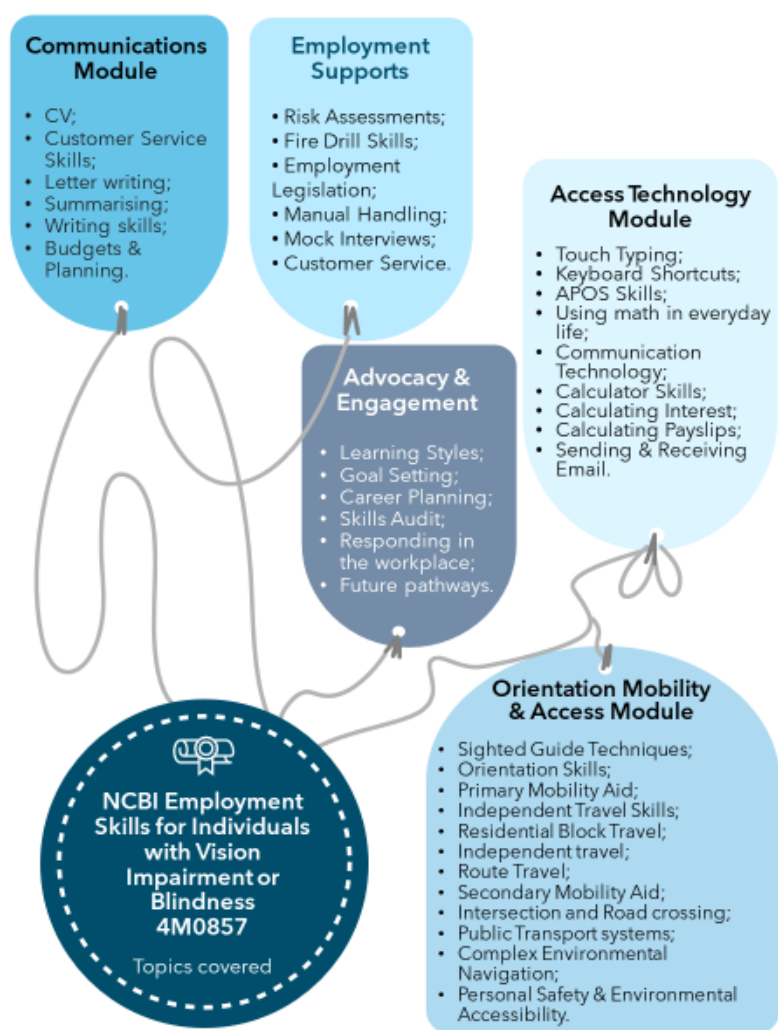


NCBI's Bespoke Major Award (QQI Level 4) in Employment Skills for people with visual impairment or blindness

The statistics in the 2016 Census indicate that the level of labour force participation amongst people who are blind and vision-impaired in Ireland is only 24.4%. This means that less than 1 in 4 people with impaired vision are currently actively participating in the labour force. This data and other evidence highlighted the need to develop a syllabus within Ireland that is relevant to the core components of rehabilitation training for visually impaired individuals to facilitate better outcomes. QQI (Quality and Qualifications Ireland) was identified as the most credible framework to provide individuals with an accreditation that is recognised and transferable nationally and to improve the skills and knowledge of individuals within the programme.

Benchmarking data from other disability and ETB providers, and in consultation with QQI, level 4 was found to be most appropriate for the target audience. As such the framework for a new bespoke major award has been developed by NCBI with programme development assistance from NCU Training Ltd. The 5 modules that formulate the award are Communication, Access Technology, Rehabilitation Studies (Orientation, Mobility & Access), Employment Supports and Advocacy and Engagement - illustrated in Figure 1 below.



Orientation and Mobility skills are essential for preparing individuals for employment. A lack of proper mobility training, access to the built environment and inaccessible public transportation pose some of the most significant obstacles to individuals who are blind or vision impaired. Due to the significance of this evidence, it was imperative that this formed a core component of the award.

A Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) devised new content for an Orientation and Mobility Module comprising 12 topics, the topics deliberately and sequentially providing progression from Sighted Guide techniques through to Independent Travel. It incorporates innovative assistive technology to ensure it is relevant in today's society. This Module within the Employment Skills for Individuals with Vision Impairment or Blindness (4MO857) is available as a minor award and was specifically developed to give recognition to the significant effort made by people with vision impairment to gain invaluable skills, without which independent access to the community is not possible.

The key features of the newly validated QQI Accredited Programme are:

- A nationally recognised qualification at level 4 of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), will help employers to have realistic expectations about the skills and competence of potential employees that have vision impairment.
- The Orientation Mobility and Access module is now a separate minor award that is now recognised on the NFQ at level 4 worth 15 credits.

This new programme combines the Better Outcomes Framework (best practice approach used in Rehabilitation Training for learners with a vision impairment based on the Expanded Core Curriculum) with a QQI accredited major award, Employment Skills, at level 4 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

The Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) is a foundation, essential curriculum that prepares students who are blind or visually impaired for success in second level education. The ECC has evolved through decades of instruction by leading educators and was only formalised by Dr. Philip Hatlen in 1996. (E-Learning, Perkins School for the Blind). Today the ECC is widely accepted by educators of students who are blind or visually impaired and continues to be the framework for innovation and educational programme design. There are nine components of the ECC: Compensatory Access, Sensory Efficiency, Assistive Technology, Orientation & Mobility, Social Interaction, Recreation & Leisure, Independent Living, Self-determination & Career Education.

Using this combination, the team at the National Training Centre created a programme that allows learners to fully participate in all aspects of the curriculum:

- A 2-week work placement supported by the team and the National Training Centre to ensure accessibility and support independent travel.
- Assessments that have been carefully mapped to simulate skills necessary for full participation in the labour force.

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- Learning outcomes that must be reinterpreted to update the award, making it relevant to the lives of people with vision impairment in the 21st century.

Learning outcomes were carefully considered to ensure the content was accessible, realistic and achievable for learners who have vision impairment.

One of the key considerations for the content in the award was the inclusion of Maths. a QQI programme requirement. The maths components were evaluated and reinterpreted to reflect maths in everyday life and everyday scenarios that affect the lives of learners with vision impairment.

NCBI Employment Skills for Individuals with Vision Impairment or Blindness (4M0857) aims to promote choice and independence by facilitating learners to develop the competencies and skills required to enter the labour force in meaningful roles.

In developing this programme, NCBI hopes to make significant progress toward decreasing the unemployment rates of individuals who are blind or have low vision in Ireland. Ongoing data analysis is key to measuring the success of this programme. Service data such as referrals, content delivery and outcomes will be measured and analysed to critique the ongoing success of the programme.

The team at the National Training Centre continue to develop relationships with a wide variety of workplace partners to support learners to gain valuable work experience as part of the programme. If you wish to partner to access NCBI's talent pool of suitably qualified candidates, please contact jodie.mcgriele@ncbi.ie (Lifecycle Manager: Employment, Training & Academia)

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References

<https://familyconnect.org/education/expanded-core-curriculum/>



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Jodie manages the Employment, Training and Academic services within NCBI, Ireland's leading charity for people with living sight loss, and has a Bachelor of Science honours degree in Psychology.

Jodie has a background in programme development and has a passion for universal design for learning and assessment, striving to achieve programming that encompasses user-centred design across the curriculum. Jodie is a Specialist in Orientation & Mobility and is an Access Consult for the Built Environment.

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