

Work After Stroke

Updated: April 2015

Review date: April 2016

Information For Stroke Survivors

The Work After Stroke research project team would like to thank all Different Strokes members who took part in the 3-year project, funded by the Community Fund. Your views and experiences have helped to inform this document and we gratefully acknowledge your contribution.

Returning to work or getting a job after stroke

- Been on sick-leave from work for a long time and want to get back to work
- Recently had a stroke and thinking about work-related issues
- Fully recovered from your stroke but worried about coping with the demands of your job
- Concerned about managing work and your disability
- Wondering how to make a new start in a new job?

About this document

Starting work after a stroke raises lots of questions and issues for many people, and this document aims to help you find the answers. In here you will find sections dealing with issues to consider:

1. while you are on sick leave or planning to start work
2. once you have started work
3. when you are looking for a new job or change of direction.

Each section includes relevant information about employment-related services and resources, followed by examples of the varied experiences and advice of the stroke survivors who took part in our Work After Stroke research project.

Where we think they will be helpful we also include some of the perspectives of the employers we interviewed during our research, and give you tips for dealing with them. (Please note that all names given have been changed to preserve confidentiality)

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Glossary of abbreviations frequently used in this document

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
DEA	Disability Employment Adviser
EHRC	Equality and Human Rights Commission (formerly Disability Rights Commission)
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
OT	Occupational therapist

1. Issues to consider whilst on sick leave or planning to start work

Will I be able to work after my stroke?

This depends on a wide range of factors including the severity of your stroke and impairments, the type of employment you were in before your stroke and want to do afterwards, attitudes of key people, how much support you receive ... and many more.

Once you are thinking about re-entering or beginning employment, consider:

- Whether you wish to work on a full-time or part-time basis
- Whether you want to go back to the same employer, job and responsibilities that you had before your stroke
- Whether you want to try something different or a new way of working

Some stroke survivors' experiences ... and advice

Most people need many months off work after a stroke. Doctors, therapists, benefits advisors, your employer and your family may all have different opinions about if, when and how you should work after stroke. Try to retain control over decisions about working. If you have a sympathetic employer, keep in contact with them while you are on sick leave. Talk through your thoughts, concerns and options with someone you trust and who will support you in making your decision.

Many feel that they would be more able to work if they had more rehabilitation from, say, the occupational therapist (OT) and physiotherapist. You may have to push for services from specialist staff to get you fit for work. If you don't get what you want, push some more.

Some people, like Lisa below, manage well once they start work after stroke or a long period of sick leave and find that working again boosts their recovery. Others report that the stroke leaves them feeling vulnerable and exposed and that their confidence is affected, or that the work they did before their stroke is too demanding afterwards because their cognitive and /or physical abilities are not what they used to be. Chronic fatigue is a common experience. Think about whether your expectations, skills and stamina match up to the work you want to do. Talk to your employer about a gradual return to work or a work trial to ease yourself in gently. Use the Different Strokes Facebook group (www.facebook.com/groups/differentstrokesuk) to talk to other stroke survivors, or call the Different Strokes helpline on 0845 130 7172.

“I can say that returning to work has been good for me as it gives me a sense of normality and purpose and I hope to continue as long as I can” (Lisa)

“Lessen your expectations of going back to a job that is too demanding for you” (Tina)

Some employers' perspectives... and how to handle them

Don't be surprised if changes occur within your organisation while you are away on long-term sick leave. If possible, find out about any changes and their likely effects on you or your position before you start back and talk to your manager if you are concerned. You may want to seek advice, perhaps from your Union.

Organisations have to think of the needs of their service users/customers as well as their employees. If you have a service-provision role, your employer will want to be sure you can still 'deliver' after your stroke. If not, or if adjustments cannot be made to help you in your role, redeployment may be worth exploring.

When should I look at returning to work? Who can help me decide the right time?

Some stroke survivors' experiences

Some people report being held back by others from starting work, despite feeling ready. Others feel pressurised into working too early after stroke, perhaps by financial needs or insufficient sick leave entitlement, or by employers, doctors or health/social care professionals who may underestimate the recovery time needed to get over difficulties associated with stroke (see Marie's example below). If you feel your doctor isn't being sympathetic towards you, make an appointment with a different doctor at the practice.

Try to start work when the time feels right for **you**. Don't push yourself to return to work too early. Take full advantage of any sick leave that is offered. A staged return to work, e.g. mornings only and a reduced workload for some time, has helped many get back to work, as Angela's case below illustrates. Try to build up hours and responsibilities gradually.

If you're unsure about when to return to work you could consider asking somebody who has been helping you during your recovery to liaise between you and your employer, e.g. your Occupational Therapist, psychologist or other key worker (see Karina's example below). A Disability Employment Adviser (DEA), from the Disability Service Team at your local Jobcentre, is another person who should provide advice and support.

If support is unavailable, discuss your situation with your employer and GP. Consider taking a family member or friend with you. If you do this, be clear with your supporter about their role. Again, take advice from other stroke survivors wherever possible.

"My GPs were initially trying to push me back to work, until I was re-examined by my consultant one year from my stroke. Because my consultant has stated clearly in a report that it is clear I will not be able to return to my occupation and my chances of employment on the open market are severely restricted by the residual effects of my stroke, my GPs are now very supportive" (Marie)

"I have returned to work part-time, every day 9 - 1pm. I have thought about full-time but I think it would be silly at the moment. I still get bad / good days. I have only been there at my job for 6 months but everyone's really nice, they always help if I need it but won't push it" (Angela)

“Work had kept my job open, but obviously prior to going back to work, we did have an interview with my employers to negotiate and tell them what I can and can't do... that was my occupational therapist and I think it was a psychologist who came with us as well” (Karina)

“The OT offered to try and negotiate a staged return to work, but she said she's had a variable experience with it, some employers are happy with it, some want you to come back or not” (Margaret)

Some employers' perspectives

Large, public organisations may find it easier than small, private businesses to keep your job open while you are on long-term sick leave or to offer a staged return to work, as they tend to have more human and financial resources (e.g. to fund your replacement while you are off). On the other hand, large organisations may be bound by formal policies which can mean less flexibility than smaller ones. If your employer can't offer you what you want, seek advice about alternative options that will enable you to work when and how it suits you: your local Jobcentre or an employment agency may be helpful, and a welfare rights organisation can advise about benefits you may be entitled to.

Many employers say they are concerned with health and safety issues and adhering to insurance conditions, so may not want you back until you are assessed as fit for work. Your employer may ask your GP, hospital consultant or an occupational health physician to do this assessment.

Employers may be happy to work with you and an advocate of your choice (e.g. OT, supportive colleague) to work out the best time for your return to work and help you in the workplace. You might need to be the one to get the ball rolling - so do not be afraid to suggest this.

What benefits am I entitled to whilst unable to work?

There is a range of benefits that you may be entitled to if you are unable to work, e.g. Statutory Sick Pay or Employment and Support Allowance. You may also be eligible for Personal Independence Payment which can be paid to you even if you do return to work. See the Different Strokes 'Benefits' booklet for further information or the GOV.UK website.

If getting the right information about benefits or applying for them proves troublesome, as some Different Strokes' members have found, ask somebody to help you. A family member, friend, the Citizens Advice Bureau or local welfare rights organisation.

What about the financial implications of starting work?

'Better off ' calculation

If you are concerned about a possible fall in your income when you start work, contact a DEA or an independent advice agency/local welfare rights organisation. Ask them to arrange a 'better off calculation'. This will gauge whether your financial situation will improve or worsen if you give up the benefits you are currently entitled to in order to work. You can also do this yourself online at www.entitledto.co.uk/help/better-Off-Calculation.

'Access to Work'

Access to Work can help you if your health or disability affects the way you do your job and your condition is likely to last 12 months or more. It gives you and your employer advice and support with extra costs which may arise because of your needs. Go to: www.gov.uk/access-to-work

Contact Access to Work on **0345 268 8489**. Print the 'Access to Work' eligibility letter and take to your employer. An advisor will then contact you to find out what help and support you require. It doesn't matter whether you are in a paid job, unemployed and about to start a job, or self-employed (however please note that you may not qualify if you receive Employment and Support Allowance whilst working). Your disability or health condition may not have a big effect on what you do each day but may have a long term effect on how well you can do your job. If you think that this applies to you, you should talk to an adviser.

'Access to Work' might pay towards the equipment you need at work, adapting premises to meet your needs, or a support worker. It can also pay towards the cost of getting to work if you cannot use trains or buses, and for a communicator at job interviews if you need one.

An Access to Work adviser will usually speak to you and your employer to reach a decision about the most effective support for you. Sometimes specialist advice from an independent agency may be needed, which the Access to Work adviser will help to arrange.

Once your adviser has decided on the package of support they feel is appropriate, you and your employer will receive a letter informing you of the approved level of support and the grant available. It is the responsibility of your employer - or you, if you are self-employed - to arrange the agreed support and buy the necessary equipment. An employer with 49 or less employees can claim repayment of all of the approved costs from 'Access to Work'.

Work Focused Interviews

If you are not currently working and are receiving Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) in the work related group, you may be summoned to attend a compulsory work-focused interview. This should provide an opportunity to assess the barriers you face in moving into work and also to draw up an action plan to overcome those barriers. In the future, it is the government's intention to increase the range of these interviews, possibly to include treatment, training and work experience.

Some employers' perspectives

Employers can also be concerned that they will be financially worse off by employing a person with a disability, e.g. they may perceive that they are responsible for covering all costs of adjustments needed and be unaware of funding that exists to help them. Give them a copy of this leaflet, explain about Access to Work grants, or suggest they speak to a DEA. It may be in your own interest to take the initiative here.

2. Issues to consider once you have started work

Permitted Work

This is work that you can do whilst on ESA and it allows you to test your capacity for work and perhaps to gain some new skills. Discuss it with your ESA personal adviser before starting.

Usually your ESA isn't affected if you:

- work and earn up to £20 a week
- work less than 16 hours a week, earn up to £104.00 a week for up to 52 weeks

Supported Permitted Work

You can also do 'supported permitted work' for less than 16 hours a week and earn up to £104.00 a week if your illness or disability very severely limits your ability to work.

Supported permitted work is supervised by someone from a local council or a voluntary organisation whose job it is to arrange work for disabled people.

If I am unable to continue in my old job, what are my options? Should my role be adapted or could I change positions?

Both these ideas are worth exploring. Negotiation is always the best way forward. Discuss with your line manager (with your supporter if necessary) difficulties you are encountering and how they might be eased.

The **Equality Act 2010** places a duty on employers to make “reasonable adjustments” for a disabled person in the workplace. You’re disabled under the [Equality Act 2010](#) if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

Some of the most effective adjustments include:

- changes to duties and / or allocating to another employee tasks which can no longer be done by the disabled person;
- transfer to another post;
- providing practical aids and technical equipment.

Find out more about the Equality Act from the Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS) on 0808 800 0082 or from <https://www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance>. Also see the information about Access to Work on page 9 - this may be useful.

Some stroke survivors’ experiences

Some people have successfully negotiated changes to their responsibilities or working hours so they can continue in their job. Esther, for example, was a landscape architect for a local authority prior to her stroke. She had a management role which she found stressful and wanted to drop that side of her work when she returned.

“When my boss came to see me while I was at home I did say that I didn't think I could carry on in that management role ... well they said 'well that's fine, don't worry about it, you won't have to do that anymore', and so that was dropped... really thankful for it”

In cases where employers have been unwilling to make appropriate adjustments, some stroke survivors have successfully used the previous Disability Discrimination Act (now part of the Equality Act since October 2010) to encourage their employer to do so. This may be necessary, but you may find employers more amenable to less confrontational tactics. Try asking somebody (e.g. an OT, union rep or DEA) to act as your advocate and negotiate alongside / for you. Agreeing to a trial period or job monitoring once adjustments are in place may help.

Some employers' perspectives

Businesses may seem more concerned about making money than they are about your needs, or your employer may have no or limited previous experience of employing a disabled person or making adjustments. Again, large, well-resourced organisations may be more able to handle a change of role for you than smaller ones. Ask them to keep you informed of any internal vacancies. Any employer may need help to find a way forward. You and / or your advocate may have to spell out your needs and rights and point to actions or services which may help your employer as well as you (e.g. Access to Work funds, see pages 9-10).

Whilst ideally employers should monitor how any changes are working out, this doesn't always happen. Employers may appreciate you taking responsibility for keeping lines of communication open and keeping them informed of your needs or for, say, setting up a formal support system. This will also help you to monitor whether your perceptions of adaptations your employer has made for you are the same as theirs... you'd be surprised at how much they can differ.

How can I make my employers and colleagues aware of the changes in me that the stroke has brought about without making them feel I am unable to do the job?

Some stroke survivors' experiences

A lot of people don't really know what a stroke is or don't understand the nature of the difficulties you are experiencing. Ignorance or embarrassment at their own lack of knowledge may lead managers and colleagues to behave in a way which leaves you feeling ignored or alienated:

"There didn't need to be adaptations but there needed to be some consideration that someone had had a bereavement and a stroke ... it was just not there" (Lucy)

"People should understand that a stroke does not just leave physical disabilities – there's a whole psychological and cognitive dimension to it" (David)

"They didn't talk about it, I was ignored" (Fiona)

The key to resolving such situations is education, education, education! One way of tackling this is to explain openly what has happened to you and how you are feeling now. If you feel that colleagues are wary of your new limitations, focus on positive aspects and let them know all the things that you are still able to do. Educate the people around you with videos, leaflets, books, etc about the effects of stroke, and what stroke is and is not. If this fails, or if you feel uncomfortable about doing this yourself, enlist the help of a professional who has worked with stroke survivors and ask your manager to invite them into the workplace to explain the effects of stroke.

Some employers' perspectives

Managers who have some personal experience or knowledge of stroke (e.g. a family member who has had a stroke) are often very aware of stroke survivors' abilities and difficulties, but you still may need to spell out to them what you can and cannot do. Some have said that they are willing to 'brief' other staff members about your abilities and needs, but would want your permission first so they don't breach confidentiality, 'label' you, or cause discrimination. Let them know what you would like them to pass on about you.

Managers' perceptions of how colleagues are reacting to you may be very different to yours. It may be up to you to let your manager know if colleagues are not being as supportive as they say or your manager thinks they are.

If I return to my previous job, what are my career prospects? Will stroke affect my chances of promotion and pay increase?

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for employers, regardless of the number of people they employ, to discriminate against current or prospective employees with a disability or who have had a disability. Discrimination occurs if, for a reason which relates to a disability, the employer treats that disabled person less favourably than the employer treats others to whom the reason does not or would not apply **and** the employer cannot show that this treatment is justified.

The Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS) notes that one common mistake is to overlook a disabled person for promotion to management or supervisory positions because they can't carry out some of the tasks due to their impairment. But very often the supervisor only needs to know how the task is done and not necessarily be able to do it.

Some stroke survivors' experiences

Some people feel their employer will not consider them for promotion because of their stroke or because they have had a lot of time off sick. They feel they have to work much harder than everyone else to prove their worth. Others have hidden their stroke or impairments from their current or potential employer in case it affects their chances of being treated fairly. These actions carry their own stresses; another option may be to educate your employer about your strengths (see previous section) and provide evidence of your achievements. If you are worried about your career prospects, speak to your line manager if possible, or the personnel department if your company has one.

Your union may be helpful if you feel that you are being discriminated against.

Some employers' perspectives

Many employers have said that their equal opportunities policies mean that they employ and promote the right person for the job, regardless of disability; therefore your chances of achieving promotion should be higher if your skills match up to the job specification. Again, tell your employer about any concerns you have about promotion.

I have returned to work, why do I feel unable to cope?

Some stroke survivors' experiences

For many stroke survivors, being back in work after a long time off sick can come as quite a shock, no matter how well-prepared they feel before they go back. They report that tasks that were easy before the stroke become arduous afterwards, and that regaining skills, confidence and stamina can take a long time. Jenny's quote illustrates the experiences of many:

"I'm not able to cope with my job anymore and I'm very unhappy as a result. It's not the physical side of working in an office that I have problems with, it's the mental stuff, like being organised and keeping my desk in order. Things I wouldn't have thought twice about pre-stroke. ... I really enjoyed work before I had the stroke but now it's making me so miserable. My boss and colleagues have been sympathetic, although I feel that this is beginning to wear thin, especially as a year has passed since I had the stroke" (Jenny)

If you feel unable to cope, talk to other stroke survivors, share experiences and find out how others have managed. Use the Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/differentstrokesuk or speak to somebody on the Helpline: 0845 130 7172. Remember that you are likely to keep improving over the years to come and you may not always feel this way. Talk to your manager too, preferably before things get too bad, and explore options for reducing your burden.

Don't give yourself a hard time if you feel unable to continue in the job or occupation you were doing before your stroke. Now might be a good time to reassess your options and consider a career change. Explore the different options that are available to you with the help of a DEA or the organisations listed on pages 31 to 32.

Formal redundancy

In general, the same arrangements, duties and requirements for redundancy will apply for disabled people as for non-disabled employees. It is normal practice for a consultation process with employees to be undertaken when redundancies are being considered. Employers need to ensure that any arrangements which are made for consultation do not discriminate against a disabled employee, e.g. ensuring that the person has received the relevant information, fully understands the proposals and has had the same chance as any other employee to contribute to the consultation process.

Disciplinary procedures and dismissal

In any disciplinary action, employers and their managers should take all steps to ensure that there is no discrimination due to disability. Dismissal on the grounds of capability (your ability to do the job) should generally only be made after careful exploration of all the possibilities for reasonable adjustments.

Some stroke survivors' experiences

An alarming number of stroke survivors in our research perceived covert or overt attempts by their employer to get them to resign and described the stresses that they caused. If this happens to you, open communication is generally the first strategy to adopt; if you can, talk things over with your line manager or, in larger organisations, the Personnel or Human Resources department. The problem might be, for example, ignorance or misunderstanding. Otherwise seek help, preferably before things get too bad, e.g. from your union, CAB, the EHRC or The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). Contact details can be found in the **Further Useful Organisations** section on page 31.

The examples below illustrate two different outcomes:

Maria felt that her employer was creating an environment at work which would cause her to fail so that they could sack her. When discussions with her manager broke down she got her union involved, but eventually left her job:

“... and my Union then negotiated a compromise agreement, just to get me out. I mean the Union wanted me to take them to an industrial tribunal, but at the time I just said, ‘I can’t, I haven’t got the energy’” (Maria)

Fiona also sought recourse to her Union and the Equality Act but it was her Personnel department who was central to her staying in employment:

“... Two years after I started work I got moved and he (boss) wanted me to do exactly the same thing that I'd done before... and I couldn't do it... and it was just, he was trying to edge me out... I was going to leave but I went into Personnel and they shifted me... It took me quite a long time to get over that” (Fiona)

One point to note is that taking action against an employer, attending tribunals etc, can be exhausting and energy-consuming. Mention the words 'union' or 'Equality Act' to some employers and their hackles visibly rise! Take advice and find out what will be involved before starting any procedures and ask someone you trust to support you though the process.

3. Issues to consider when looking for a new job or new direction

How can I find a new job?

Contact your DEA and ask for an Employment Assessment. This begins with an in-depth interview and, if appropriate, may include referral for assessment by an occupational psychologist. At the end of the assessment you will draw up an action plan with your DEA. You will be given a copy of this and of your employment assessment. There are various employment initiatives which may help you:

Work Choice – a voluntary programme to support disabled people in employment

This scheme aims to help people with disabilities whose needs cannot be met through other work programmes, Access to Work or workplace adjustments. This might be because you need more specialised support to find employment or keep a job once you have started work. It is a voluntary programme that is open to all people with disabilities of working age via JobCentre Plus.

You do not have to be claiming benefits to apply!

To qualify for Work Choice you must:

- be of working age
- need support in work as well as to find a job
- be able to work at least 16 hours a week after Work Entry Support
- have a recognised disability that means you find it hard to get or keep a job
- need specialist help that you can't get from other government programmes or schemes - eg workplace adjustments, suppliers working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus or Access to Work

You can apply if you have a job but are at risk of losing it because of your disability. This also applies if you're self-employed.

If Work Choice is suitable for you it should be tailored to meet your individual needs. It should focus on helping you achieve your full potential and moving towards being more

independent. Work Choice also aims to ensure employers get the support they need to employ more disabled people.

The Work Choice programme will be delivered by providers funded by the government. There are three different levels of support:

Work Entry Support

This will last for up to six months. You should receive help with personal skills and work-related advice to get you into supported or unsupported work.

In-Work Support

This will last for up to two years. You should receive help to start work and stay in your job.

Longer-term In-Work Support

You should receive help to progress in your job and where appropriate, help you move into unsupported work.

If you don't have a DEA and want to know more about Work Choice, contact your local Jobcentre Plus Office to arrange an appointment. Some other organisations who work with disabled people will also be able to talk to you about Work Choice. Partner organisations offering the programme include Remploy, Shaw Trust and Ingeus - contact your local council to find out who is involved in your local area.

Some stroke survivors' experiences

Reports from members suggest that some individual DEAs offer a better service than others. If you are unlucky and encounter somebody unhelpful, see if there is anybody else whom you can be referred to.

Like Tammy and Maria below, you may need to persevere:

"Just keep asking the right people - initially you will have to find out who they are! - if you can be prioritized" (Tammy)

“The first disability adviser that I met down at my local job centre was quite helpful and she arranged some interviews for me, but she left, and a new one came in and she hadn’t got a clue” (Maria, who found herself a job after four years’ hunting!)

See job hunting as an opportunity to choose a career. Spend some time opening up ideas. Lengthen the timescale you give yourself for getting a job. Think the unthinkable! Adapt to the changes your illness has forced upon you. Be upfront about your disabilities but focus on the positive. Tailor your CV to the specific job you are going for. Like Maria above, most stroke survivors we interviewed said it was their own determination and motivation that landed them a job... so...

... be patient / positive / proactive / persistent!

Who would want to employ me?

The GOV.UK website has a guide to “Recruitment and disabled people” at www.gov.uk/recruitment-disabled-people .

The booklet ‘Employing Disabled People, A Good Practice Guide for Managers & Employers’, points out that it makes good sense for employers to employ and retain disabled people because:

- disabled people have abilities, skills and experience to use at work.
- they are no more likely to be generally ill than their non-disabled colleagues
- employers are more likely to get the right person for the job
- customers and other staff can benefit from adjustments made for disabled people
- good practice can improve the company image and lead to better employee and public relations

There are over 1.3 million disabled people in employment in the UK. The following initiatives may help you to join them:



“Positive about Disabled People”

The Employment Services’ ‘two ticks’ disability symbol is a very visible way for employers to show that they are taking positive steps to employ disabled people. Employers have signed up to the disability symbol agree to take the following action:

- to interview all applicants with a disability who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and consider them on their own abilities
- to ensure there is a mechanism in place to discuss at any time, but at least once a year, what can be done to make sure they can develop and use their abilities at work
- to make every effort when employees become disabled to make sure that they stay in employment
- to take action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make the commitments work
- each year to review these commitments and what has been achieved, plan ways to improve on them and let employees and the Employment Service know about progress and future plans.

Contact your DEA to ask about employers that have signed up to the disability symbol in your area. Some employers adhere more conscientiously than others to the terms of the disability symbol. Report anyone who falls below the standard to the EHRC.

Remploy

Last year **Remploy** supported hundreds of people to find sustainable employment, in a wide range of roles with many of the UK's top employers from retail and administration roles, to contact centre jobs, warehousing & logistics, and catering.

Remploy's mission is to transform the lives of disabled people and those experiencing complex barriers to work by providing sustainable employment opportunities.

If you contact Remploy to find out more about their services for Jobseekers, you'll receive the support of a Remploy Employment Advisor to help you with a structured programme of

careers advice, including help with writing your CV, interview tips, advice about disclosing your disability and benefits advice. The Advisor can also offer job search advice, training and development or work placements,

Remploy also supports young people to get their first foot on the career ladder, whether that be after leaving school, college or university.

Contact Remploy on 0845 155 2700 or email info@remploy.co.uk to find out more about Remploy's services to see if they could be right for you.

Shaw Trust

This is a national charity which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently. It has helped over 400,000 people find a job or stay in work over the past 30 years. It is one of the Government's lead partners in the delivery of employment programmes for disabled and disadvantaged people. Before you find work it can help you with:

- Confidential advice
- Support and a service designed specifically to suit you
- A dedicated adviser to work with you on one-to-one basis

You will need to be referred by your local Job Centre Plus.

Some stroke survivors' experiences

Although employers often say that they recruit the best person for the job, regardless of whether that person has a disability, this is not always the perception of stroke survivors and disabled people. Some people, like Ian below, worry that admitting about a stroke or disability on an application form will mean employers will not interview them, let alone offer them a job. However, this is not necessarily the case:

"I filled in a few applications, and I put that I'd had a stroke but I'm not physically a problem, I'm OK, please give me an interview, give me a chance. Cause I thought if someone sees 'stroke', he ain't no good, but I sent off this application to this other company, and I've been there ever since. And they've been great with me"

It is a good idea to apply for jobs that you feel will suit your skills and to approach employers who are proactive in employing people with disabilities or who have resources to support you. That is what stroke survivor Daisy did: after leaving her job as a cleaner but finding work in a busy bakery too demanding, she became an assistant in a pharmacy:

“Where I am at the moment I feel a part of the community again, and I feel, even just standing behind the counter, I feel I'm helping the community... My manager's very good... and of course being a chemist I'm at an advantage anyway, because if anything goes wrong, if I get a headache or anything, he keeps an eye on me.”
(Daisy)

Some employers' perspectives

Some employers have expressed their willingness to have an informal discussion with job applicants before an official interview to discuss, for example, the nature of the job, your needs, etc. This is what happened in Maria's case, though in the quote below her employer points out that it was ultimately Maria's skills that landed her a job in a hospital for children:

“We didn't deliberately go out to seek someone disabled. There was a full structured interview and... Maria was the best person for job... employing someone who is... post-stroke... and having some profile around the unit, I think is good for the children.”

Where can I re-train? How will I support myself whilst I am retraining?

Some stroke survivors' experiences

Many people we spoke to felt that they benefited from training. They reported increased confidence in abilities and coping with difficulties and the development of new skills and job opportunities. Training in computer and IT skills has been particularly valuable in opening up new avenues.

The three cases below illustrate some of the benefits of training:

Ursula returned to her job as a library assistant after her stroke. However, she felt she had lost confidence and wanted help to develop her skills. She got a place with Momentum Skills in Scotland, who liaised with Ursula's employers about both her and her employer's needs as well as offering her support and training:

"Confidence is out the door 2 years ago, but now it's coming back slowly but surely... and I'm really grateful for it to come back. And they've showed me how to relax... and they showed me how to do the computers. And the support worker, she's helping me and is an agony aunt... she's SO nice. But the team in Rehab are excellent, really, really good. And they laugh and joke and all that. I like it"

Unlike Ursula, Andy did not return to his previous job after his course. He took an introductory counselling course:

"I wouldn't say it was enjoyable although aspects of it were, but the class became the highlight of my week because I really found it challenging"

With further training Andy qualified as, and now works as, a counsellor.

Zena began a degree course whilst on sick leave from her job. She felt this contributed to her recovery:

"I started an Open University psychology degree, and I'm now finishing my third year... and I think that was good because that was a way of using my time constructively. And I think it was quite good to use my brain and know I had one and it could be used again"

Accessing and participating in training may seem daunting, particularly if you have not studied before or for a long time. If you are unsure of what training you need or want,

discuss different options with an advisor (your DEA, OT or whoever is recommending courses). Be clear about what you need, have a goal in mind and select courses which will help you reach that goal rather than moving aimlessly from one course to the next. Select courses that offer support.

Some employers' perspectives

Some organisations will give you paid time off for training, so it is worth exploring this with your current or prospective employer. Others have mentioned that they would give time off for training but cannot fund it. Encourage your employer to seek advice - perhaps from a DEA - about funding that may be available to them, or give them a copy of this leaflet.

Should I try voluntary work?

Advantages to undertaking voluntary work are that it can provide valuable work experience and, possibly, training. Hours and attendance may be more flexible than for paid employment and it provides an opportunity for you to gauge how well you will manage in the workplace before starting paid work.

Starting or stopping voluntary work shouldn't affect your benefits (though if you are claiming Jobseekers Allowance you have to continue seeking work and be available to attend an interview at 48 hours notice).

For details of voluntary organisations in your area, contact

- Community Service Volunteers (CSV) on 020 7278 6601 (England), 0131 622 7766 (Scotland) or 02920 415 717 (Wales), Young Help Belfast on 0289 056 0120 (N. Ireland), or www.csv.org.uk/
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- local council or library.

The CVS may also advertise voluntary posts in the local newspaper. Other organisations such as Do-It – www.do-it.org.uk/ and Volunteering England www.volunteering.org.uk/ may also be helpful.

Is self-employment an option? How would I set about starting my own business?

There are lots of factsheets available on the GOV UK website at www.gov.uk/browse/business/setting-up for more information about everything from start-up grants and cash flow forecasts to getting help with exporting and breaking into new markets. Also see the self-employment checklist on the CAB website at www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/work_e/work_self-employed_or_looking_for_work_e.htm

If you are self-employed, it will make a difference to how you pay your tax and national insurance contributions and whether you have any employment rights. Remember, if you are self-employed, you do not have an employer you can take to a tribunal. Also see information about Access to Work on pages 9-10.

Some stroke survivors' experiences

The main benefit of self-employment is independence: you will be working in a job, environment and way that suits you and allows you to develop your skills; but it doesn't suit everyone. Run through the checklist below, based on stroke survivors' experiences, to see if self-employment is for you:

- Do you like working alone? If you are used to working in a team and need positive feedback from others about your work, you may miss this.
- Have you got enough initiative?
- Are you a worrier? Getting business and keeping the money coming in can be stressful.
- How sound is your judgment in your chosen area? The more you know your stuff and your market, the better.
- Are you prepared and able to do the routine and inevitable weekly paperwork? If not, you will need someone to support you with this.
- How good a salesperson are you? It's about getting business again.
- Will your family be understanding and supportive? Family members may be an invaluable asset.
- Can you afford it? One person we spoke to said: *"I think the hardest thing is trying to find a level that you can live at reasonably"* (Bernie)

Moving into self-employment is challenging but may be possible. The right support and technology help a lot, as Bernie found:

“I think I would go self-employed for 90% of people with physical problems or visual problems or whatever, because I think that once you've got that enabling technology to do the job, you can do the job”

What if I can't stay in my job, get another one or I don't want to go back to work?

Some stroke survivors' experiences

For some stroke survivors, being back at work or looking for another job just does not work out. There are all sorts of reasons for this, ranging from difficulties overcoming the effects of stroke such as fatigue or physical impairments, to employer-related factors such as negative attitudes or their unwillingness to make the right adjustments. Don't give yourself a hard time if you leave the workforce or if working does not suit you. The main thing is to give yourself some time, but stay open to any opportunities that arise. Not working may enable you to focus on your own health and recovery. You might consider retraining, a change of career or doing voluntary work.

Finally, remember, that there is life after work, as these stroke survivors found:

“Since then I've been concentrating on getting my health back into some order and becoming independent in my daily routine” (Karina)

“I go to a resource centre twice a week which I enjoy very much, they have helped me a great deal. I try to give something back in return and help the other clients there, which gives me great pleasure... I must say when one door closes another opens so they say. It has happened to me, I have found two talents I never had, I paint and also write poetry although I have dysphasia... I have had several of my poems published in our local paper... I have also designed a garden for our local community on a piece of waste ground” (Paul)

“I actually done a chapter of a book which is being published through a lady who's wrote a book on rehabilitation... I must admit when the weather's nice I don't really miss work” (Carole)

Information on Work, Employment Advice and Retraining

Ability Net

PO Box 94, Warwick, CV34 5WS

Tel: 01926 312847 Advice helpline: 0800 269545 Website: www.abilitynet.org.uk

Free information and advice on any aspect of the use of a computer by a disabled person and an individual assessment of technology needs. Also sells adapted computer equipment and offers full training and technical support.

Community Volunteer Services (CVS UK)

The Levy Centre, 18-24 Lower Clapton Rd, London E5 0PD

Tel: 020 3780 5870 Email: information@cvs.org.uk Website: www.csv.org.uk

A national charity that offers volunteering opportunities.

Disabled Workers Co-operative

130 Wells Rd, Glastonbury, Somerset BA6 9AQ

Website: www.disabledworkers.org.uk

Registered charity with an on-line database of skills, services and products disabled people have to offer.

Ingeus

Tel: 0121 386 6958

Email: info@ingeus.co.uk Website: www.ingeus.co.uk

A range of employment programmes including the Work Programme and Work Choice.

Momentum Scotland

Momentum, Pavillion 7 Watermark Park, 325 Govan Road, Glasgow, G51 2SE

Tel: 0141 419 5299

Email: headoffice@momentumscotland.org Website: www.momentumscotland.org

Person-centred programmes enable people to gain the skills, training and experience needed to live independently with an equal chance of finding mainstream employment.

Queen Elizabeth's Foundation For Disabled People

Training College, Leatherhead Court, Woodlands Rd, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 0BN

Tel: 01372 841100 Website: www.qefd.org

Vocational training or retraining for sustainable employment for adults with disabilities, especially those forced to change career direction through accident or illness.

Remploy

18C Meridian East, Meridian Business Park, Leicester LE19 1WZ

Tel: 0845 1552700

Email: info@remploy.co.uk Website: www.rempoy.co.uk

Provides a range of employment services to support disabled people and those experiencing complex barriers to work into gaining and retaining sustainable employment.

Shaw Trust

Shaw Trust Enquiries, Shaw House, Epsom Sq, White Horse Business Park, Trowbridge, Wilts BA14 0XJ

Work Choice enquiries Tel: 0300 3033111

Work Programme enquiries Tel: 0345 234967 or 0300 2472550

Website: www.shaw-trust.org.uk (email contact forms on website)

A national charity which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently. The UK's largest third sector provider and a lead partners in the delivery of employment programmes for disabled people.

Further Useful Organisations

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

Head Office: Euston Tower, 286 Euston Road, London, NW1 3JJ

Helpline: 08457 474747 Website: www.acas.org.uk

It aims to improve working life through better employment relations.

GOV.UK

Website: www.gov.uk

Large amounts of benefits information and information for accessing JobCentre Plus services. Staff on the enquiry line can answer general questions about benefits for disabled people and send out date-stamped claim forms for most benefits.

Do-it (Volunteering Made Easy)

Website: www.do-it.org.uk

Search through one million opportunities to volunteer and apply online.

Equality and Advisory Support Service (EASS)

Freepost MID 02164, Stratford-Upon-Avon, CV37 9BR

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com Helpline: 0808 800

Information advice and support on discrimination and human rights issues to individuals in England, Scotland and Wales

National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB)

Myddelton House, 115-123 Pentonville Rd, London, N1 9LZ

Tel: 020 7833 2181 (admin only – no advice) Website: www.nacab.org.uk

CAB advice website: www.adviceguide.org.uk

Info on benefits, tax, national insurance, self-employment and most other legal matters.

Prince's Trust

18 Park Square East, London, NW1 4LH

Tel: 020 7543 1234 Website: www.princes-trust.org.uk

Its Enterprise Programme supports unemployed young people aged 18-30 to work out if their business ideas are viable and whether self-employment is right for them.

Downloadable business guides are available from the website.

Volunteering England (part of NCVO)

Regents Wharf, 8 All Saints Street, London, N1 9RL

Website: www.volunteering.org.uk

Committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity.

Working Families

1-3 Berry Street, London, EC1A 0AA

Helpline for parents and carers: 020 7253 7243

Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Advice on flexible working, maternity rights, maternity discrimination, paternity rights, in-work benefits.