

Work and mental illness

Getting a job

Many people find work is important for their mental health. And that work helps them feel good about themselves. You may have stopped working because of mental illness and now feel ready to go back. This factsheet explains your options for finding work. This factsheet is for people with mental illness who are looking for work and their carers.



KEY POINTS

- You could try different types of work. Like voluntary, supported, part-time or full-time work.
- Work can affect your benefits. This depends on whether you get paid and the number of hours you 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.
- You can think about asking an employer to make 'reasonable adjustments' to help you.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What types of work could I try?](#)
2. [Will working affect my welfare benefits?](#)
3. [What support is available to help me find work?](#)
4. [Should I tell an employer about my mental illness?](#)
5. [What are 'reasonable adjustments'?](#)

1. What types of work could I try?

There are several options you can try such as:

- volunteering,
- part-time work,
- full-time work,
- self-employment,
- apprenticeships, and
- employment projects.

We look at these options in more detail below.

Volunteering

Voluntary work is a good starting point for getting into work.

The following are things to consider about voluntary work:

- You don't get paid. But you might get paid expenses.
- It can allow you to try out different roles and get a feel for what you are interested in.
- It can improve your chances of getting a paid job.
- It can be a good option if you have been out of work for a long time, or if you have a severe mental illness.

You can search for voluntary work by using the websites in the '**Useful contacts**' section at the end of this factsheet.

Part-time work

If you work part-time:

- you work but don't work full-time, so you might work for 10, 16 or 20 hours a week,
- you can ease yourself into work more slowly than you would in a full-time job,
- you will usually have to pay for lunch and travel out of the money you earn, and
- you can have the time to do other things during the day, such as:
 - go to therapy appointments,
 - do some extra training, or
 - look after your children.

Full-time work

Full-time work usually means working at least 35 hours a week.

If you want to full-time work after a period off illness think about the following things.

- What made you unwell.
- Ways of reducing stress if that was a problem before.
- If you need a change of job or role.
- Any reasonable adjustments you want to ask your employer about – see section 5 of this factsheet for more information.

- How work affects other areas of your life. This might be looking after your children or having time to do things you enjoy. This is known as 'work – life balance'.

Self-employment

If you are self employed:

- you work for yourself,
- you might have your own business,
- you don't work for an employer who pays you a salary,
- you can decide how, where and when you do your work, and
- your income might not be guaranteed in the same way as working for an employer.

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 like:

- **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.

You can also find out more information about being self-employed by clicking here: www.gov.uk/working-for-yourself.

Apprenticeships

You might know the type of job that you want to do. But you might not yet have the experience, skills or qualifications to do the job.

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.

You might have difficulties because of your mental health condition. If you do you might be able to get help from the Remploy – Supporting apprentices scheme.

Their details are in the 'Useful contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.

You can find out more information about apprenticeships by clicking here: www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide

You can find apprenticeships by clicking here: www.gov.uk/apply-apprenticeship

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.

To find out if any employment projects are available in your area you can contact:

- your care co-ordinator, if you have one,
- a Disability Employment Adviser at your local Job Centre Plus, and
- the organisations Remploy, The Shaw Trust, Steps to Employment and The Richmond Fellowship - their details are in the 'Useful contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.

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2. Will working affect my welfare benefits?

Whether working affects your welfare benefits can depend on:

- what benefits you are claiming,
- whether you are volunteering or doing paid work,
- how many hours a week you are working, and
- how much you are earning.

You should think carefully about whether you would be better off going back to work or staying on benefits. You can ask a benefits advice organisation to do a 'better off calculation' for you.

You can get advice about how work will affect your benefits.

You can get advice from your local Citizens Advice office. You can find their contact details in the 'Useful contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.

You can also search for local benefits advisers by using the following websites:

Turn 2 Us: <http://advicefinder.turn2us.org.uk>

Advice UK: www.adviceuk.org.uk/find-a-member

Or you can contact the Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service on 0300 5000 927 and we can search for you.

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

You can do some work and still get ESA. This is known as permitted work. Permitted work usually means you:¹

- work less than 16 hours, and
- earn less than £120 a week.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

PIP is not means tested. This means that it is not affected by your income, capital or savings. So any money you earn by working will not affect the amount you get under PIP.

If you work you can still get PIP as long as you meet the PIP criteria.

You can find more information about

- **Employment and support allowance**
- **Personal Independence Payment**

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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3. 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 such as:

- local charities,
- national charities such as Shaw Trust, Remploy, Steps to Employment and the Richmond Fellowship,
- Bipolar UK Employment service,
- local authority schemes,
- help from social services,
- Jobcentre Plus schemes and Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) at the Jobcentre,
- careers advisers, and
- support from friends and family.

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

Details of some national charities and careers advice help can be found in the 'Useful contacts' section at the end of the factsheet.

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, and
- 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 and Health Programme
- Work Choice
- Specialist employability support

There is more detailed information about these schemes below.

Access to Work

Access to Work can help if you are:²

- 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. Please see section 5 of this factsheet for more information on 'reasonable adjustments'.

You can find out more about Access to Work online at www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview. You can apply online.

You can contact the scheme directly:

Access to work

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

Telephone: 0345 268 8489

Textphone: 0345 608 8753

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

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

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

Work and Health Programme

From Autumn 2017 the government plans to introduce the Work and Health Programme. It is planned to replace:³

- the Work Programme, and
- Work Choice.

The Work and Health Programme is at the 'green paper' stage at the moment. This means that the government want to bring it in. But it is not definite at the moment.

If you are on the Work Programme or Work Choice you can stay on them. You can no longer join the Work Programme if you are not already on it.⁴

You can still apply for Work Choice (see 'Work Choice' below) at the moment.

The Work and Health Programme will provide specialised employment support for:⁵

- people with disabilities, and
- people who have been unemployed for over 2 years.

People with disabilities can choose whether to do The Work and Health Programme or not.⁶

The DWP have not published more details of the Work and Health Programme yet.

The Work Programme

The Work Programme aims to support people claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to find work. The Work Programme stopped taking new participants on 1 April 2017, but if you started on the Work Programme before this date you will still be on it.⁷

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

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.

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.

You can find more information about ‘**Welfare benefits and mental illness**’ at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

Work Choice

The Work Choice scheme can help you get and keep a job if you have a mental health condition and find it hard to work. But only if your condition is a disability as defined in the Equality Act 2010. Which means that it:⁸

- must have a substantial affect on your day to day activities, and
- be long term, lasting 12 months or more or likely to last 12 months or more.

Work Choice can help when Access to Work is not appropriate.⁹

You can get help with:¹⁰

- training,
- building your confidence,
- finding a job that suits you,
- interview coaching, and
- developing your skills.

| 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 1 year |

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.¹¹

You can find out more about Work Choice on this website:

www.gov.uk/work-choice/overview

Specialist employability Support

You might not be eligible for the Access to Work or Work Choice schemes. But you might be able to get support through Specialist Employability Support.¹²

The scheme provides mentoring and training to help you into work if you're disabled. But only if your condition is a disability as defined in the Equality Act 2010. Which means that it:¹³

- must have a substantial affect on your day to day activities, and
- be long term, lasting 12 months or more or likely to last 12 months or more.

You can find out more about Specialist Employability Support from the following link:

www.gov.uk/specialist-employability-support/overview

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

It is usually up to you to decide whether to tell an employer about your mental illness.

Before you are offered a job

The Equality Act says that an employer can not ask you questions about your health before they offer you a job.¹⁴ This is to stop discrimination because of your health.

An employer can ask you questions if they need to find out:¹⁵

- if you need any reasonable adjustments for the interview,
- if you will be able to do something that is part of the job,
- personal information to track who is applying for jobs with them- This helps with their equality and diversity policies,
- if you could be part of an employer's scheme that favours disabled people, or
- if you have a disability that you need for the job(for example, an employer with a project for deaf people may want a deaf person to run it).

You don't have to answer health questions before you are offered a job. Unless you have a specific type of job where you have to tell the employer

You could try to find out why the employer is asking these questions. This may help you decide whether or not to answer them.

Once an employer offers you a job, they can ask you health-related questions.

You may be given a 'conditional' offer of a job. This means that getting the job depends on certain things. An employer might say your job offer is conditional on satisfactory references and health or disability checks.

An employer can then ask questions about your health. If at this stage your job offer is withdrawn you may be able to make a claim of disability discrimination – see 'Unfair treatment' below.

Reasonable adjustments

It may be helpful to tell an employer about your mental illness so they can make 'reasonable adjustments'. This might help you during the interview and recruitment process or if you get the job.

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

Please see section 5 of this factsheet for more information on reasonable adjustments.

Guaranteed interview

Some employers guarantee an interview to disabled people who meet the minimum criteria for the role.

The employer might be part of the Disability Confident scheme. These employers encourage applications from disabled people.

If the employer of job advertisement has this symbol it means they are part of the Disability Confident scheme:



Telling your employer

If you tell your employer think about the strengths and skills you use to cope with and overcome your mental illness.

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,
- setting goals, 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.

Gaps in your CV

When you fill in an application form or write a CV you have to include an employment history.

You might have gaps in your employment history. These gaps are periods where you couldn't work because of your mental illness.

The following are things to think about when telling an employer.

- It is best to be honest. If you are not and the employer finds out later it could lead to problems for you. Honesty is a good quality that employers value.
- You don't have to go into everything in detail.
- You might have been employed for a long time and held different positions. You can put your more recent positions only on your CV. This might cover up any gaps from years ago.
- You can sometimes tell the employer the years but not the months that you were employed. This might mean you don't have to explain a gap.
- Employers will generally be used to job applicants having gaps in their employment. It is how you deal with it that could make the difference.
- Think about the positives from your break in employment. Instead of just saying you were too ill to work you could say things like:
 - "To get myself well enough to start working again I"
 - "I used the following skills and strengths to overcome the challenges I faced"
 - "I learn the following things....."

If you are offered an interview you will probably be asked about gaps in your employment.

You can plan what you are going to say. It is your chance to impress the employer with:

- how you dealt with the situation,
- what skills you used, and
- what you learnt.

Jobs where you have to tell the employer

In some jobs you have to tell the employer about your health. This is because of regulations that apply to these professions. These jobs include:

- teachers,
- nurses and doctors, and
- the armed forces.

If you don't tell the employer you could face disciplinary action later on.

Unfair treatment

Telling an employer that you have a mental illness could lead to unfair treatment when applying for a job.

You may be protected by discrimination law. But 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 think you have been discriminated against because of your mental illness you can get advice from The Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS). Their details are in the 'Useful contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.

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5. What are 'reasonable adjustments'?

Under The Equality Act 2010 employers have to take certain actions to help people with disabilities. This includes many people with a mental illness.

Under The Act employers have a duty to change their procedures and practices. They have to do this to remove the barriers people face because of a disability.

Disabled people can ask employers to change their procedures and practices. As long as it is reasonable. The Act calls this the duty to make 'reasonable adjustments.'

The Equality Act defines a disability as being:¹⁶

- a physical or mental impairment,
- long term – has lasted at least 12 months or likely to last 12 months, and
- has a substantial adverse effect on your ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

You can ask for reasonable adjustments during the recruitment process. So you might ask for a reasonable adjustment to make it easier for you to go to an interview. You can also ask them if you get the job.

Reasonable adjustments for employees with a mental health condition include:

- offering flexible working patterns, including changes to start and finish times and adaptable break times,
- changing your working environment, for example providing a quiet place to work,
- working with you to create an action plan to help you manage your condition, and
- allowing you leave to attend appointments connected with your mental health.

You can find more information '**Discrimination and mental health**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.



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 your local office on their website:

Telephone: 03444 111 444

Webchat: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/web-chat-service/

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/

The Disability Law Service

Provides 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: 0207 791 9800 (Mon-Fri 10am–1pm, 2pm–5pm)

Address: Disability Law Service, The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR

Email: advice@dls.org.uk

Website: www.dls.org.uk

Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS)

An organisation that gives practical advice and information about the Equality Act 2010 and discrimination.

Telephone: 0808 800 0082 (Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm, Saturday 10am to 2pm)

Address: FREEPOST EASS Helpline FPN6521

Email: via website

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com

Apprenticeships

National Apprenticeship Service

Responsible for apprenticeships in England. There is comprehensive information about apprenticeships in England on their website.

Telephone: 0800 015 0400 (8am to 10pm, 7 days a week)

Email: nationalhelpdesk@findapprenticeship.service.gov.uk

Website: www.apprenticeships.org.uk

Remploy – Supporting apprentices

This free service supports apprentices who are feeling low or upset or struggling to keep up with their apprenticeship.

Telephone: 0300 456 8210

Email: apprentices@remploy.co.uk;

Website: www.remploy.co.uk/supportingapprentices

Careers advice

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: www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk;

Charities

Remploy

One of the UK's leading providers of employment services to people with barriers to work.

Telephone: 0300 456 8110

Email: employmentservices.osc@remploy.co.uk

Website: www.remploy.co.uk

Shaw Trust

A national charity which supports disabled and disadvantaged people to prepare for work, find jobs and live more independently.

Telephone: 0345 234 9675

Email: support@shaw-trust.org.uk

Website: www.shaw-trust.org.uk

Steps to Employment

Aims to assist disabled people who need the most support to enter work or undertake work-related training, courses and activities.

Telephone: 0808 100 3134

Email: info@stepstoemployment.co.uk

Web: www.stepstoemployment.co.uk

Richmond Fellowship

Offers 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

Bipolar UK – Employment Support Service

Support, advice and resources if you have bipolar and you are finding it hard either to get work, or to do your work when you're there. There are charges for some of their services. Includes a booklet "An employee's guide to bipolar and employment", which you can download for free.

Telephone: 0333 323 3880

Address: Bipolar UK, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB

Email: employmentsupport@bipolaruk.org

Website: www.bipolaruk.org/support-for-employees

Self-employment

Business Support Helpline

This government service provides free business advice and support online and through local advisers.

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

Email: enquiries@businesssupporthelpline.org

Website: www.gov.uk/business-support-helpline

Business Debtline

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 – 5.30pm)

Email: via website **Website:** www.businessdebtline.org

Volunteering

Volunteering Matters

Includes a volunteering position search facility.

Telephone: 020 3780 5870

Email: via website

Website: www.volunteeringmatters.org.uk

NCVO

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

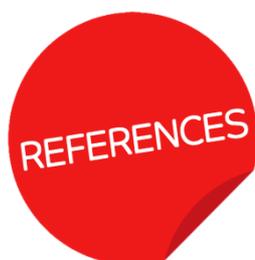
Website: www.ncvo.org.uk

Do-it

A national database of volunteering opportunities in the UK.

Website: www.do-it.org.uk

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¹ Gov.uk. *Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) 4. Eligibility*

<https://www.gov.uk/employment-support-allowance/eligibility> (accessed 31 July 2017)

² Gov.uk. *Access to Work. 1. Overview* <https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/overview> (accessed 31 July 2017)

³ House of Commons Library. *Work and Health Programme.*

<http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7845> (accessed 31 July 2017)

⁴ Gov.uk. *Help with moving from benefits to work. 2. Job search programmes.*

<https://www.gov.uk/moving-from-benefits-to-work/job-search-programmes> (accessed 31 July 2017)

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, Department of Health. *Work, health and disability green paper: improving lives*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/work-health-and-disability-improving-lives/work-health-and-disability-green-paper-improving-lives> (accessed 31 July 2017)

⁶ As note 5

⁷ As note 4

⁸ s9, Equality Act 2010 c15.

⁹ Gov.uk. *Work Choice. 3 Eligibility.* <https://www.gov.uk/work-choice/eligibility> (accessed 31 July 2017)

¹⁰ Gov.uk. *Work Choice. 2. What you'll get*, <https://www.gov.uk/work-choice/what-youll-get> (accessed 31 July 2017)

¹¹ Gov.uk. *Work Choice. 4. How to claim.* <https://www.gov.uk/work-choice/how-to-claim> (accessed 31 July 2017)

¹² Gov.uk. *Specialist Employability Support.* <https://www.gov.uk/specialist-employability-support/overview> (accessed 31 July 2017)

¹³ As note 8 (EA 2010), s6.

¹⁴ As note 8 (EA 2010), s60 (1).

¹⁵ As note 8 (EA 2010), s60(6).

¹⁶ As note 8 (EA 2010), s6.

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This factsheet is available
in large print.

Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

**Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)**

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:

RAIS

PO Box 17106

Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm

Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



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

For further information
on Rethink Mental Illness
Phone 0121 522 7007
Email info@rethink.org



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www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to **www.rethink.org** for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, 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 on 0300 5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, 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 0121 522 7007 to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors' generous support.



Rethink Mental Illness is a partner in:

