as measured by the screening tool and related 'distance travelled' questions). Secondly, the analysis of the data gives further insight into the assessment qualities of the screening tool (building upon the data analysed in relation to the first screening tool).

This section considers the following:

- nature of the sample and any potential biases introduced at the time of the second screening tool;
- the measured distance from the labour market;
- the estimated distance travelled since first screening;
- insights into the qualities of the screening tool questions.

It should be noted that the research draws upon a small sub-sample of the original recruited clients (n=36 of the 62).

4.2 Sample

As with the first application of the screening tool, ECs were responsible for collecting the screening tool data a second time. This took place in autumn 2011 (from September to the beginning of December). Of the 62 clients recruited to the project we were able to collect screening data for a second time from 36. There were several reasons for the reduced number:

- Some clients (n=3) had not received services for long enough to warrant a second assessment (recruited after 31 August 2011).
- Positively, four had found work (in fact, a further two clients who did provide screening data for a second time later secured employment).
- Three clients had been ill for an extended period of time.
- We were not able to get quality data from two clients at a mutually convenient time.
- A larger number of clients (approximately 14) were no longer formally in contact with ECs because their programme (for example Work Choice, college) has come to an end, or they had disengaged from the programme and were no longer in touch with the EC.

There are potentially sources of bias which are introduced into the analysis by the loss of clients for the second assessment. Firstly, we may lose clients who have moved closer to the labour market (and therefore reduce any observed impact of services). Most obvious here are those four clients who have found employment (and this is clear evidence of positive outcomes for the services involved). More problematic are the larger number of clients for whom less is known as they are no longer on a programme. Some of these clients may also have found work, although more likely they have not. Nevertheless, the completion of programmes may well have brought them closer to the labour market. However, some of the clients were lost to this part of the project. They may have disengaged and may not have moved any closer to the labour market (or even become more distant). In contrast, they may have moved to other non-Action or non-RNIB services which were of benefit to them (for example Remploi).

For this reason we must be particularly cautious about how these findings are generalised, as well as consider the implications of the biases and “unknowns” identified.

A second consideration here is the types of services the 36 clients had received between the two assessments (and for how long). The clients were drawn from a variety of programmes and schemes. Therefore, meaningful aggregation of data is problematic (although it still serves the project’s purposes in relation to trialling the screening tool). Of further concern is that we only have clear data in relation to service programme for about half the clients in this analysis. They represent a range of programmes (Work Choice, Loughborough College, TGS, RNIB Scotland programmes).

In terms of length of time between assessments, this ranges from 12 weeks to 27 weeks (mean = 20 weeks, standard deviation = 3.97 weeks).

4.3 Distance from the labour market (Levels 1 to 4)

An analysis of the screening tool levels as calculated by the screening tool scoring system and separately by the ECs confirms the patterns revealed by the analysis of the first screening tool. ECs tend to judge clients to be further from the labour market (a higher level) than the screening tool formula (although the difference was not statistically significant as it was in the first assessment).

Clients were asked what level they thought they were as part of the client interviews. The interviews were carried out at a similar time to the second screening. This enables a comparison of the findings for the 26 for whom we have data for both. Clients tend to score themselves closer to the labour market

than the screening tool formula (of the 26: 14 agreements; 11 clients scored themselves closer to labour market; 1 client scored themselves further from the labour market). The pattern was even more pronounced when compared with EC scores.

While it is likely that this indicates that clients tend to be more optimistic about their distance to the labour market than ECs (using the current formula used in the screening tool), it should be noted that interviews usually took place after the second screening assessment. Therefore clients may feel they had made progress since the second assessment. Indeed, the analysis in the previous paragraph does not include two clients who had gained employment after the second screening assessment (and had previously only been judged to be at Level 2).

4.4 The estimated distance travelled since first screening

4.4.1 Level and screening questions

One approach to measuring distance travelled is to compare the level assigned to clients in the first screening assessment to that assigned in the second screening assessment. Analysis reveals a slight shift towards the labour market across the two assessments. Based upon the screening tool formula, 28 clients appear to have remained static, seven were judged closer to the labour market, and one judged further away (Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test, $z=-2.121$; $p=0.034$). Based upon the EC score, 17 clients appear to have remained static, 14 were judged closer to the labour market, and five judged further away (Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test, $z=-2.202$; $p=0.028$).

While these are small significant effects it is encouraging that they exist at all and that they are in the predicted direction (increased proximity to the labour market following service intervention). A closer look at individual areas of the screening tool (employment activity, educational attainment, computer skills, access to information, independent travel, or confidence to explain visual impairment) does not reveal that there are particular areas which have improved. Given the range of services the clients were engaged in, perhaps this is not surprising. Confidence with independent travel appears to show greatest improvement for the group (but this is not statistically significant on its own).

The small client numbers and large range of client characteristics and experience of service means that we were not able to explore in any great detail if particular variables were associated with distance travelled. A larger scale of trial would reveal more, although the existing data does have potential for further exploratory/qualitative analysis.

4.4.2 Question-by-question analysis

Many of the questions in the screening tool are designed to offer a method of measuring progress of clients in relation to work-related activities. As described in the introduction of the report, many of these were chosen because of their relevance to people with visual impairment. The following summarises which of the relevant questions provided indications of (statistically significant) progress made by the group between the first and second screening assessments. If the question is not identified assume no notable group-change was observed.

In terms of employment:

- More have completed job preparation courses
- More have prepared CVs
- More have a clearer idea of the target job (near significant)
- More have awareness of support available in employment (for example Access to Work).

In terms of computer use:

- More have increased confidence using mobile phones for non-phone calls (texting, “smart” applications).

As can be seen, little group progress appears to be observed. This is perhaps not surprising given that the sample size is small and made up of clients engaged upon a range of programmes. In addition, the time between the first and second assessment was relatively short. Nevertheless, it might be expected that more directly employment-based activities would have shown positive change given that all services are concerned with employment. For example, engagement in voluntary work, work placements, applied for jobs and attended interviews (none of which showed obvious group improvement).

It is important to note that there were changes in responses in relation to most areas of questioning, but there were few instances where there was a general **group** change in a particular direction.

4.5 Insights into the qualities of the screening tool questions

It has already been noted that there are a number of likely explanations for the limited evidence of “distance travelled” which are related to the design of the study (for example mixed programmes, small numbers). It is important to also consider the features of the screening tool itself. The previous section of the report which presented an analysis of the data gathered from the first screening tool noted that some questions did not discriminate between different clients very well (for example nearly all participants used computers, therefore the question “Q10, Do you ever use a computer?” offers little as a screening question). While other questions (for example confidence using a word processor) may discriminate better, there is little evidence from the (limited) data gathered so far that these questions show very much change over time.

As already noted, it is impossible to be conclusive at this stage as to whether the lack of group changes is attributable to the limitation of the design of the study so far or limitations of the screening tool itself (or both). Nevertheless the small observed changes noted in previous sections offer some optimism that the screening tool has potential.

Another aspect of the screening tool which offers further insights are questions which are expected to yield fairly static data (that is questions which we might expect to give answers which are not likely to change very much over time). Example questions might include educational qualifications, length of time out of work, presence of additional health issues or disabilities, registration status and other questions related to vision. While responses to all these questions may change over the three to six month period between screening assessments this may be limited or in a predicted direction (for example in the case of length of time out of work).

The responses to the questions in first and second screening assessment were fairly similar and when they did differ they are generally in predictable directions. There are some ambiguities however, for example five clients appear to have lower qualifications in the second screening assessment compared to the first, which is illogical and must reflect some error in the data collection. These small ambiguities and inconsistencies help to remind us that there is (and will always be) an element of unreliability in data gathered through interviewing in this way. This might be due to errors in recollection by the client or errors in recording by the EC/researchers. It is also important to remember that for softer measures (such as those involving perceived confidence) there will be natural fluctuations linked to the construct itself.

4.6 Key points

- There is evidence that ECs score clients as further from the labour market than the screening tool formula (in keeping with findings from the first screening tool).
- There is evidence that clients' scores of their own distance from the labour market are more positive than those offered by ECs or the screening tool formula.
- Over the period between the first and second screening assessment there is some evidence that clients (as a group) have moved closer to the labour market (as scored by ECs and the screening tool formula).
- Few questions within the screening tool identified general group changes over the period between the first and second screening assessment. Possible exceptions are: more clients have completed job preparation courses; more have prepared CVs; more have clearer ideas of the target job; more have awareness of support available in employment (for example Access to Work); more have increased confidence using mobile phones for non-phone calls (texting, "smart" applications).
- Caution is required interpreting and generalising the findings because of limitations of the research design (limited numbers, limited and inconsistent length of time between first and second screening assessment, and clients having experienced different types of service).
- Nevertheless, the relatively few ambiguities in the data collected suggest that there are reasons to be optimistic about the screening tool's potential application and development.

5. Results: Clients' views of the service they received

5.1 Telephone questionnaire for clients

In line with the participatory approach taken in the project we aimed to gather the views and perspectives of the 62 clients recruited to the project. Interviewing took place over a two month period in autumn 2011. We successfully interviewed a total of 48 of the 62 clients (28 male and 20 female), about 77 per cent of the total sample group (two additional clients were interviewed by the ECs in error and are not included in this analysis).

A total of 12 clients declined interviews when contacted or were unable to be contacted in spite of several attempts. Based upon the screening tool, three out of the 12 were judged to be Level 4 (one client had been sick over a long period), four were judged to be at Level 3, two at Level 2 and three at Level 1.

All interviews were pre-arranged and took between 30 and 40 minutes. All interview data was entered onto a secure database and then exported to SPSS for further analysis.

It should be noted that clients had a very wide range of service experience which reflects the different programmes they were enrolled upon. These programmes are contrasting in nature, for example some clients were part of an RNIB intensive training programme such as the Trainee Grade Scheme (TGS) or studying at Loughborough College, while other clients were receiving employment support as part of contractual work programmes such as Work Choice. Indeed, some clients attended Loughborough College on a residential basis for an extended period of time.

5.2 Purpose of the questionnaire

The interview sought to gather data in relation to four areas:

1. Clients' experience of the use of the screening tool with the EC.
2. Clients' understanding of their distance from the labour market.
3. Clients perceived impact of the service(s) they received (or are still receiving).
4. Clients' views of the influence they had on shaping the services they received and their overall satisfaction.

5.3 Results

5.3.1 Section one: Client experience of the screening tool

It is important to mention that the screening tool was one of a number of assessment and record keeping tools that ECs may have used with their clients during an initial or subsequent meeting. ECs may not have made a distinction between filling out the ENABLER screening tool and any other data collection tool they were required to complete as part of their contractual responsibilities with a given funding agency, for example STEPS as part of Work Choice.

In a small number of interviews, clients had a clear idea that the screening tool was part of a separate project and were expecting to be contacted by ENABLER. During one interview, a client said that she felt the screening tool was disjointed from the rest of the service. In most cases, clients did not know what level they had received or were told about the scoring process. It was not a requirement for the ECs to explain the scoring system or the significance of the levels. On the whole, clients had a vague memory of the tool and this was the starting point for the interview.

Clients were asked some preliminary questions about the screening tool to find out if they could recall being asked a series of questions as part of an initial interview with an EC at the beginning of their collaboration with either Action or RNIB. Out of the 48 interviewed, 54 percent (n=26) were still receiving services at the time of the interview and just under half (46 per cent) said they were no longer in regular contact with their EC or were unsure if they were still on a programme. Sixteen said they were on “Work Choice”, five on the Trainee Grade Scheme and three at the RNIB College. Half were either unsure of the work programme they were on or the connection with other support some were receiving from another agency or organisation (for example Remploy, Blackburn Diocese). In terms of the screening tool, the majority (41 of 48) said they remembered being asked a set of questions about their past employment, job search skills, computer skills, etc. The remainder were unsure or could not recall.

Generally, clients were positive about the range of topics covered and felt there were no obvious gaps. They considered them to be “sensible and reasonable” or “extremely relevant” with “a good range of questions to do with eyesight”. Three quarters of clients (n=35) felt the right topics were covered with most of the rest being unable to comment on the topics as they could not recall the screening tool in enough detail. Just two people said it did not cover the right topics. Follow up questions asked clients to comment on what they thought about the topics. Clients were able to talk more generally about the topics rather than about specific questions, although there were exceptions:

“a few questions were hard to answer as [they were] too general... computer questions and one didn't make sense (the questions about travelling 'with help' were pointless). 'Who wouldn't be able to cope with help!'”

Another client said that the questions were useful but found the scoring system of 1–4 (1 very confident to 4 not at all confident) was too narrow (and this was in keeping with some feedback offered by ECs in the focus group).

When asked whether they thought the screening tool questionnaire helped them in any way with their goals around employment, approaching half (n=21) said they found it was either “very helpful” or “helpful”. In a small number of cases, clients said it helped them with setting goals or with widening job searches. A similar number (n=17) were less positive: feeling it was “of little help” or “not at all helpful”. Sixteen clients (n=16) said that they already had an idea (some of them clearer than others) about what they wanted to do before meeting the EC. The fact that they did not find it personally altogether helpful did not necessarily mean it was an unhelpful process for both the EC and the client to go through. For example, two clients said that it helped the EC to learn about their needs rather than help them set their own goals. One considered it more as a fact-finding mission – “gathering information” and not so much a tool to help them “to set specific goals”.

Table 15: Example comments made by clients to the question “how useful was the tool in helping to identify issues or concerns that needed to be addressed when seeking employment?”

Client rating	Comment
Very helpful	<p>“It is good having a tool that gets information from source [the client].”</p> <p>“The disability employment officer only has limited information about me so there is a need to have something more structured.”</p>
Helpful	<p>“I had lost confidence going out... worried about tripping over furniture in the workplace ... I don’t seem to worry about that as much because I get help from [the EC].”</p> <p>“It helped me to focus on existing skills and how I can transfer these skills to a new career.”</p>
A little helpful	<p>“Helping to take more risks in applying for jobs that I thought I may not be suited to do.”</p> <p>“It highlighted reading and writing issues and perhaps the need to develop IT skills.”</p>
Not at all helpful	<p>“I knew what I wanted to do and what my strengths were.”</p>

Clients were asked how comfortable they felt completing the questionnaire. The main purpose of this question was to get a sense of the level of sensitivity of questions being asked about their vision, mobility and additional disabilities or health issues that could affect their search for work as well as the language used to ask the questions.

Responses to the open question were broadly positive, for example:

“Challenging, but I liked that...no point asking unspecific questions, but need to ask questions that get to the real difficulties I’m experiencing.”

“Fine. I’ve never had a problem explaining what my level of eyesight is. Some people might find it difficult to deal with but I don’t feel RNIB should avoid these questions.”

In responses to a closed question, the majority (n=37, 77 per cent) felt the questionnaire was sensitive or did not know (n=8). Only two clients said that the screening tool was in anyway insensitive. When this was explained, it appears that only one of the two clients was able to give

a specific example about the question relating to the “impact of sight on a day-to-day basis” and to “changing vision”. The other client was more concerned about the way the questions were asked rather than their content.

5.3.2 Section two: Clients' understanding of their distance from the labour market.

This section asked specific questions about the segmentation model and the four levels. Clients were briefly described the levels and asked whether it was useful to have a questionnaire to find out about “how far

a person is from getting work”. Technical terms such as “distance travelled” were not used unless clients had mentioned the term during the interview.

Over half (n=33, 69 per cent) said they found having a questionnaire that helped to determine a person's level as “useful”. A further n=11 thought it was useful but had “some reservations or doubts about the levels”. No clients said it was not useful. For those who found it “useful” comments particularly related to the tool helping them to realise what assistance they needed at each level. For those who had some reservations and doubts about the levels concerns were raised about the wording of the description of the levels and how clients could actually fall into two levels and some confusion when certain descriptors were repeated in more than one level, for example “experience voluntary work” (Levels 2 and 3) and updating skills “such as IT” (Levels 2 and 3). One client, in this study, felt they were useful “as long as it's not used to batter people” and the “scores are handled sensitively”. A similar concern is raised in the DWP Research Report (Exploring a Distance Travelled approach to WORKSTEP development planning) when meetings based on the pilot, identified possible drawbacks about the “distance travelled approach being used as a deficit model” and could potentially undermine customer confidence. One client emphasised the point that the level was not put forward in the correct way – “blind people have spent a great deal of energy trying not to be labelled, so it is important to explain the level sensitively”.

Based on the descriptions of the four levels, we asked clients to place themselves at one of the levels. Out of the sample, n=3 had found jobs, and the majority of the rest thought they were at Level 1 (n=21) or Level 2 (n=15). Only n=4 thought they were Level 3 and none at Level 4. This appears to suggest that clients are more positive than ECs about their own proximity to the labour market (see section 3.2 for further analysis on this).

Table 16: “What level do you think you are now?”

Level	Total sample n	Total %
Got a job	3	6
Level 1	21	44
Level 2	15	32
Level 3	4	8
Level 4	0	0
Don't know	3	6
Total	48	100

In terms of additional comments, some of the clients had difficulties placing themselves at one level based on the descriptions, often feeling they fell between Levels 1 and 2. Furthermore, some clients described being very aware of the challenges of finding employment at the moment in the current economic climate. In some respects, this factor has impacted strongly on their levels of confidence which can fluctuate from day to day. Those who described themselves at Level 3 referred to extended periods of not working and additional health issues.

Table 17: Example clients' comments on their level

Level	Comment
Level 1	<p>“I think I was a Level 4 when I arrived at the college and a Level 1 by the time I left. In my situation, having lost my sight overnight, I had no idea how I would cope. So I arrived not thinking about work and left confident I could become self-employed, which is what I'm doing.”</p> <p>“Is between Levels 1 and 2 and has difficulties with maintaining confidence in the current climate.”</p> <p>“I'm as close as I'll ever be – but it's finding a job!”</p>
Level 2	<p>“Through TGS, it is helping me to build up confidence.”</p> <p>“I need a few extra qualifications to get to level 1. I want to go into accountancy work so need a qualification.”</p>
Level 3	“Been out of work for 30 years and feel I lack work experience.”
Don't know	“Always ready to work but whether I have the relevant skills I'm not sure.”

Clients were asked if they thought their level had changed during the time they have spent using the services. Responses were approximately evenly split between those who felt they had become closer to the labour market and those who had stayed the same (plus n=5 who did not know).

A variety of explanations were offered for this improvement (that is why they thought they were closer to the labour market), for example work placements had given confidence or made a client "more marketable". For those who felt they were more static this was qualified by some who felt that they remained at Level 1, or their confidence had in fact improved. Others described drops in confidence linked to prolonged unemployment, or had concerns about employers being the key barrier to getting a job. One participant was perplexed by the lack of linkage between their level and the service they received (inadvertently cutting to the fundamental aim of the project).

"I was a little bit stumped about being scored as a level 2 client. I was scored 2 because I hadn't had paid work since 2008, but on my PGCE course, I was working in schools so I knew all about what was required. Also, what particular services would you have offered a level 2 client that are different from a level 1 client?"

5.3.3 Section three: Clients' perceived impact of the service(s) they received

The third part of the questionnaire looked at the "impact of service provision" upon a variety of aspects of clients' knowledge, behaviour and attitude:

5.3.3.1 Knowledge: Changes in knowledge of employment opportunities and resources

When asked if their knowledge of employment opportunities or resources had changed as a result of the support they received, over half (n=27) said "yes" and the remainder said "no" (n=13) or were unsure (n=7).

When asked to specify what opportunities or resources they had found out about, clients gave a range of responses:

- Information about pre-employment opportunities such as voluntary work or work placements in charitable organisations
- Information about various support structures for those who get work for example Access to work
- Advice and ideas on where to look for work for exemplar lists of websites for example the Guardian newspaper, "Directgov"

- Help with updating CVs, filling out application forms and preparing personal statements
- Information about job clubs and local charities off/for blind people.

ECs appeared to also provide general advice beyond employment (for example benefits, other services). For example, one client said he had not received a formal clinical assessment of his vision even though he had reduced vision for a number of years. The EC advised him to go to the eye clinic at his hospital. He is now registered as partially sighted and has subsequently applied for a free bus pass. He is now able to travel to his job centre more often to look for jobs because he is no longer burdened with having to pay five pounds to travel.

Nevertheless, negative reflections were given: one client said that he was unhappy with the amount of help he was receiving:

“no, nothing has changed... Being given a half-a-dozen websites is not what I call helping someone into employment!”

For some clients their uncertainty centred on the current economic climate and the general difficulty with finding suitable jobs and then having to compete with so many applicants for the same jobs.

5.3.3.2 Attitude: Changes to how you think about work in the future

Over half (n=28, 58 per cent) said the support they had received changed the way they thought about work in the future. Fewer (n=13)

did not think the support they received has changed the way they think about work (seven were unsure).

Clients who said “yes” gave some personal accounts:

“Yes, certainly. Before I met the EC, I would get knocked back by not getting a job interview. The service has opened my mind...I’m looking for a wider range of jobs.”

“I was comfortable in my own career before (previously an international lorry driver). I never had to think about job search, interview process, covering letters. Application letters didn’t apply in road haulage. To sit a formal interview was totally alien to me.”

A small number of clients (n=2) who said “no” and provided some explanation said that they already knew what they wanted to do for example work in accountancy or a managerial job.

5.3.3.3 Behaviour: Changes to job search approaches

When asked if they have changed the way in which they work as a result of the service they had received, half the respondents reacted positively (n=24). Examples given included: more systematic approaches to job applications, wider search criteria, more realism about suitable jobs and CV development.

Of those who said they had not changed their job search behaviour (n=20), reasons were mainly related to clients knowing what they wanted to do anyway and not getting any more benefit from their EC (although it should be noted that their analysis may not be realistic, as noted in other sections of the report).

Related to the above, clients were also asked to reflect on the new activities they were doing or specific skills they had acquired while receiving support from Action or the RNIB and had made the most positive difference. A range of things were highlighted which can be usefully categorised as work-based skills, behaviour and communication, and personal development /education and independence. Examples are presented in the following table:

Table 18: Categories and key skills for work, communication and personal development

Category/behaviour	Key skills for work
Job searching skills	Preparing CVs and application forms. Practicing mock interviews. Carrying out effective job searches on the Internet using search engines and keywords.
Understand requirements of employment	TGS organised a 9 month work placement in an office. Developed a set of office based skills.
Self-employment	Writing business plan with a view to becoming paid as a self-employed counsellor.
Category/behaviour	Behaviour and communication
Communication skills	Qualification to be a Guide Dog speaker. Apprenticeship NVQ in communication skills within a work environment.
	TGS organised a 9 month work placement in an office. Developed a set of communication skills (communicating via email, telephoning skills).
Category/behaviour	Personal development
Independent living skills	Resident at Loughborough College and learning to live independently. Skills for life course (2 year course).
Literacy and numeracy	Improved writing skills to write job applications.
Independent travel	Received mobility training as resident at Loughborough College.

Those who discussed new activities or specific skills were asked to identify which ones made the most difference towards their employment goals. Responses were similar to those listed in the table above but there was a strong sense of satisfaction from those who were involved in the TGS and from those who were attending the residential college in Loughborough. One client, who had been on a nine-month work placement as part of the TGS, said he was better able to understand how the sometimes quite isolated skills that helped him to find work fitted together when he was placed in an office environment. He felt a stronger sense of self-belief, confidence to look for work

and felt more optimistic about finding a full-time job (see case study John – Level 2, 7.6). A client attending Loughborough College felt interview practice with “real employers” was particularly helpful in testing his performance and giving him feedback. He also learnt tools for interview situations, for example STAR (situation, task, action, response). This client also learnt how to use additional screen-magnification software to help him access the computer and sit “normally” at the desk rather than close to the screen.

5.3.3.4 Impact: Overall impact of service

Table 19: “What impact do you feel Action’s or RNIB’s employment services have had in helping you move closer to or find work?”

	Total sample n	Total (%)
A very large impact	14	29
Some impact	19	40
A small impact	9	19
No impact	4	8
Don’t know	1	2
Total	48	100

When asked what impact did they feel Action or RNIB employment services had in helping them to move closer to or find work, well over half (n=33) said “a very large impact” or “some impact”. Nevertheless, the ‘instability’ of these responses is illustrated by one client who described how he was overjoyed having just received an offer for part-time work at a local supermarket, but also noted that he did not feel this way a few days earlier. Clients were also aware of the difficult economic climate and the limited extent to which their EC could help them to find employment. Some clients commented that ECs were “doing their best”. Another said that “she [EC] can’t create jobs” and another said “I’m glad the service is there, although I’ve not got a job yet”.

The question generated further responses which revealed client opinions about service approach. One client said that he found the approach of one EC better suited to his personality. He felt he needed a push to do tasks and “not get away with anything”. Another client said that the EC was able to keep “moving ideas

forward” but this needed to be balanced with practical help with searching for work, something he had not received yet. Although another client was generally very happy with the service he was receiving, he felt he needed a more “tailored or bespoke” service that could accommodate for his needs.

Fewer clients felt the service had had little impact (n=9) and fewer again said it had had “no impact”. Additional comments included: expecting more help and guidance with interviews, informing prospective employers about the support they could receive if they employed a person with a visual impairment, and communication problems between the EC and the client. Two clients (from the same region) said they had received very limited support because the EC could not cover their geographic area adequately.

Some clients also referred to the limited availability of jobs as a key reason for limited impact of the service.

5.3.3.5 Confidence: Impact of service on confidence

Clients were asked if they felt more confident finding work as a result of the service. Unsurprisingly, this generated similar (relatively positive) responses to the previous question on service impact.

Table 20: How confident do you feel about finding work as result of the support you received?

	Total sample n	Total (%)
Feel a lot more confident	13	27
Feel more confident	20	42
About the same	13	27
Feel less confident	1	2
Feel a lot less confident	1	2
Total	48	100

Explanations for positive responses included confidence drawn from meeting role models (for example meeting other blind people and receiving help from them at Loughborough College) and advocacy work (for example ECs support “by explaining my disability to the employer either at the interview or when I get

a job"). For those who were less positive, this appeared to be mainly due to a general sense of frustration at not being able to find work because of the current economic climate.

5.3.4 Section four – Clients' influence on shaping the services and their overall satisfaction

This section asked clients to give some feedback on the amount of influence or "say" they had in shaping the services they received from Action or the RNIB, their satisfaction with this, and their general optimism about their situation.

Table 21: Clients' influence on shaping the services, their satisfaction, and their optimism

	Total sample n	Total (%)
Influence on the service		
Strong influence	18	38
Some influence	14	29
Limited influence	6	13
No influence	4	8
Don't know	6	12
Satisfaction with influence you had?		
Completely satisfied	21	46
Satisfied	16	35
Not very satisfied	5	11
Completely dissatisfied	1	2
Don't know	3	7
Optimism about your situation		
A lot more optimistic	19	40
A bit more optimistic	14	30
Feels about the same	11	23
Less optimistic	2	4
A lot less optimistic	1	2

In terms of influence on the service received, the majority felt they had at least some influence (n=32, 67 per cent) and linked to this 77 per cent (n=37) felt “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their involvement.

Out of those who said they had a strong influence comments included:

“I told him what I wanted. I emailed him what I wanted then he would come round once a month and discuss what I’d sent him.”

“... completely personally tailored to me.”

Another client appreciated the fact that she could direct the support in “whatever direction [she] wanted to go, for example job search or towards self-employment”. Two clients said they were able to form a good working partnership with the EC – sharing the different aspects of job search – “not a case of the EC doing all the work...she gave as much help as you need to give input on where I can improve an application”.

Out of those who said they had some influence and provided comments – two were happy with the EC taking the lead. One client said he felt that “employment specialists know best so I let them decide what I need to do”. At the same time he felt confident enough to tell the EC if something did not work well or if he wanted more of one activity. Related, a client who said that they only had a limited influence on the service talked about the need for a “structured environment” as was the case for one client who was at Loughborough College – “it couldn’t be flexible because it’s important to follow a work routine” – so they were satisfied with the limited influence they had on the service as they thought it was appropriate.

Nevertheless, one client felt the service was “quite rigid”, with the EC only being able to give limited time to help him. Similarly, one client said she was expecting more support to find work and with choosing the right course. Another said that he felt the EC thought he was independent when he actually required help.

In terms of optimism about getting a job, over half felt either a lot more optimistic (n=19) or a bit more optimistic (n=14). Some related explanatory comments are presented in the table below and these clearly reflect a range of feelings. Although with low numbers it is difficult to be confident, the negative comments appeared to be more commonly associated with clients who were on Work Choice in England, or were from clients who appeared to be unsure of the scheme/service they were receiving.

Table 22: Additional comments

A lot more optimistic	<p>"I was lost 10 months ago...now I have specific skills and I know what I can do."</p> <p>"My whole attitude is different. I've done things at the college so I now know that I can do them outside of college." (TGS)</p> <p>"It's been life changing. I've gone through the ceiling...I can present myself in a proper manner. I read the job description and person spec and it means something to me. I can read in between the lines. What I have learnt has given me so much more of a chance (to find work)."</p>
A bit more optimistic	"It's a very tough market, but Action are very positive so this helps me a lot."
About the same	"It was a pointless exercise. It hasn't helped me in the slightest."

5.4 Key points

- Although recollection was not always clear, clients were broadly positive about the aims, purpose and realisation of the screening tool. In the main clients felt that the screening tool was sensitive, although useful specific areas of development were raised.
- When estimating their own distance from the labour market ("level"), clients appeared to think they were closer to the labour market than estimates made by the EC (and the screening tool formula).
- Similarly, clients appear to be relatively positive about the services they have received in terms of reducing their distance from the labour market ("distance travelled"), improved job search behaviours, knowledge of employment opportunities, and confidence.
- However, this progress appears not to be evident in the changes observed across the two measures of the screening tool.
- Over half the clients felt they had some involvement in the design

- of the services they were receiving, and the majority were broadly satisfied with their involvement.
- Well over half the clients said they felt more optimistic as a result of the service (and although of concern, only three clients felt less optimistic).
- Nevertheless, positive comments were by no means universal. Some concern and disappointment was expressed by some clients about the quality of support they had received (particularly, analysis of the unstructured comments appears to reveal a number of clients who were less satisfied). This seems to be particularly true of those who were on Work Choice in England, or were from clients who appeared to be unsure of the scheme/service they were receiving.

6. Results: Focus group discussion with ECs

The key purpose of this section of the report is to consider the responses and suggestions made by a group of six ECs who had been using the tool with clients over four months in four regions covered by Action in England and one from RNIB Scotland. A total number of 19 ECs completed the tool with 62 clients over the duration of the research cycle. A focus group meeting was organised at the University of Birmingham in July, approximately four months after the tool had been launched. ECs attending the meeting were expected to have used it with at least two clients and provide feedback on the process of completing the tool with clients and to propose changes for the next iteration in terms of wording of questions, scoring and emphasis. Five ECs had managed to complete between two or three tools with clients before the meeting and one EC had managed to interview 10 clients in the first three months.

The following sections give a summary of the main points discussed during the meeting. For ease and consistency, the tool was unpicked section by section once ECs had the opportunity to make general comments about the structure and use of the tool.

6.1 Structure

There was generally positive feedback from the ECs who have used it with clients in both England and Scotland. Most were using it as part of an introductory conversation between the client and EC. It also complemented other tools that needed to be completed for external funders (for example STEPS for Shaw Trust). It seemed to “fit” well into initial interview with clients. For example, the EC from Action East of England said she found it really useful for all first interviews with clients. “The tool gives me much more information about the client.” She said she found it easier to have a conversation with the client and fill it in either at the client’s house or after the interview. She preferred this approach to ticking boxes on STEPS. ECs were able to have a conversation with the clients and build a work development plan based on the responses.

6.2 Amount of time to complete the tool

ECs said that the time to complete the tool varied from client to client, but generally it took between 30 to 45 minutes. This rate could of course decrease as ECs became more familiar with the tool. One client at Action London and

South East said he completed the tool during the second interview with a client using information from an interview tool already in place (the WETCHA) thus only needing to spend 20 minutes in total.

6.3 Development programme

One EC felt she was able to create development programmes based on the information they received from the client and on the scoring. There seems to be a natural progression from the tool to the development plan. “I have a separate page to make notes while I go through the tool. I pick up the issues and use them for the basis of the development plan.” An EC working on the TGS said she used the tool as part of her introductory meeting “it is a first opportunity to meet them properly. I use the tool with our development plan”.

6.4 Accessibility

ECs made some suggestions about the general structure, such as numbering all sections and questions for ease and possibly producing two versions of the tool: one for ECs using the tool for the first time to help with navigation and a second version for those who are more confident at using it. The EC from Action South West suggested reducing the number of spaces between lines in order to make it easier to read with a screen-reader (for example JAWS).

6.5 There were a small number of clients who the ECs felt were not ready

to discuss their experiences because of recently experiencing sight loss. The EC from Action North West said she had a client who did not want to be “targeted” and did not want to be interviewed. She also said that those who were the furthest away from the labour market (for example Level 4) were often referred to other services and do not get recruited onto Work Choice. Positively, ECs were interested in following up clients who were no longer on their caseload as they saw the value of the screening tool.

6.5 Using the 1–4 scale

A large number of the questions on the tool asked clients to choose a number between “1” and “4” to rate their level of confidence at doing a task or rating their skills and knowledge. The EC in Action South West raised the difficulty his clients experienced when scoring themselves using this scale. He felt that clients may have considered “2” to be too high or in other words, too competent at doing a task and “3” to be too low or not very good at doing a task. He

suggested using a scale of “1 to 10” or “1 to 8” in order to give clients more choice. Conversely, a scale that had too many choices could be considered to be “paralysing” for clients who had learning difficulties or difficulties interpreting the scale. It was suggested to use a larger scale of say 1 to 6 to allow for these subtleties.

There was also some discussion around levels of confidence versus competence. The current scales asking about clients’ confidence did not tell the EC how effectively clients can do something. The EC from Action South West said that if a client says they use a computer every day, it will give me a better idea of their competence’. He suggested adding an extra question about how often a client does something, for example use the computer. There was general agreement that it was harder to measure competence levels using the tool but asking for frequency could be a useful way of finding out clients’ general use.

6.6 Identifying levels using the “formula” and the segmentation model

When asked about how they found the scoring sheet and formula, there was a general consensus that they were helpful and easy to use. The EC for the RNIB Trainee Grade Scheme said: “I found it useful. I can look at individual scores and see what areas need to be worked on.” “It gives a snapshot of where a person is – very close to work or not. It helps me to identify areas where clients may need more training.” Although the EC for Action London and South East expressed concern about what the scores meant to a client – “the score gives nothing to the client... they are more interested in what they need to do”.

Finally, the ECs felt the four level segmentation model was helpful. An EC felt that there should be an additional level between 2 and 3 as there seems to be a considerable jump between the two levels. For example someone could score as Level 2 but may still have outdated computer skills because they were not as important ten years ago as they are now.

There was an agreement that clients who fall into Level 4 tend not to be recruited to Work Choice because they needed to be close to starting work (within six months). Additionally, Level 3 or 4 clients were often referred to other coordinators (for example to the housing, independent living coordinators) and not taken onto their caseload.

Additionally, all ECs testing the tool were invited to give their comments about their experience either electronically or over the telephone. Any additional comments are discussed in the next section.

6.7 References to specific sections

ECs were invited to make some comments about specific sections of the tool taking one section at a time.

6.7.1 Employment activity

- There was a discussion about the time intervals used in Q1 (time not working) and whether the six month gaps could be broken down into three month intervals in order to get a more accurate idea of how long they have been out of work. There was some agreement that clients who are between 0 and three months unemployed are closer to the labour market than those who are more than six months unemployed.
- A small confusion about the wording of the question about completing job preparation course (Q2a) as there is a dedicated work preparation scheme in place at Action. It was suggested that the question be reworded to be more generic to encourage clients to discuss any courses they have completed.
- Question about attending a job centre (Q7C) – re: attending job centre once a week or more. ECs said that most of their clients do not attend job centres. The EC from RNIB Scotland said that many of her clients did not have access to mainstream services: “they don’t go to the job centre.” She felt that it was important to “look at infrastructure when asking some questions”.

6.7.2 Education and training

- This section had been developed using a five level scale based on a combination of national awards (for example NVQs) and qualifications (for example A-levels and degrees). Scotland has a different qualification system which could be included as well as levels in a document entitled “7307”.

6.7.3 Computer skills

- There was an agreement between the ECs from Action London and South East and from the South West that ECs should ask for more details about whether a client is able to do a task using a specific software program, for example, write a document using a word processor. The EC from Action London and South East suggested adding some short follow-up questions such as “can you write a letter?” or “can you format it and use different fonts and styles?”

6.7.4 Independent travel

- The questions on independent travel (Q22–25) are not always suited to clients living in rural areas of the country. For example, the EC from RNIB Scotland

commented that many of her clients living in rural areas do not have access to any public transport and cannot travel to their local shops and services.

6.7.5 Additional comments made by ECs

All ECs were invited to comment on the tool using email or by phone. Some of those not captured in the previous sections are given below:

- Some duplication with initial assessment document developed and used in the North East region but considered more useful as a “progression tool”.
- The tool does not ask about clients’ strengths, hobbies or interests which could help ECs to assess how ready they are for work.
- Questions about mobility can lead to an open discussion about a client’s true level of independence and delve into mobility issues.
- There is no direct link between the scoring system and actions that need to be undertaken with the client. This connection needs to be made more meaningful.
- Q16 – “can you read print”, some ECs have interpreted this question as “can you read print with your eyes”, as opposed to “can you read print with your eyes or with the aid of a computer”. This ambiguity has led to ECs scoring clients as “further from work” when in fact the client is able to access print.
- Two ECs and one client, who attended a steering group, felt the cut off for being “closer to work” in the education section should be lower, to include Level 3 qualifications.
- There is some duplication with initial assessment documents already being used with Action teams.
- There should be a connection between the screening tool, score and interventions to be carried out. This is a key objective of the project, but has been picked up by some ECs (and one client during the evaluation interviews – see above).

6.8 Initial conclusions

Overall, ECs wanted a tool that could give them some indication of how far a client is from work. Having a final score and the opportunity to give their own judgement was encouraging. Only one EC had used the tool quite extensively and seemed to be integrating it well into her work whereas others were still discovering its purpose. ECs could see the benefit of the tool once they had used it twice on the clients and got some idea on how much progress they had made over six months.

Some ECs were reluctant to use the screening tool at the first meeting with a client in case they did not turn up again. The final sample of clients may contain less Level 3/4 clients as a result, as it is these clients who may be less motivated to keep going once they know what we can (and can't) offer. This may have biased the sample towards those closer to the labour market as payments are dependent on finding people work within the six months. This could be because Work Choice clients can only access the service for six months. Extending the time on the programme is possible, but rarely approved. Therefore, Work Choice prime contractors may be “cherry picking” clients who are more likely to find work.

6.9 Key points/suggested changes

- ECs remain positive about the approach taken and purpose of the screening tool. The focus group involved constructive discussion about developing and improving the screening tool.
- Need to review levels in the segmentation model – there is a considerable jump between levels as a client could actually be situated between two levels, for example where someone has a lot of motivation, volunteering and work experience but who needs training in IT. Review levels to see movement within and between levels to perhaps include sub-categories (for example 2.1, 2.2, 2.3) to reflect the subtleties of clients' progress.
- Increase number of scales from 4 to 6.
- Better navigation and numbering for ECs using screen-readers: possibly create a simplified version by removing instructions.
- Competence versus confidence: Maybe have additional questions to ask about a client's competency and not just their levels of confidence. EC wishes to know how well a client is able to do a task, for example not just whether they use a PC but how frequently and competently they type a letter, compose a work-related email and so on.
- Review “urban versus rural” locations and a client's ability to access to mainstream services. For instance, clients in rural parts of the country may not have access to public transport (which affects screening question on “independent travel”).

7. Results: Case studies

7.1 Introduction

We have chosen eight case studies, two from each screening tool level (1 to 4), to bring to life some of the issues faced by blind and partially sighted people seeking work. Our starting point for these studies has been the EC judgement of the client's level at the 1st screening interview. Potentially each client's estimated level can be taken from three different sources: the screening tool formula, the EC judgement, and the client's own estimate. Given the screening process is in the trial stage at this point, it felt expedient to select these cases based on the EC judgement at the initial screening.

In terms of constructing each case study, the data was taken from a number of sources; the 1st and 2nd screening tools interviews, Action Impact (Action's internal client record database), follow-up evaluation interviews conducted by the project team, paper files including development plans, progress reports and Work Choice documents, comments from a client who attended a project steering group meeting and finally email exchanges with a client.

The case studies have been selected because they highlight something illuminating about client levels or the screening process itself. For example:

- Connie is the archetypal “Level 1” client; good work history, disability-specific skills, articulate, motivated and an experienced self advocate. Steve highlights the difficulty of categorising clients, described by both EC and himself as “borderline Level 1 and 2”.
- Derek (Level 2) shows how different ECs can elicit different client responses.
- John (also Level 2) shows what a difference a TGS placement can make to someone's skills and confidence.
- Dennis' progress as a Level 3 client is nothing short of “life changing” (his words) and demonstrates the all-round strength of RNIB College Loughborough's work skills programme.
- Grace's case study (Level 3) shows the degree of support necessary for someone experienced in a factory environment to develop a new skills set.
- Kathy's story is a good example of a Level 4 client and the long-term journey she will need to take to engage in meaningful work again.
- Susan shows just what can be achieved; initially assessed as a Level 4 person with few skills, experience or motivation, who now has purpose, meaning and ambition.

7.2 Approach and sources of Information

The eight case studies drew upon data described in the table below. Each case study was constructed with the broad purpose of summarising the given client's involvement with the project and RNIB / Action employment services. To aid consistency each case was constructed within the following broad framework (where data allowed): Background; Programme; Assessment process; EC/ Client interaction; and Client evaluation.

Table 23: Case studies and associated sources of data

Level	Case	Sources of data
1	Connie	1st screening tool/2nd screening tool/Action Impact/Client interview.
1	Steve	1st screening tool/Client interview.
2	Derek	1st screening tool/Notes from paper file including Work Choice development plan and CV/Comments from attendance at steering group / Client interview.
2	John	1st screening tool/2nd screening tool/TGS development plans and progress reports/Client interview.
3	Dennis	1st screening tool/2nd screening tool/Online Blog/Emails with ENABLER project manager/ Client interview.
3	Grace	1st screening tool/2nd screening tool/4-page report from EC/Client interview.
4	Kathy	1st screening tool/2nd screening tool/Action Impact
4	Susan	1st screening tool/2nd screening tool/Action Impact/Client interview

7.3 Case 1: Connie – Level 1

Service accessed: Action employment advice.

Table 24: Summary of assessed levels in Case 1

Data source	Level
1st screening tool – score	1
1st screening – EC judgement	1
1st screening – client judgement	1
2nd screening tool – score	1
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	1
2nd screening tool – client judgement	1

7.3.1 Background

Connie was previously employed as a language teacher, having a degree and teaching qualification; but hadn't worked for 13 months. In the meantime she has kept busy with voluntary work at a welfare centre and fundraising. Connie is a skilled computer user and reads braille in several languages, as well as in music and mathematics. She has a full employment history as a person with sight loss, and was studying for a Diploma in Sports Massage when she contacted Action for Blind People. Registered blind due to a childhood accident, Connie is an independent traveller who has clear job aspirations and confidence in her ability to communicate effectively with potential employers. Connie wanted advice on becoming a self-employed sports/reflexology masseuse or finding paid employment in the field. She was 29 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living in a medium sized urban town.

7.3.2 Programme

Connie was a non-contract work client, whose case was closed by the EC after two months. Interestingly, Connie felt her file was still "open", I assume because of the ECs offer to Connie to contact her "anytime".

7.3.3 Assessment process

At the 1st employment screening tool (EST) assessment both EST and EC agreed that Connie was a Level 1 client. The same result emerged from the 2nd screening tool interview several months later. The EC felt at the 1st interview

that “[the] client is truly able to work and shows determination to get a job or set up her own business”.

7.3.4 EC/Client interaction

Connie received support for almost three months, with advice split between self employment and job search. She was sent relevant information about becoming self employed, and put in touch with a self employment advisor who would act as a mentor. Connie was also sent

a business plan to complete and encouraged to discuss this with Access to Work (AtW). She was also referred to a self employment workshop

as part of the Work Choice programme, even though she wasn’t a Work Choice client. At the same time, Connie was encouraged to search on NHS websites and chiropractor trade publications for work related to her new qualification, whilst her CV was updated by email exchange. The case was closed as Connie felt she did not require any further help with the business plan, but she was encouraged to contact Action again if she required further employment support.

7.3.5 Client evaluation

During our discussion on the screening process, Connie felt that it was very important for people with sight loss to be able to speak confidently about their sight loss, what adaptations that need but also about how they are able to do the job. When I explained that we score on these subjects she agreed wholeheartedly. “I don’t mind answering questions about my sight loss. Employers need to know and I need to be confident.”

Connie was positive about the support she had received. She felt being given practical assistance, “[even] to talk to an employer with me” was the most important part of the service. She also learnt new information about how to become self employed and felt having a self employment mentor was helpful. As a capable individual doing her own job search though she did reflect on what support would be necessary to help someone “move beyond Level 1 to getting an interview”.

7.4 Case 2: Steve – Level 1

Service accessed: RNIB employment advice.

Table 25: Summary of assessed levels in Case 2

Data source	Level
1st screening tool - score	2
1st screening – EC judgement	1/2
1st screening – client judgement	1/2
2nd screening tool – score	–
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	–
2nd screening tool – client judgement	–

7.4.1 Background

Steve last worked over a year ago, although he has attended a work preparation course since, where he updated his CV. He has been volunteering since 2004 where he runs groups, organising and delivering training whilst designing and writing training materials. Registered partially sighted, he has lived with sight loss since birth. Steve does not feel it affects him unduly, especially when it comes to accessing information. He can read font size 14 print with a magnifier, and he is a skilled computer user. He was 24 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living in an urban city.

7.4.2 Programme

Steve was signed up through the Work Choice programme for six months, with the case now closed.

7.4.3 Assessment process

The 1st employment screening tool (EST) was completed, which indicated Steve was a Level 2 client. It was his educational qualifications that prevented him from being assessed as a Level 1 client, and his EC felt he was actually “borderline” Level 1 and 2.

As his EC explained, “I would agree that his educational attainment is quite low (having no further, higher or continued vocational training). [However...] he is probably bordering between Level 1 and 2. My reasons for this is he

is volunteering, where he regularly teaches and motivates groups of young people, in addition to this there are a number of training opportunities for him through this role. However, as he has no recent vocational or advanced qualifications for the types of role he is applying for (mainly administration) – I would agree that this leans more to a Level 2 score. In addition he has never sought or been advised about different types of jobs his skills could apply to. [Steve] has good computing skills, having previously worked in an administration role (for two and a half years, plus a short term work placement more recently) however he has no [European Computer Driving Licence] ECDL or administrative qualifications since leaving school which was some time ago. His motivation, mobility and communication skills are excellent and would lead me to believe he is a Level 1 client.”

7.4.4 Client evaluation

Steve felt the screening process was useful as the questions helped the EC to learn about the person “right away”, that is without having to wait for a number of interviews. He also felt it added something to the information already available.

“It is good having a tool that gets information from source [the client]”

“The disability employment advisor only has limited information about me so there is a need to have something more structured”

Interestingly, Steve too felt he was between a Level 1 and Level 2.

In terms of support Steve received extensive job search support and application form advice. He felt the process was mutually supportive.

“We were working together; the EC [would] work on a part and I would work on another part. She gave as much help as you need and [was] able to give input on where I can improve an application.”

Steve felt it was specialist and tailored to his needs.

“The EC was able to do a lot more than the job centre.

I was able to work on certain things that I needed to develop.”

“The EC is able to help me along the path giving me specialist types of information about where to search.

For example, searching on charity and voluntary sector websites and Goodmoves.”

The other key dynamic of the support on offer was the confidence it gave Steve:

“I’m looking at jobs that I never dreamed of looking at and applying for them. I realised that I have skills that I picked up when volunteering and can be transferred, such as teaching and working with mental health issues.”

“Before I met the EC, I would get knocked back by not getting a job interview. I’m looking at a wider range of jobs. The service has opened up my mind.”

In summary, Steve felt it had “opened his eyes” to making more applications, and had “totally changed the way I do things.”

7.5 Case 3: Derek – Level 2

Service accessed: Action employment advice.

Table 26: Summary of assessed levels in Case 3

Data source	Level
1st screening tool - score	2
1st screening – EC judgement	2
1st screening – client judgement	1
2nd screening tool – score	–
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	–
2nd screening tool – client judgement	–

Derek had last worked in June 2011 as a fundraising assistant. His employment history covers a range of paid and voluntary positions, and is well qualified with A-levels and GCSEs. He has extensive experience in the use of various office computer packages and is seeking work either in fundraising, research, administration or customer service. He is registered partially sighted, accessing information via font size 14+ or through assistive technology. He is an independent traveller and confident about his ability to communicate effectively with potential employers about his skills and requirements. He was 36 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living in an urban area of Greater London.

7.5.1 Programme

Derek was part of the Work Choice programme, initially from December–June 2011, with an extension agreed to September. The case was closed when he found work in July 2011.

7.5.2 Assessment process

The 1st employment screening tool (EST) was only completed as Derek secured employment; EC and EST were both in agreement that Derek was a Level 2 client. However, Derek was adamant that he was a Level 1 client and that his lack of professional qualifications or a degree should not preclude that assessment (the score sheet requires one of these qualifications for a client to be classified as “closer to work” in that category).

7.5.3 EC/Client interaction

Derek was initially allocated a number of workshops through Work Choice: the importance of interview preparation, different methods of applying for jobs, where and how to look for vacancies and a workshop to discuss disclosure and how to deal with “rejection”. There was a change of EC but based on her recommendation – “highly motivated, pro-active jobseeker applying for jobs every week, good skills, good attitude, definitely employable” – an extension on Work Choice was agreed.

The support package intensified with more emphasis on daily job search and regular attendance at a London based Action job club. Derek was encouraged to apply for at least two jobs a week. On one day, for example, the EC identified four jobs with “tight deadlines but no excuse not to have a go”. On another day, six jobs were suitable of which Derek was required to apply for at least two. Derek was encouraged to “speed up” the time it took to fill out applications and to take in completed forms to job club for feedback. He was encouraged to present more “professionally”, in appearance and communication.

Alongside this work, the EC focused on interview technique training, for example, by providing a list of typical job interview questions and developing skills-based responses. Derek was volunteering, offering information and advice whilst the EC secured additional voluntary work in an administration team. New employers were added to Derek’s job search database and his CV was updated. He also attended a two week unpaid work training experience programme with “learning for work”.

All of this work resulted in a string of interviews, until finally Derek was offered a full-time position on 13 July that he began on 1 August.

7.5.4 Client evaluation

Derek attended a project steering group and shared his thoughts about the assessment process and the support he received. He was very supportive of the screening process and style of questions but felt the scoring system was unfairly weighted (see above).

Derek’s feedback concentrated on the differing approaches of the two ECs he worked with, and how an increase in intensity was exactly what he needed. “The first employment consultant was not forceful enough; the second one would not let me get away with anything, wouldn’t let me make excuses. I got encouraged when I needed it, got kicked up the backside when I needed it.”

He explained how he was “given a push to write a personal statement”, which was something he had avoided before. He also described receiving support in improving his CV and interview skills, which made him “more effective in selling myself”. Derek was very positive about the help he received.

7.6 Case 4: John – Level 2

Service accessed: RNIB Trainee Grade Scheme.

Table 27: Summary of assessed levels in Case 4

Data source	Level
1st screening tool – score	2
1st screening – EC judgement	2
1st screening – client judgement	2
2nd screening tool – score	1
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	1
2nd screening tool – client judgement	1

7.6.1 Background

John last had paid employment 10 years ago, but has since done voluntary work “on and off” for RNIB, a local radio station and as a freelance musician. He applied for a number of posts in 2009 and had one interview before this opportunity through RNIB Trainee Grade Scheme (TGS). He lost his sight in childhood and is registered blind, feeling that his sight loss has affected his ability to find work. With “careful preparation” he can travel independently and is confident in his ability to explain his skills and requirements to an employer. He is a skilled computer user and accesses information through braille and speech software. He was 33 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living in a medium sized urban town.

7.6.2 Programme

John has paid work as part of the RNIB TGS programme, which ran for a year. The case was open at the time of this report.

7.6.3 Assessment process

A 1st employment screening tool was completed with EC and score sheet both suggesting that he was a Level 2 client. “[John] is motivated and possess some experience, mobility wise independent and confident what [he] lack[s] is recent experience and possibly job search support.” The 2nd screening tool, completed five months later again resulted in agreement between EC and score sheet. Now John has some recent, relevant employment through TGS he is considered a Level 1 client. “[John] has moved even closer to work

with up to date work experience and becoming more confident with travelling independently.”

7.6.4 EC/Client interaction

John is working full-time as part of his TGS placement. The post runs for one year; there is a detailed job description and development plan, which cover the key areas of communications, PR and information handling, creative writing and campaigning.

John’s support is multi-layered. He receives on the job training and has attended a number of courses run by RNIB (for example presentation skills, writing for the web) or external agencies (for example “getting your message across” delivered by a local voluntary agency). His “progress review report” contains an impressive list of achievements (for example in administration, office protocol, time management website development, features in an audio magazine) whilst there are future plans to attend training in marketing and event management.

Alongside this work-based training TGS provide over-arching support and teaching in all aspects of job search. For example, CV writing, completing application forms, recruitment processes speculative letters, types of employment opportunities and strategies for job search.

7.6.5 Client evaluation

John felt the screening process was helpful. “Challenging, but I liked that. No point asking unspecific questions, but need to ask questions that get to the real difficulties I’m experiencing.” John also described himself as Level 2 client before taking the TGS role.

His evaluation of the support he has received can be divided. Firstly there is the experience of “working” and how this has boosted his practical skills and confidence. “It was difficult to take the plunge for work and lose the fear of wanting to go back to employment.” “Taking this work placement has increased my confidence to look for work.”

Then there is the work that the TGS employment coordinator has been doing. These include; “preparing and tailoring my CV, improving my writing skills and learning to use the correct words and phrases for job applications, using the internet more effectively for job searches”. “I’m more aware of good websites and where to look for work. I also receive job alerts.”

John describes his time on TGS as a “wonderful experience”.

7.7 Case 5: Dennis – Level 3

Service accessed: RNIB College Loughborough.

Table 28: Summary of assessed levels in Case 5

Data source	Level
1st screening tool – score	3
1st screening – EC judgement	3
1st screening – client judgement	4
2nd screening tool – score	2
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	2
2nd screening tool – client judgement	1

7.7.1 Background

Dennis was employed as a lorry driver for 25 years before his sight began to deteriorate four years ago. Registered blind and struggling to cope, in June 2011 Dennis took the decision to move away from his family to attend the six-month residential employment course run by RNIB College Loughborough. “I was like a scared cat arriving at college, leaving my family and friends.” Determined to work but unsure how, he felt that he needed to develop skills in every aspect of living with sight loss. Dennis described how he “doubted the decision at first, but how excellent the staff were in every aspect. The support is wonderful”. Dennis was 54 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living at the College having moved from a small town in the North West.

7.7.2 Programme

Dennis was part of the college’s six-month employment skills development programme. The case was open at the time of the screening interviews, but he has since completed the programme.

7.7.3 Assessment process

The 1st employment screening tool was completed with tutor and score sheet both in agreement that Dennis was a Level 3 client. As the tutor said, “I would agree with this assessment that Dennis has the potential to work but is still some way off due to his limited IT skills, mobility and adjustment to disability. Dennis is very motivated to find employment so I’d consider him to move up

the scale quickly, within a few months, to be more job ready". By the time the 2nd screening tool was completed, both tutor and score sheet agreed that Dennis had progressed to Level 2. "He has more confidence in his ability, gained through learning how to use JAWS and through a highly successful work placement in the office of a road haulage company; thereby tapping into knowledge he learnt in his previous career."

7.7.4 EC/Client interaction

This residential course provides an all-round package of support that majors on employment but also focuses on independent living skills, computer skills, mobility and other issues relating to living with sight loss. Dennis talks enthusiastically about the breadth of support whilst at the same time being "completely personally tailored to me".

7.7.5 Client evaluation

Dennis did not feel the screening made any difference to his situation, as he knew "what he needed to do". He explained how the college in general and the skills he learnt around seeking work in particular have helped him. "I have moved a lot closer to work. I never imagined I would have done as well as I have." Dennis has passed a number of exams on his way to achieving a CLAIT qualification, when previously he described himself as "not academic at all".

"I was comfortable in my own career before. I never had to think about job search, interview process or covering letters. Application forms didn't apply in road haulage. To sit a formal interview [mock interview practice] was totally alien to me." Describing how his approach to employment has completely changed, Dennis explained how he now sends speculative letters to companies, something he has never done before. He also talked about researching local companies who may be interested in him.

Asked about what was most important to him at college, Dennis said "the whole package". He described independent living skills, learning to use a computer and passing exams (something he never did before). The work placement (at a road haulage company working on tracking systems) showed him what he could do "as a blind person in work".

The work placement has given him "so much confidence and self belief", because he is now able to teach his employer things like short cuts on the keyboard. But most important of all, the work he is doing there is "real work, that the company needed doing".

Summing up, Dennis said:

“It’s been life changing. Personally I’ve gone through the ceiling. I can present myself in a proper manner... Now, I read the job description and person spec and it means something to me. I can read in-between the lines. What I’ve learnt has given me so much more of a chance [to find work].”

7.7.6 Postscript

We received an email from Dennis a few months ago explaining that after another two-week placement close to his home, organised by the college, he has been offered a full-time job working in the transport office in the New Year.

7.8 Case 6: Grace – Level 3

Service accessed: RNIB employment advice.

Table 29: Summary of assessed levels in Case 6

Data source	Level
1st screening tool – score	2
1st screening – EC judgement	3
1st screening – client judgement	1
2nd screening tool – score	2
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	3
2nd screening tool – client judgement	1

7.8.1 Background

Grace worked for a social firm for seven years before being made redundant in April 2011. She worked a 37-hour week. She had previously been employed by the same social firm between 1980 and 1984. Her only other paid work includes working for a short period of time as a packer. Grace has no formal qualifications. She is able to use a computer, although her preferred medium is large print which she reads with the aid of a magnifier. She is able to read Grade 1 braille and some Grade 2, but she states that she has not studied this braille since 1979. Grace was registered blind in 1982 and is a guide dog owner, which is her primary mobility aid. She is a competent, independent traveler that uses the local bus service to get around. Grace was 48 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living in large city.

7.8.2 Programme

Grace was referred to the Work Choice programme but after the initial assessment it was decided that it would be unrealistic for her to gain employment in six months. A European Social Fund contract was deemed a better alternative. Having worked with RNIB for over six months, Grace recently chose to put her engagement with RNIB on hold until further notice due to personal difficulties.

7.8.3 Assessment process

Both 1st and 2nd screening tool interviews assessed Grace to be a Level 2 client. However the EC disagreed with this assessment on both occasions, instead classifying Grace as a Level 3 client. “Although she is keen to work, has no mobility issues and is reliable, she does have poor literacy and numeracy skills and has no other experience other than helping to manufacture on a production line. There are very few unskilled, manual, factory type jobs in the city she lives in and she doesn’t have many transferable skills.” At the time of the 2nd interview little had changed. The EC raised the possibility that Grace may have “learning disabilities” but questioned whether he had a right to make such a claim. We discussed how our screening tool could pick this up, but the EC felt this would be a difficult conversation to have with a client; especially if the client lacks self awareness.

7.8.4 EC/Client interaction

Grace is supported to look for work on a weekly basis; complete applications forms and send her CV to potential employers. She requires support to complete application forms, as her literacy skills are not at the required level.

Grace is very keen to work in a factory environment. She has achieved two interviews to work in social firms, one in a laundrette and one manufacturing kitchen cabinets. Unfortunately she was unsuccessful on both occasions. She was given mock interviews and support prior to each interview, where she performed satisfactorily. However, in the interview proper she has not performed well and the feedback after her interviews has been quite negative. “It is proving very difficult to instil in to Grace that she must sell herself, be enthusiastic and appear to really want the job.” Her previous successful appointment with a social firm did not involve a competency-based interview. “In my opinion, Grace also has an unrealistic perception of what is expected in the work place and at interview. I feel that this is largely due to her only working in supported employment.”

According to her EC there are very few employment opportunities that match Grace’s skill set. Her confidence is ebbing and for this reason the EC has been helping her to apply for Pets as Therapy (voluntary). Grace has a guide dog that she can take into care homes and hospitals. Patients have an opportunity to interact with the dog, which can aid recovery. “It is hoped that this work will increase Grace’s confidence, improve her communication skills, move her out of her comfort zone and provide recent experience for her CV.”

7.8.5 Client evaluation

Grace did not really understand the screening process, but in discussing the different levels she did say “[I’m as] close as I’ll ever be, but it’s about finding a job.”

Grace was happy with the support she receives but feels that “being disabled, it’s not easy getting a job. There are no factory jobs”.

“[I have] worked in a factory for nine years. Not interested in an office job but there’s nothing out there. All my family have been in factories.”

7.9 Case 7: Kathy – Level 4

Service accessed: Action employment advice.

Table 30: Summary of assessed levels in Case 7

Data source	Level
1st screening tool – score	4
1st screening – EC judgement	4
1st screening – client judgement	–
2nd screening tool – score	–
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	–
2nd screening tool – client judgement	–

7.9.1 Background

Although Kathy was only recently made redundant, she worked for a local council factory in a repetitive role under supported employment. She is unable to read print or braille and has no computer skills, and

is registered severely sight impaired. She has very basic independent living skills and no means of searching for a new job, which at the time of referral consists of looking in local shop windows. Kathy's parents have been present for her meetings, reflecting Kathy's lack of independence. The EC believes that Kathy "would love to engage in a regular meaningful working pattern again; however the journey to help her develop new skills in a suitable environment with an empathetic and understanding employer is likely to be over the longer-term, particularly in the present climate." Kathy was 52 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living in a medium sized urban town.

7.9.2 Programme

Kathy was part of the Work Choice programme, and has been working with Action for approximately four months. The case remains open.

7.9.3 Assessment process

The 1st employment screening tool (EST) only was completed; EC and EST both in agreement that Kathy was a Level 4 client. Kathy cancelled the 2nd screening tool interview due to illness; however the EC provided an assessment

based on his experience of working with Kathy up to this point. He felt that Kathy would have remained a Level 4 client, as the limited progress Kathy has made would not have affected the scoring system.

7.9.4 EC/Client interaction

Kathy has begun a basic level IT training course with the local society, but is very much at the keyboard navigation stage of learning. However this connection has improved the quality of her week; Kathy now accesses a number of activities through the society. Based on the ECs advice and recommendations Kathy's parents have been helping identify local employers to approach regarding a work placement. They have also been searching for suitable volunteering opportunities and attend every advice interview with Kathy. The EC provides full job-search support due to access to information limitations, and has helped Kathy to develop a CV and covering letter to use for potential work placements/volunteering. The EC has also passed on important information; for example explaining the support available through Access to Work. He has also explained the benefits of the Equality Act, steering Kathy towards vacancies that offer a guaranteed interview. Kathy's difficulties will be exacerbated as she is coming to the end of contribution based job seekers allowance, which may disconnect her from mainstream support.

7.9.5 Client evaluation

Unfortunately our client evaluation interview was also cancelled due to Kathy falling ill. This client remains an instructive case study because of the barriers to employment she faces as a "Level 4" client. These are compounded by the erosion of supported employment as an option alongside the decline in repetitive, "production line" manufacturing work.

7.10 Case 8: Susan – Level 4

Service accessed: Action employment advice.

Table 31: Summary of assessed levels in Case 8

Data source	Level
1st screening tool – score	2
1st screening – EC judgement	4
1st screening – client judgement	3
2nd screening tool – score	2
2nd screening tool – EC judgement	2
2nd screening tool – client judgement	2

7.10.1 Background

Susan was last in paid employment more than five years ago, although she secured two job interviews in 2008. Having experienced sight loss in childhood, Susan describes the large impact sight loss has had in her life. Susan lacks confidence in her abilities although is reluctant to share her sight loss with others. For example, she is unwilling to use mobility aids despite having difficulties getting around outside her home. With no recent training or voluntary work experience, Susan lacks clarity about her future employment goal. Her personal computer had also broken rendering job search difficult. She was 41 at the time of the 1st ENABLER interview, living in a large urban town.

7.10.2 Programme

Susan self-referred to Action services and received support on a non-contract programme basis. She worked with Action for six months, but the case is now closed (at Susan's request) whilst she concentrates on her college work.

7.10.3 Assessment process

The first employment screening tool (EST) assessment scored Susan as a Level 2 client, although the EC felt she was actually at level 4 (for all the reasons above). However, by the time of the 2nd screening tool interview five months later, both EST and EC agreed that Susan was now a Level 2 client. The EC described how Susan's "confidence [has] improved due to going to college"; how she has bought a laptop and is using the computer well and finally that the "client is [in] a much happier place now; full of plans and ideas".

7.10.4 EC/Client interaction

Susan received support with a range of employment related issues including: understanding the person specification and job description; creating a job searching list with a weekly job search activity plan; the creation of a CV and discussions about voluntary work. Susan quickly became adept at organising things for herself and her confidence blossomed. She volunteered at a local blind society and sought further volunteering opportunities when this proved insufficient. Susan met with the Guide Dog Association regarding mobility and signed up for a 30 week course in a natural healing discipline. She also sought support from RNIB emotional support services in dealing with her sight loss.

7.10.5 Client evaluation

Susan was not really able to distinguish the screening process or the support she received about employment from the help she received from Action in general. For example, Susan received support from Action across a number of different areas, including counselling, benefits advice, housing as well as employment. Susan's experience at the hospital seemed to lead to a drop in confidence, mainly because of the way the consultants talked about her eye condition and how it would deteriorate. She has felt much more positive about herself and her future as a result of meeting people with sight loss and discovering "what they are able to do". Susan didn't feel part of the "human race" when she was diagnosed with sight loss but is feeling a lot more positive about her future.

"I had lost confidence going out...worried about tripping up over chairs in a room...I don't seem to worry about that as much because I get help from [Action]."

She has regained a lot of confidence as a result of attending a course at a local college. She is considering doing another course which will help her to develop her employment skills. "I feel more confident about working and that I'm worth something." Finding out about services such as Access to Work has also helped Susan to think about work.

"The main thing [the EC] has given me is the confidence to be part of the workforce again. I didn't feel important and felt people saw me as useless."

8. Discussion and next phase

In this section we present the key findings and the plans for the next stages for the project. Phase 1 of the ENABLER project developed a pilot employment screening tool which the potential 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 client’s 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 evaluation of services.

Phases 2 and 3 of the ENABLER project sought to evaluate this pilot screening tool through trialling its use by ECs and clients. Specifically the trial sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What have we found out about the quality of the screening tool?
2. What have we found out about the employment services?

Drawing upon the key findings presented in the results sections of this report we explore the answers to these research questions in turn, and also consider the implications for the next phases of the ENABLER project.

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

The research has provided evidence of the qualities of the screening tool in three inter-related areas:

- 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?
- Do stakeholders think the screening tool is useful, appropriate and sensitive?

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

The research has provided encouraging evidence that the screening tool offers useful discrimination of clients in relation to distance from the labour market. The key data is presented in the following table.

Table 32: Findings/recommendations and source of evidence related to screening tool discrimination

Finding	Evidence
Employment coordinators (ECs) agree with the current formula for calculating client distance from the labour market in about 50 per cent of cases.	Analysis of first and second screening assessment.
Where EC and the formula differed it appears that ECs most commonly would judge clients to be further from the labour market (though not always).	Analysis of first and second screening assessment.
There is evidence that clients' scores of their own distance from the labour market are more positive than those offered by ECs or the screening tool formula.	Analysis of second screening assessment; client interviews.
Areas in which the current formula could be modified to include different questions (which differentiate and discriminate more effectively) are: Computer skills; and Access to information.	Analysis of first screening assessment.
Areas in which the current formula could be modified to use different criteria for categorising responses as closer or further from the labour market might include: Education level; independent travel; and explaining visual impairment.	Analysis of first screening assessment.
Approaches to using more static (or medical) aspects of clients' lives as part of the screening process needs further thought (for example level of vision, additional health or disability issues).	Analysis of first screening assessment.

The original reason for not using questions related to medically defined variables (for example level of vision, age, additional disabilities) in the first draft of the screening tool was linked to our discomfort to include criteria beyond the control of the client (or beyond the intervention of employment-based services). It seemed (and seems) inappropriate to categorise clients' distance from the labour market based upon these fixed criteria. Nevertheless, research findings from elsewhere do demonstrate a clear link between employment and these variables, so it seems unhelpful to ignore them. A solution for the next version of the screening tool might be for ECs to use these variables as "qualifiers" which they draw upon to modify a client's score as necessary, that is if they judge the variable (for example vision or health) to interact in such a way to mean the client is further from the labour market than the screening tool formula calculates.

In relation to other redevelopments of the screening tool, the EC focus group provides more specific areas in which the screening tool might be improved. Combined with the additional points raised within the text of the report this is a helpful initial redevelopment list for the research team to focus upon in the next phase of work:

- Need to review levels in the segmentation model – there is a considerable jump between levels as a client could actually be situated between two levels, for example where someone has a lot of motivation, volunteering and work experience but who need training in IT. Review levels to see movement within and between levels to perhaps include sub-categories (for example 2.1, 2.2, 2.3) to reflect the subtleties of clients' progress.
- Increase confidence scale from four-point scale to a six-point scale.
- Better navigation and numbering for ECs using screen-readers: possibly create a simplified version by removing instructions.
- Competence versus confidence: Maybe have additional questions to ask about a client's competency and not just their levels of confidence. EC wishes to know how well a client is able to do a task, for example not just whether they use a PC but how frequently and competently do they type a letter, compose a work-related email and so on.
- Review "urban versus rural" locations and a client's ability to access to mainstream services. For instance, clients in rural parts of the country may not have access to public transport (which affects screening question on "independent travel").

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

The research has provided encouraging evidence that the screening tool can usefully measure changes in distance from the labour market over time. While the research design means that there are some confounding of variables there are reasons to be optimistic about the screening tool's potential application and development. The key data is presented in the following table.

Table 33: Findings/recommendations and source of evidence related to screening tool measurement of change

Finding	Evidence
Over the period between the first and second screening assessment there is some evidence that clients (as a group) have moved closer to the labour market (as scored by ECs and the screening tool formula).	Analysis of first and second screening assessment.
Few questions within the screening tool identified general group changes over the period between the first and second screening assessment. Possible exceptions are: more clients have completed job preparation courses; more have prepared CVs; more have clearer idea of the target job; more have awareness of support available in employment (for example Access to Work); more have increased confidence using mobile phones for non-phone calls (texting, “smart” applications).	Analysis of first and second screening assessment.
Caution is required interpreting and generalising the findings because of limitations of the research design (limited numbers, limited and inconsistent length of time between first and second screening assessment, and clients having experienced different types of service).	Analysis of first and second screening assessment.
Clients appear to be relatively positive about the services they have received in terms of reducing their distance from the labour market (“distance travelled”), improved job search behaviours, knowledge of employment opportunities, and confidence. However, this progress appears not to be evident in the changes observed across the two measures of the screening tool.	Client interviews.

8.1.3 Do stakeholders think the screening tool is useful, appropriate and sensitive?

It is encouraging that both EC and clients were both positive about the potential of the screening tool.

Table 34: Findings/recommendations and source of evidence related to stakeholder “buy in”

Finding	Evidence
Although recollection was not always clear, clients were broadly positive about the aims, purpose and realisation of the screening tool. In the main clients felt that the screening tool was sensitive, although useful specific areas of development were raised.	Client interviews.
ECs remain positive about the approach taken and purpose of the screening tool. The focus group involved constructive discussion about developing and improving the screening tool.	EC focus group (and previous EC consultation)

8.2 What have we found out about the employment services?

Caution is required interpreting and generalising the findings in relation to evaluating the employment services involved in this research. This is because of the limitations of the research design (limited numbers, limited and inconsistent length of time between first and second screening assessment, and clients having experienced different types of service). Even so, the research provided some useful, if incomplete, data.

Table 35: Findings and source of evidence related to employment service quality and process.

Finding	Evidence
Over the period between the first and second screening assessment there is some evidence that clients (as a group) have moved closer to the labour market (as scored by ECs and the screening tool formula).	Analysis of first and second screening assessment.
Clients appear to be relatively positive about the services they have received in terms of reducing their distance from the labour market (“distance travelled”), improved job search behaviours, knowledge of employment opportunities, and confidence. However, this progress appears not to be evident in the changes observed across the two measures of the screening tool.	Client interviews.
Over half the clients felt they had some involvement in the design of the services they were receiving, and the majority were broadly satisfied with their involvement.	Client interviews
Well over half clients said they felt more optimistic as a result of the service (and although of concern, only three clients felt less optimistic).	Client interviews
Nevertheless, positive comments were by no means universal. Some concern and disappointment was expressed by some clients about the quality of support they had received (particularly analysis of the unstructured comments appears to reveal a number of clients who were less satisfied). This seems to be particularly true of those who were on Work Choice in England, or were from clients who appeared to be unsure of the scheme / service they were receiving.	Client interviews

8.3 Final reflection

It is worth reflecting at this point on the question groupings used within the screening tool in this first research phase. Coleman and Parry (2011) state there are a number “core” characteristics associated with employability which apply to all jobseekers and should be included in any assessment model. These include: age, gender, children, qualifications, health problems, location, employment background and housing tenure (p25). All of these characteristics have been included at different points in the screening tool development, but as the toolkit evolved several were removed. This is because of the difficulties associated with our specific aim to screen job seekers, that is making judgements about a person’s employability in such controversial areas (legally and professionally) as age, gender and children. Others were removed through expediency (location and housing tenure), although “location” has been re-introduced for the next phase. Housing tenure is covered by the outcome measurements developed as part of the Improvement, Innovation and Impact (3Is) project through Action.

It is important to reflect upon the relative success of our strategy of developing an assessment model which differed from that suggested by Coleman and Parry. One of our rationales for selecting the areas of data collection in the ENABLER assessment toolkit was that the assessment tool focussed upon some of the specific areas where services for blind and partially sighted people are seeking to make a difference. Some of these are “generic” (for example job search skills), while some are “visual impairment-focussed” (for example mobility, information access). Others (many of which are linked to “core” characteristic as identified by Coleman and Parry, 2011) are more contextual variables. That is, while (for example) age and gender are important variables when understanding a clients’ job needs they do change in response to services, and therefore we do not believe them to be useful parts of a “distance travelled” measure. Positive responses from stakeholders about the screening tool are encouraging that this general strategy was valued.

Another rationale for the design of the screening tool was that existing tools gathered details on the more generic issues. For example, as described in the previous ENABLER report, a distance travelled measurement tool has been incorporated into Work Choice through the STEPS database (based upon research into the lessons learned from WORKSTEP). Twenty-one behaviours were identified from the research as being vital in terms of employability, and these have been included within STEPS. Clients self-assess in each area, from which ECs are required to generate actions if the clients judge they are not

sufficiently skilled in a particular area. These areas are (taken from Purvis et al, 2009, p115–118):

- Key skills for work: Job seeking skills, understanding requirements of employment, delivery requirements of employment, health and safety, reliability, equal opportunities.
- Additional skills for work: Time management, adaptability, motivation, concentration, problem-solving.
- Behaviour and communication: Communication skills, appropriate behaviour, supervision, team working.
- Personal development: Literacy and numeracy, self-esteem/confidence, personal presentation, living skills, independent travel, health and well-being.

Although not the focus of the ENABLER work, through open consultation during the first research phase we have learnt something of the ECs' experience of the WORKSTEP/STEPS approach. Although informally discussed, some ECs appear to have found the approach administratively burdensome. To this extent, asking ECs to carry out more data collection for the ENABLER project may have added to the pressure they may have felt.

There was also concern from some (again informally gathered) that the data gathered within STEPS was unable to show distance travelled. It could also be the six-month time limit for Work Choice clients that has hampered the effectiveness of measuring progress over time, for example clients furthest from the labour market may not be able to make the changes necessary in six-months in order to find work.

This does not mean that ECs are unaware of the importance of measuring progress over time. Indeed throughout the project we have heard ECs reflect upon the lack of recognition of work programmes for customers making progress which has not resulted in employment (and, arguably, this has been an incentive for many to be involved in ENABLER). It may be that EC's relative positivity towards ENABLER was that they felt that the screening tool offered them a greater opportunity to demonstrate the impact of their work (that is distance travelled by their clients).

8.4 Next phase of work

Phase 4 and 5 of the project will continue to refine the new assessment tools, but will also seek to inform the design of new service interventions that move people closer to the labour market. The project team will work with Action regions in the South West, East of England and London and the South East, as well as RNIB Scotland. We will work closely with a group of 13 clients

identified as furthest from the labour market (that is Level 3 and 4 clients). Clients may already be known to us through our earlier work or new clients screened as Level 3/4 job seekers. The aim of this phase of work will be to enable client and EC to agree interventions and joint action plans that are most likely to assist blind and partially sighted people to progress towards employment, and to inform more suitable interventions which centre upon the client's expressed ambitions and aspirations. Importantly, this reviewing process will also seek new ways to support the client in a more holistic way. This phase of work will seek new ways to meaningfully engage, motivate and support clients who are furthest from the labour market. Some of these interventions may not necessarily lead directly to employment, but will however support the client to reach their full potential.

More recently, Action's Improvement, Innovation and Impact project has taken the principles behind the Outcome Star suite of products and adapted these into a simplified, standardised set of "outcome ladders". This is currently being trialled in Action teams in Manchester and Leeds, with a report on progress due in February 2012. The areas covered extend beyond employment to include: eye health, emotional well-being and motivation, safe care and safe living environment (ILCO) economic well-being, gaining employment/volunteering, retaining employment/volunteering, accessing information/technology, mobility and finally, meaningful use of time/social inclusion. The links between ENABLER and the Improvement, Innovation and Impact project and the development of a standard operating framework are recognised and we are working together to ensure best practice.

9. References

Coleman N and Parry F, 2011. **Opening up work for all: The role of assessment in the Work Programme.** Advanced Personnel Management. Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion.

Purvis A, Lowrey J and Law R, 2009. **Exploring a Distance Travelled approach to WORKSTEP development planning.** A report of research carried out by Northumbria University, Centre for Public Policy on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

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.

RNIB would like to thank Big Lottery Fund for their generous support with this project.



LOTTERY FUNDED

© RNIB 2013 Registered charity number 226227

Action for Blind People Registered charity number 205913