

Studying and Mental Illness

Studying can be a good part of recovery. It can help build confidence and increase skills and job options. But it can be stressful, which can affect mental health. This factsheet looks at studying with a mental illness. It covers what help is available and things to think about when deciding what and where to study.



KEY POINTS

- Studying can be helpful for people recovering from mental illness.
- It can be tricky deciding what and where to study.
- You may want to train for a type of job or career.
- You might have studied before and want to do more on that area.
- If you move away from home there can be other issues. Being away from your support, money worries and study pressures can affect your mental health.
- You may be able to get extra help and financial support while you are studying.
- Universities and colleges should have a student support service. This can signpost you, advise you or support you depending what you want.

This factsheet covers:

1. [How can I choose what to study?](#)
2. [How do I find a college or university?](#)
3. [How do I apply for a course?](#)
4. [What if I experience difficulties while studying?](#)
5. [Can I get financial support while studying?](#)

1. How can I choose what to study?

When you decide to study you need to pick a course. You can study something relating to something you are interested in or a hobby. You could pick a vocational course which will give you training in a skill or trade, such as carpentry or childcare. You can pick a subject that lets you to increase skills and experience you have already. If you want to train for a type of career you should think about the qualifications and skills you need for it. You should think about the employment options after you have finished.

It may help to speak to a careers adviser. Some organisations can give careers advice including:

- JobCentre Plus offers face-to-face careers advice,
- Careers advisers at school or college, and
- The National Careers Service - www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx.

You could read through some prospectuses. These are booklets about a school or university. They give you information about the university and the courses they run. You can look up different subjects online to see what you are interested in.

You need to think about if you want to study full-time or part-time and which suits your life. If you have commitments such as a family, you may find part-time study less stressful. Think about how much it will cost and what you can afford.

Many colleges offer evening or weekend courses. This could give you a chance to try a subject before deciding if it's right for you.

You could look at online or open-university courses which you can study from home. Open University courses offer disability support for students with mental health issues.

Use the table below as a guide to create your own careers action plan.

What subjects am I interested in?	
What job could I get after studying? Do I know all the options?	
Do I need to do more study to get into this career? Will I get on the job training?	
What are my strengths and weaknesses?	
What grades or qualifications do I need to study this subject?	
What grades do I think I'll get? What qualifications do I already have?	

2. How do I find a college or university?

Making your decision

An important decision will be to decide where you want to study. You should visit the college or university to help you decide. If you are moving away from home, you can research the city or town to see if you like it.

Colleges and universities run open days. This allows you to visit the university, see what facilities they have and get more information about courses. You may be able to talk to students who attend the university and ask them questions. There may be tours of the halls of residence if you wanted to see if they would suit you.

It can be expensive to attend open days if you have to travel to a different town or city. You should research a university before you decide where you would like to visit. Looking at the college or university prospectus is a good way of doing this. You can view the prospectus online or order it for free by post.

When you are deciding where to study there are many things to think about. The checklist below goes through some questions that you may want to think about. If you need to choose between several colleges or universities you may you could compare them using the questions below.

Course

- Is the course what I am looking for and interested in?
- If I have a particular career in mind, will the course help me with this?
- How much does the course cost?
- How do they assess my work in this course? Do they use coursework, end of year exams or a mixture of both?
- Does the assessment style suit how I learn?

University or College

- What learning facilities do they have? Do they have libraries, laboratories and study spaces?
- What leisure and social facilities do they have?
- What is the reputation of the college or university?
- Do I think I will be happy there?

Accommodation

- Do I want to move away or stay at home?
- Are there halls of residence?
- Will I definitely get university accommodation? If yes, how long for?
- Is the accommodation single or mixed sex?
- What are the halls of residence like? Could I see myself living there?
- Can the university grant special requests? For example a room with

a private bathroom or a room in a quieter part of the campus?

Care

- What support does the university give to students with mental health conditions?
- Is there a student support service?
- Are there peer support services?
- Would I get a personal tutor who could offer pastoral support?

Support for people with mental health problems

Most universities and colleges have student support services. These offer different kinds of support including counselling and money advice.

Some universities may ask you to see a disability adviser. They can find out what support you need if you start studying there. You can contact a college or university to find out what help and support is available for students with mental health issues.

You may get an allocated a course tutor. They can offer advice and support for personal problems. These tutors can be called “personal tutors” or “pastoral support tutors”. They may be able to arrange extra help for you during your studies. You can visit them to talk about problems you are having coping with stress, course work, college, or university life.

Some kinds of extra help during studies might be:

- doing exams in a separate room to other people,
- having a seat near a door or a window in exams,
- getting extra time for exams and assignments,
- getting a computer so you can work from home if you are too ill to come into university,
- someone to go to if you have any problems,
- counselling from the university or an external service, or
- benefits and money advice.

Some universities and colleges have support services run by students. You can get emotional support by phone or email. There may be a student run advice centre or legal service. Many Student Unions will have a student Disability or Equality Officer. They may be able to offer support if you have any problems during your course.

Mentoring

Some universities have mentor schemes. You and another student will pair up together. They will be someone who understands mental illness or your condition. The mentor can be around when you need them. When you are well you may not need to see them. If you begin to feel unwell or just want to talk they can be there for you. People can find this support helpful.

3. How do I apply for a course?

What next?

When you have decided on a course, you will need to apply. You need to think about if you want to tell the college or university about your mental illness. If so how much detail are you happy to give them?

Colleges and universities will ask if you have a disability. Disability can include mental illness. For some courses it is helpful to tell them you have a disability. You can make sure you get help or support with your studies. The positives to sharing information about your mental illness are:

- you can give the information about your mental health in a positive way,
- they can put support in place from the start of the course,
- you may be able to get extra help, even if you do not need it to start with,
- you may be able to get benefits, or
- it may be one less thing to worry about when you set off for university or college.

There are some courses where mental illness may affect your application. These courses include training to become a doctor, nurse or a teacher.^{1,2}

If you want to do these jobs you should look at their 'fitness to practise' regulations. They will all have their own regulation. The 'fitness to practise' rules are to make sure someone can deal with the demands of the career.

To do this you will have to do a health questionnaire and sometimes an occupational health assessment. However, no-one can assume that someone with a mental illness can't become a teacher or health professional. They need to think about any reasonable changes they can make to the job which would allow you to work. These changes are called "reasonable adjustments". They need to think about these as part of the 'fitness' assessment.

More information on "reasonable adjustments" can be found in our factsheet on '**Work and Mental Illness**'. You can download it for free from www.rethink.org or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

"I think I've been discriminated against"

The Equality Act 2010 is the law that protects people from employers treating them unfairly because of their disability. This includes discrimination against disabled people in education.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has useful information on its website about education and discrimination. If you think that you may have been discriminated against, the Disability Law Service or Equality Advisory

Support Service may be able to advise you. They details are in the Useful Contacts section of this factsheet.

You can find more information about '**Discrimination and Mental Health (Equality Act 2010)**' at www.rethink.org. Or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for the information to be sent to you.

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4. What if I experience difficulties whilst studying

Studying can be stressful. You may feel under pressure because of your university work. You might find socialising difficult or may worry about money. These things can trigger mental illness in some people.

If you already have a mental illness, these things may affect you more than other people. You may already know how your mental illness affects your ability to study. However, if you do not, here are some things which may mean you need more help and support.

You may find it difficult to:

- concentrate,
- work in groups,
- talk to or work with other people such as other students, tutors or lecturers,
- go to everything you need to or get there on time,
- be around large groups of people such as lectures, libraries and exams,
- do all the work you need to for your course,
- meet assignment deadlines, or
- live in shared student accommodation.

What should I do if I my mental health is getting worse?

If you feel that you are experiencing mental health problems you should speak to someone as soon as possible. You should do this with someone you feel most comfortable talking to. You could talk to:

- a close relative or friend,
- your GP,
- your psychiatrist (if you already have one),
- the university or college student support service, or
- your personal tutor.

Your friend or relative could help you to make an appointment to see your GP or psychiatrist.

If you have just moved, you may not have had time to register with a GP. If you need help, you can get an appointment as a temporary patient. The university or college student support service may be able to help you find your nearest GP.

You can find more information on the support that GP's can give you in

our **'What to expect from your GP'** factsheet, which you can download for free from www.rethink.org or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

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5. Can I get financial support while studying?

Below is a list of grants, loans and benefits that you may be able to claim while in higher education.

- Student Loans
- Sponsorship
- Career Development Loans
- Access to Learning Fund
- Bursaries
- Maintenance grants
- Disabled Students' Allowance

Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs)

While you may not consider yourself to be disabled, anyone with a mental health condition may qualify for additional funding. DSAs are to help you with additional costs you have because of your mental health. This could be funding for a computer, travel costs or other expenses. Go to www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/how-to-claim for information about how to apply.

Welfare benefits

Disabled students may be able to claim some welfare benefits, such as:

- Personal Independence Payments (PIP),
- Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), or
- Universal Credit.

You can find out more about these benefits from www.rethink.org or call 0121 522 7007 and we can send this information to you.

You may be able to get help with prescription costs, dental and optician charges. Contact the NHS Low Income Scheme helpline for more information on 0300 330 1343 or 0191 279 0565

Remember, as a student you will not have to pay Council tax if you live with other students.³

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Disability Rights UK

This organisation offers information and advice about all areas of the Equality Act and how you are protected. They have a student advice helpline.



Telephone: 0800 328 5050 (Tuesday 11.30am-1.30pm, Thursday 1.30pm to 3.30pm)

Email: students@disabilityrightsuk.org

Web: www.disabilityrightsuk.org/

Citizens Advice

They offer free, confidential advice on different areas including your discrimination, laws and rights and welfare benefits. Go onto their website to find your local branch.

Website: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/

Disability Law Service

They advise on a number of areas related to disability, including disability discrimination.

Telephone: 020 7791 9800 Mon – Friday 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 and Human Rights Commission

This is an independent organisation that aims to help eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality and protect human rights. It aims to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.

Web: www.equalityhumanrights.com/

Equality Advisory Support Service

EASS gives advice on discrimination and human rights to people in England, Scotland and Wales.

Tel: 0808 800 0082 Monday to Friday 9am to 8pm, Saturday 10am to 2pm

Address: FREEPOST Equality Advisory Support Service FPN4431

Email: Via [website](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/)

Webchat: via [website](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/)

Website: www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/

Open University

Module, registration or general finance enquiries and student recruitment

Telephone: 0300 303 5303 (Mon - Fri 8AM- 8PM, Sat 9AM-5PM)

Email: general-enquiries@open.ac.uk

Website: www.open.ac.uk/

Gov.UK

The Government website has different financial information that may be helpful for students. There is information on general student finance as well.

Website: www.gov.uk



¹ Nursing & Midwifery Council. Good health and good character guidance for students, nurses and midwives. As accessed at: www.nmc-uk.org/Students/Good-Health-and-Good-Character-for-students-nurses-and-midwives/ . [Accessed July 2013].

² Department for Education and Employment and the Faculty of Occupational Medicine. Fitness to teach: occupational health guidance for the training and employment of teachers. *London: HMSO, 2000.*

³ Web: GOV.UK. *Council Tax and Students*. As accessed at: www.gov.uk/council-tax/full-time-students [Accessed July 2013]

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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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twitter.com/rethink_



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.



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