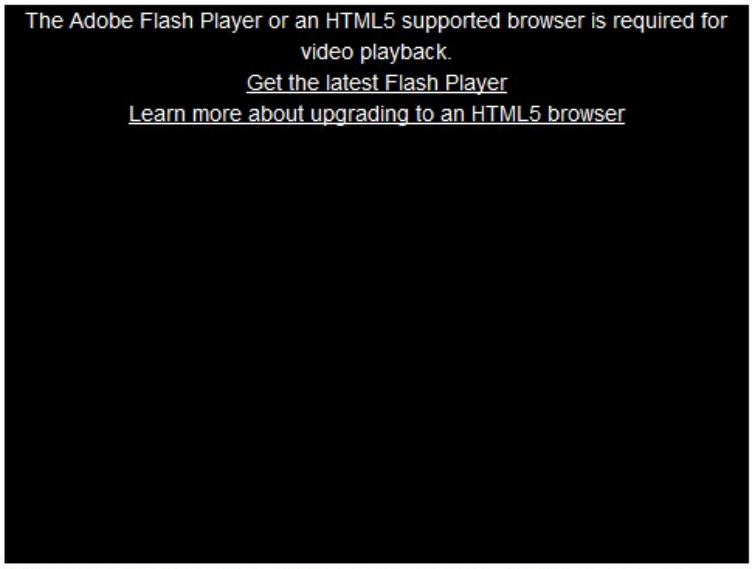
The ENABLER project: experimental new action-based beneficiary led employment research

This three year research project aims to improve the employment prospects for thousands of the UK's blind and partially sighted population. Using a Big Lottery Fund grant, the RNIB, Action for Blind People and the University of Birmingham (Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research, VICTAR) aim to ascertain key employment needs amongst blind and partially sighted job seekers. Throughout the three year project, we will work with blind and partially sighted individuals to develop a standard assessment model and best practice guide, to ensure all blind and partially sighted job seekers receive the right services.

The video below, produced by the RNIB, highlights some of the work of the ENABLER project



Drawing upon the experience and expertise of Action employment co-ordinators and existing clients we will develop a means of classifying our blind and partially sighted job seekers according to their distance from the job market. Successful identification and classification of our client base will ensure we provide appropriate support to a broad range of job seekers. It will also create a mechanism by which clients' progress towards employability can be effectively monitored.

The ENABLER project will also utilise the experience of blind and partially sighted job seekers to inform the research design of new service interventions that move people closer to being 'ready for work'. In particular we will focus on the employment needs of those furthest from the labour market.

Current employment services fail to address the additional complex needs facing many blind and partially sighted people; such as other disabilities, low educational attainment, a lengthy unemployment history and mental health problems. This is because existing funding mechanisms are weighted towards job outcomes. Consequently, employment services tend to concentrate on clients who are 'job ready'. Blind and partially sighted individuals with additional complex needs who are not yet ready for employment become further marginalised as a result.

The ENABLER project will deliver a method for showing the positive changes blind and partially sighted people are making, including those people furthest from the labour market, as a result of our employment support services.

The research findings will be used to influence European Union and Government policy as well as other major service providers.

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