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factsheet

Returning to work – help and support services

Introduction

Returning to work after brain injury is an important step towards regaining independence, which is vital to many people's self-esteem and financial well-being. However, independence doesn't mean doing everything by yourself and it is important to access as much help and support as you can. This factsheet provides an overview of the main services available in the UK.

Vocational rehabilitation

Specialist neurological vocational rehabilitation services provide assessment and rehabilitation programmes provided by a multi-disciplinary team, including clinical neuropsychologists, occupational therapists, occupational psychologists, social workers and others. Sadly, only a small number of specialist services are available. Some local community brain injury teams offer specialist vocational services and it may be possible to be referred to services outside your local area. It is advisable to speak to your GP, healthcare professional or Disability Employment Adviser about services you can access.

You can find a list of some vocational rehabilitation providers in *Further information* on this section of the website. This list is not definitive and details are subject to change but will be kept as up-to-date as possible. Taking up a rehabilitation placement is an important commitment and it is wise to explore all the options, visit different rehabilitation settings, and ask as many questions as possible before a placement is confirmed. Headway does not endorse any specific providers. You can also find a directory of neurological rehabilitation services, many of whom provide vocational rehabilitation, on the United Kingdom Acquired Brain Injury Forum (UKABIF) website at www.ukabif.org.uk.

Occupational Therapists

It can be particularly useful to seek the support of an Occupational Therapist (OT). OTs use purposeful activity in order to help people with disability to regain independence in daily life and also to help them return to employment. Many work in brain injury rehabilitation and can be employed within either the NHS or social services. Ask your GP or social services department if they can provide a referral to local services.

Professionals in private practice

If you have difficulty obtaining an NHS or social services referral there are some professionals in private practice who provide vocational rehabilitation services. You can find a directory of occupational therapists in independent practice on the College of Occupational Therapists Specialist Section – Independent Practice at www.cotss-ip.org.uk. Some neuropsychologists also provide vocational rehabilitation and a directory of chartered psychologists, including clinical neuropsychologists, can be found on the British Psychological Society (BPS) website at www.bps.org.uk.

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Jobcentre Plus services and programmes

The programmes and services offered by Jobcentre Plus should be available to everyone who meets certain criteria. It should be noted that, while most of the services outlined are available throughout the UK, there are some variations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Disability Employment Advisers are available throughout the UK so your local one will be able to advise on the services available to you.

The following provides a useful overview of those most relevant to people with a brain injury:

Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs)

If you have no help available, the first place to access is your local Jobcentre Plus office. They will have a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) who can assist you in returning to work or finding new work or training. You can ask to see the DEA at any jobcentre and doing so is free and will not affect your benefits. They can help with:

- Searching and understanding job adverts
- Jobcentre Plus programmes to help people return to work (see below)
- Advice on financial support
- Help with getting to job interviews
- Job retention and problems at work
- Employment assessment - they may refer you to see an occupational psychologist for specialist advice
- Job matching and notifying you of any suitable jobs
- Accessing other local organisations
- Specialist training opportunities, e.g. specialist colleges

Pathways to Work

Pathways to Work is a programme designed to encourage people who are claiming benefits to consider starting or returning to work. It is run by either Jobcentre Plus or an associated private or voluntary provider, depending on the area. The programme offers individual support and access to a wide variety of support services. If you are claiming certain disability benefits for the first time, or are claiming again after a break, you will automatically be considered for Pathways to Work. Disability benefits that provide access to Pathways to Work include:

- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- ESA at the Assessment Phase rate of benefit whilst appealing against the result of a Work Capability Assessment
- Incapacity Benefit (if you have been claiming since before October 2008 or your claim links back to before October 2008)
- Income Support on the grounds of incapacity (if you have been claiming since before October 2008)

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- Income Support while appealing against a decision that you are not incapable of work (if you have been claiming since before October 2008)

The Pathways to Work programme consists of the following:

Work Capability Assessment - Before you can receive the benefit and access Pathways to Work you will usually have a Work Capability Assessment. After your initial claim, you have to complete a questionnaire about how your illness or disability affects your ability to complete everyday tasks and your own doctor may be asked to provide a medical report. An approved healthcare professional will consider the questionnaire and any medical reports, along with any other information you may have provided.

If the approved healthcare professional feels that the Department of Work and Pensions will need more information to make a decision on your benefit claim, they will recommend that you attend a face-to-face medical assessment. Most people are asked to attend a medical assessment and you have the right to have a friend, relative or support worker attend with you. It is advisable to take someone with you who understands the effects of your brain injury, particularly the subtle difficulties such as planning, organisation and memory problems.

Work focused interviews – You will be invited to attend up to six work focused interviews with a personal adviser. Your needs will be assessed and the approach taken will be based on this assessment. This helps you receive a more personalised service. If you receive Employment and Support Allowance the second Work Focused Interview will not normally be conducted until the outcome of your Work Capability Assessment is known. Your interviews will be with a personal adviser who will:

- Help you to remain focused on your ability to work
- Help you develop a personal action plan to help you get the job you want
- Discuss work opportunities with you
- Explain the support that may be available to address key health and non-health related obstacles - for example, managing debt
- Tell you about any financial benefits you may be entitled to once you start work
- Work out how much better off financially you would be in work

The amount of benefit you receive might be reduced if you do not attend these interviews. For this reason, if you have memory and organisational problems you should tell the provider and ask for reminders of appointments. Make sure you make a note of appointment times. Also, it is a good idea to take someone with you to interviews for support and to help you remember, so ask the provider for permission to do this.

The Condition Management Programme – this is a varied and adaptable programme which aims to educate and support you to manage your condition better. The programme is delivered by health professionals and tailored to your individual needs.

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Permitted Work

If you are claiming Employment and Support Allowance then a good way of starting back to work is through the Permitted Work scheme. This allows you to do some types of work for up to 16 hours a week without affecting your benefits and is an excellent way to assess your capacity for work and to gain new skills. It is important to check that the work is allowed under the Permitted Work rules and your DEA will be able to advise on this.

Access to Work

Appropriate adaptations to the workplace can usually be made with co-operation between you, your employer and professionals such as your Disability Employment Adviser. Help is also available from the Jobcentre Plus Access to Work scheme. This scheme helps you and your employer with advice and support with extra costs when returning to work. Access to Work can help pay for:

- A communicator if you have trouble with hearing at a job interview
- A reader at work if you are visually impaired
- Special equipment or alterations to suit your work needs
- A support worker to help you at work, or with getting to work
- Help towards the cost of getting to work if you cannot use your car or public transport.

To find out more about the Access to Work scheme contact your local Jobcentre Plus and ask to speak to the Disability Employment Adviser or the Access to Work adviser.

Work Choice

This scheme replaced WORKSTEP, Work Preparation and the Job Introduction Scheme in October 2010. Work Choice is designed to help people with disabilities whose needs cannot be met through other programmes such as Access to Work. Work Choice may be the right programme for you if you require particularly specialised support. It will be tailored to your individual needs and also provides as much support as possible for employers.

Work Choice is delivered by government funded providers. There are three different sections called modules: Module one (Work Entry Support) - This lasts up to six months, during which time you will receive help with personal skills and advice to get you into work; Module two (In-Work Support) - This lasts up to two years and provides support to help you stay in your job; Module three (Longer-term In-Work Support) - This provides support to help you to progress in your job and, where appropriate, help you move into unsupported work.

If you are already on WORKSTEP, your adviser will talk to you about the transition. Otherwise, a DEA will be able to give you the information you need.

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Work Trials

A Work Trial gives you the chance to try out a job for up to 30 working days in order to give you and an employer the chance to see if it is the right job for you. You will be able to continue receiving any benefits and will be paid travel expenses and a daily meal allowance of up to £3, or £6 if the Work Trial is too far to travel there and back in a day. You will normally be eligible for a Work Trial if you have been unemployed for six months or more (although there are some exceptions to this).

Residential Training

Residential training for disabled adults is a programme that helps long-term unemployed disabled people secure and maintain jobs or self-employment. The programmes are tailored to assist trainees in securing employment through a combination of guidance, work experience, vocational (work-based) training and qualifications. In order to be eligible you must:

- Be a UK resident
- Have a physical or sensory disability, or a learning difficulty
- Be aged 18 or over
- Be unable to access other suitable local training
- Be unemployed and have the potential to take up employment, including supported employment

An allowance is paid during training. Residential costs, which can include some travel costs, will be paid for by the residential training unit. The training takes place in a residential setting in accessible buildings and staff members with specialist knowledge of disability issues teach the courses. There are only nine specialist providers in England, but those who are eligible can attend a course regardless of where they live. See 'Residential Training Providers' in *Further information* on this section of the website for contact details.

New Deal for Disabled People

Under this programme, job brokers help people to find, prepare for, and stay in work. Assistance can be by way of training, work experience, work trials, help with job applications and interviews, or to become self-employed. The programme is not available in all areas of the UK but in areas where it isn't available a similar service is provided Provider led Pathways to Work. A full directory of New Deal for Disabled People providers is available at www.jobbrokersearch.gov.uk.

Travel-to-Interview Scheme

The Travel-to-Interview Scheme aims to encourage customers to widen their job search by helping them with travel costs to attend interviews outside their local area. It may also be possible to cover the costs of travelling to local interviews. To be eligible you must be in receipt of a qualifying benefit, you

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must contact the jobcentre before the interview and the interview has to be in the United Kingdom. Jobs must be at least 16 hours per week, expected to last 3 months or more, paid employment (including self employment) and payment of travel costs can't have been made from any other source. There are some circumstances where travel costs can't be awarded.

More information on all Jobcentre Plus Schemes is available from your local Jobcentre Plus and Disability Employment Adviser and the government website at www.direct.gov.uk.

Disability Employment Organisations

There are several different national charities which provide services designed to help people with all kinds of disabilities, not just brain injury, to find employment. There should be at least one service available in most areas of the UK. It would be worth discussing with your Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) which of these organisations is available locally and which would be right for you. Some organisations may require referral by a DEA, though most accept self-referrals. See 'Disability Employment Organisations' in *Further information* on this section of the website for contact details.

Other sources of help

Nextstep

Nextstep is a free service in England that offers face-to-face help and support about training, learning and employment. There are Nextstep providers all over the country and you can find your nearest office at www.direct.gov.uk/nextstep. A Nextstep adviser will talk to you in confidence and help you to link your personal interests and skills to a job. They can help you to:

- Understand the job market
- Search and apply for jobs
- Find funding to support any learning
- Develop your CV
- Improve your interview and presentation skills
- Progress in your current job
- Help to find training in basic reading, writing and maths skills and tell you what financial support is available

The service is available to anyone aged 20 or over or anyone aged 18-19 who has been referred by Jobcentre Plus. You can contact them free on 0800 100 900.

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Connexions

Connexions provide help and support for 13-19 year olds on a wide range of issues, including employment and education. There are Connexions centres all over England, but not in other parts of the UK. They have a telephone advice line on 0808 001 3219 and their website is at www.connexions-direct.com.

Conclusion

This factsheet provides an overview of the main UK services available to help you back to work. However, it is important not to overlook the help that is available closer to home, such as from your family and friends. They can help to give you feedback on the difficulties you have and the kind of work you can do and can also help you to practise strategies that will make returning to work much easier. Referring the people close to you to Headway's other information materials can help them understand the situation and assist you as much as possible. Remember, Headway's Groups and Branches can also provide invaluable assistance in all aspects of social and vocational rehabilitation.

To discuss any issues raised in this factsheet, or to find details of our local Groups and Branches, please contact the Headway helpline free of charge on 0808 800 2244, or by email at helpline@headway.org.uk. You can also find more information and contact details of Groups and Branches on our website at www.headway.org.uk.

Headway produces a range of booklets and factsheets covering brain injury related issues. Booklets cost £3.50 each and can be ordered from the website or on 0115 924 0800. Factsheets are freely downloadable from the website.

Brain injury survivors and carers can receive free copies of appropriate booklets from the helpline.

Much of the information in this factsheet is adapted from www.direct.gov.uk and is © Crown copyright.

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