

Work and mental illness

Getting a job

Many people find work fulfilling and important for their wellbeing and development. You may have given up work because of mental illness and now feel ready to go back, or perhaps you want to earn your own money. Maybe you are looking for something to do with your time or to help your recovery. This factsheet explains your options for finding work.



KEY POINTS

- You could try different types of work. For example voluntary, supported, part-time or full-time work.
- Various organisations offer help and support with finding work.
- If you tell an employer that you have a disability, it is illegal for them to treat you badly because of this.
- Work can affect your benefits. This depends on whether you get paid and the number of hours you work.
- You might need to think carefully about whether you would be better off going back to work or staying on benefits. Ask a local benefits advice organisation to do a 'better off calculation' for you.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What types of work could I try?](#)
2. [What support is available to help me find work?](#)
3. [Should I tell an employer about my mental illness?](#)

1. What types of work could I try?

There are several options you can try:

- volunteering
- part-time work
- full-time work
- self-employment
- apprenticeships
- employment projects

We look at these options in more detail below.

Volunteering

Voluntary work is a good starting point for getting into work. You can try out different roles and get a feel for what you are interested in. Voluntary work could improve your chances of getting a part-time or full-time job.

You are allowed to do voluntary work while claiming Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance and Incapacity Benefit. This can be a good option if you have been out of work for a long time, or if you have a severe mental illness.

Usually the organisation you volunteer for will pay your expenses. You may decide that voluntary work is a suitable alternative to paid work because you can keep your benefits more easily.

Part-time work

Working part-time means you can ease yourself into work more gradually than you would in a full-time role.

You could also have the flexibility to do some other things during the day, such as go to therapy appointments, do some extra training or look after your children. However, you should get some advice about how any work will affect your benefits. Remember, you will have to pay for lunch and travel out of the money you earn.

You can also claim these benefits if you are in paid work and working less than 16 hours a week and earning less than £102 a week.

Full-time work

If you are getting certain welfare benefits, the Department for Work and Pensions will class any work over 16 hours a week as full-time.

If you are returning to full-time work after a period of illness, think about what made you unwell. If you were stressed because of work, think of ways to try to reduce stress. This could involve a change of role or job. You should think about how your benefits will change once you start working and whether you will have any additional costs such as travel costs.

A local welfare rights advice charity, such as Citizens Advice or a Law Centre, can do a calculation to see whether you will be better off in full-time or part-time work.

Self-employment

Self-employment is a popular option for people with disabilities. You can set up a business in a number of ways, including as a sole trader, partnership or company. You will have to think about how you will register, run the business and deal with any debts.

There are organisations that can give you information about self-employment. Business Support provides free advice about setting up and running a business and Business Debtline gives advice about dealing with business debts. You can find contact details for these organisations in the 'Useful Contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.

Apprenticeships

If you know the type of career that you want but do not have the experience, skills or qualifications, an apprenticeship may be a good option for you. An apprenticeship will give you the opportunity to learn on the job, get qualifications and earn a small wage.

You can get an apprenticeship in a wide range of roles, including agriculture, horticulture, health, public services and leisure. You can contact the National Apprenticeship Service for more information. Their details are in the 'Useful Contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.

Employment projects

There are employment projects in some parts of the country. Some of these projects offer jobs to people with disabilities. You may get ongoing support from a caseworker.

This work should not affect your benefits if the Department for Work and Pensions see it as 'supported permitted work'. You should check whether this work is likely to affect your benefits before you start.

You could speak to your care co-ordinator or a Disability Employment Adviser at your local Job Centre Plus to find out if any projects are available in your area.

2. What support is available to help me find work?

There are lots of schemes, programmes, organisations and training providers that can help you into work.

- Local charities
- National charities such as Shaw Trust and Remploy
- Local authority schemes
- Help from social services
- Jobcentre Plus schemes and Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) at the Jobcentre
- Careers advisers
- Support from friends and family

You may have to be claiming benefits to use some of these services.

Different services offer different sorts of help. This may include:

- help with developing skills, abilities and experience,
- identifying suitable job opportunities,
- help with writing a CV,
- help with interview techniques,
- providing information about local job opportunities, or
- supporting you in work.

Not all of these options will be available where you live.

Jobcentre Plus, part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), offers national schemes to help people access work.

- Access to Work
- The Work Programme
- Work Choice

There is more detailed information about these schemes below.

Access to Work

Access to Work can help if you are:

- in a paid job,
- about to start a job or work trial, or
- are self-employed and have health or disability needs that affect your ability to do your job.

You and your employer can get advice and support about costs related to your illness. This could include help with putting 'reasonable adjustments' in place for you.

You can get more information on reasonable adjustments in our **'Discrimination and mental illness'** factsheet from www.rethink.org .Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

You can find out more about Access to Work online at <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview> or by contacting the scheme directly:

Access to work

This is funding provided to pay for practical support if you have an illness.

Telephone: 0345 268 8489

Address: Operational Support Unit, Harrow Jobcentre Plus, Mail Handling Site A, Wolverhampton, WV98 1JE.

Email: atwosu.london@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview>

Work Programme

The Work Programme aims to support people claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to find work. Some people have to do it (it is mandatory) and some people can choose to do it (it is voluntary).

Different organisations run the Work Programme in different areas. Jobcentre Plus deals with all referrals to the Work Programme.

The Work Programme		
Your Circumstances	Do I have to do it?	When you start
JSA claimant aged 25+	Yes	12 months after claim
JSA claimant aged 18-24	Yes	9 months after claim
JSA claimant recently moved from incapacity benefit	Yes	3 months after claim
JSA claimant facing significant disadvantages (e.g. homelessness)	No	3 months after claim
Income related ESA claimant in work related activity group	Yes	3 months before claimant is expected to be fit for work

All other ESA claimants	No	Any time after your ESA decision
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You can get more information on JSA and ESA in our **‘Welfare benefits and mental illness’** factsheet from www.rethink.org. Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

Once you are on the Work Programme, you will have regular meetings with an adviser. This person should help you with the skills you need to find a job such as improving your application writing and interview techniques.

Some people tell us that they do not feel ready to take part in the Work Programme. They may feel that it puts them under pressure to take steps towards finding a job before they are ready to do so. Other people value the support that they get during the process.

You may feel that you are being asked to do too much, or that you have not been treated fairly. If you have any problems with the Work Programme, raise these with your personal adviser. All Work Programme providers will have complaints procedures, which you can use if you cannot resolve a problem through your adviser.

Work Choice

Work Choice aims to help people with disabilities get into or stay in work when the Work Programme or Access to Work is not appropriate. Work Choice should also give employers the support they need to employ more disabled people.

Level of help	What you get	Length
Help to get a job	Advice on work and personal skills to help you find a job	Up to 6 months
Support in work	Help to start work and stay in your job	Up to 2 years
Long-term support in work	Help to get on in your job and work without support	Long-term

You can only access Work Choice through the Jobcentre Plus. The disability employment adviser (DEA) has to refer you to it, so if you are interested in this scheme, you should make an appointment to speak to your nearest DEA.

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3. Should I tell an employer about my mental illness?

In most cases it is up to you whether or not to tell them. But health questions are standard in some careers, such as the armed forces and professional jobs in teaching and healthcare.

The law limits the questions that employers can ask you about your health before offering you a job. An employer should only ask you questions for specific reasons that the law allows, such as to find out whether you will be able to do the work or to ask whether you need support at the interview.¹

You may choose to tell an employer about your mental health condition during the application process. It may be helpful to tell an employer for the following reasons.

- Some employers guarantee an interview to disabled people who meet the minimum criteria for the role.
- If you need 'reasonable adjustments' at interview, then you would need to tell the employer that you have a disability.

Your employment does not have to make reasonable adjustments unless they know, or should know, about your illness.

However, telling an employer that you have a mental illness could lead to unfair treatment when applying for a job. This sort of behaviour is more likely in small companies that do not have proper recruitment policies. Although you are protected by discrimination law, it may be hard to prove that the employer treated you badly because of your mental illness rather than a fair reason such as lack of experience.

If you tell your employer, concentrate on the attributes that employers will value, despite the barriers that your illness may cause. Your experience of mental illness may have given you useful skills, such as:

- problem solving,
- the ability to work with and relate to different sorts of people,
- determination,
- diplomacy, and
- creativity.

If you choose to tell an employer during the application process, you can tell them on the application form, on a covering letter, or at the interview stage.

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ADVICE - BENEFITS AND EMPLOYMENT

Citizens Advice offers free, confidential impartial and independent advice. They have expertise in dealing with benefits and work issues. You can find out more and find your local bureau at the following websites:

Telephone: 03444 111 444

Address: Citizens Advice, 3rd Floor North, 200 Aldersgate, London, EC1A 4HD

Email: via website

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/ www.adviceguide.org.uk

The **Disability Law Service** can provide information on all matters surrounding disability which includes work and discrimination. They may help you challenge decisions which discriminate against you as a disabled person.

Telephone - 020 7791 9801

Address: Disability Law Service, 39-45 Cavell Street, London, E1 2BP
National Advice Line - 020 7791 9800 (Mon-Fri 10am–1pm, 2pm–5pm)

Email: advice@dls.org.uk

Website: www.dls.org.uk

The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** is an independent statutory body that aims to help eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.

The EHRC helpline closed in Oct 2012 and has been replaced by the 'Equality Advisory Support Service':

Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS)

Telephone: 0808 800 0082 (Mon-Fri 9am-8pm and Sat 10am-2pm)

Address: FREEPOST Equality Advisory Support Service, FPN4431

Website: <http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/>

VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering England is an independent charity and membership organisation, committed to supporting, enabling and celebrating volunteering in all its diversity. They have an England wide network of volunteer centres. You can find a centre close to you on their website.

Telephone: 020 7713 6161

Address: Society Building, 8 All Saints Street, London, N1 9RL

Website: www.volunteering.org.uk

Do-it was launched in 2001 with the first national database of volunteering opportunities in the UK.

Website: www.do-it.org.uk

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Remploy is one of the UK's leading providers of employment services to people with barriers to work.

Telephone - 0300 456 8110

Address: Remploy, 18c Meridian East, Meridian Business Park, Leicester, LE19 1WZ

Email: employmentservices.osc@remploy.co.uk

Website: www.remploy.co.uk

Shaw Trust is a national charity which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently.

Telephone: 01225 716300

Address: Shaw Trust Enquiries, Shaw House, Epsom Square White Horse Business Park, Trowbridge , Wiltshire , BA14 0XJ

Website: www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Richmond Fellowship offer a wide range of housing, care, employment and community support services for people with mental health problems throughout the country.

Telephone: 020 7697 3300

Address: Richmond Fellowship
80 Holloway Road
London
N7 8JG

Website: www.richmondfellowship.org.uk

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

The government's **Business Support Helpline** provides free business advice and support online and through local advisers.

Telephone: 0300 456 3565 (Mon-Fri 9am - 6pm)

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/browse/business>

Business Debtline is a charity that provides free debt advice to small businesses over the telephone. They also have a website with useful factsheets and sample letters.

Telephone: 0800 197 6026 (Mon-Fri 9am - 5pm)

Website: www.bdl.org.uk

OTHER

National Apprenticeship Service is responsible for apprenticeships in England. There is comprehensive information about apprenticeships in England on their website.

Telephone: 0800 015 0400 or 0247 682 6482

Email: nationalhelpdesk@apprenticeships.gov.uk

Website: <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/>

National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance to help you make decisions on learning, training and work opportunities.

Telephone: 0800 100 900 (8am - 10pm daily)

Email: via website

Website: <https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk>

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¹ s 9. *Equality Act 2010*, c15.

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This factsheet is available
in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

Feedback

PO Box 68795

London SE1 4PN

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.



Leading the way to a better
quality of life for everyone
affected by severe mental illness.

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0300 5000 927
Email info@rethink.org

www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to www.rethink.org for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights. Or talk to others about your problem at www.rethink.org/talk.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0300 5000 927. We are open 9am to 5.30pm, Monday to Friday and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us between 10am and 2pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

Can you help us to keep going?

We can only help people because of donations from people like you. If you can donate please go to www.rethink.org/donate or call **0300 5000 927** to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors' generous support.



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