

# Studying and Mental Illness

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This factsheet looks at studying if you have a mental illness. It looks at what to think about when you are deciding what to study and where, and extra help you might be able to get.



KEY POINTS

- Studying can be a popular option for people recovering from mental illness.
- You may have decided to train for a particular profession or to change your career path. If you have experience of mental illness, you may want to train for a mental health related profession.
- You may be away from home for the first time, have pressures of studying and exams or be worried about money. These things can cause mental health problems or make them worse.
- When you are deciding what to study and where, there are a number of things to think about.
- You may get extra help and financial support while you are studying.

## This factsheet covers –

1. [Choosing to study](#)
2. [Finding a college or university](#)
3. [Applying for a course](#)
4. [Difficulties while studying](#)
5. [Benefits, mental illness and studying](#)

### 1. Choosing to study

When you decide to study you need to know what you want to study. You will also need the right qualifications and skills to study that subject. If you are studying with a particular job or profession in mind, you may need to think about your chances and options of employment are after you have finished the course.

Why not use the following questions as a guide to create your own careers action plan:

- What areas of study am I most interested in?
- What career options are available after studying these areas? Do I know all the options?
- Do I need to do further study to get into my chosen career? Is there any on the job training I can do?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What grades can I get at GCSE / A-Level or other qualification levels?
- What grades or qualifications do I already have?

You could speak to a careers adviser. Various organisations can give careers advice. Options include -

- JobCentre Plus offers face-to-face careers advice.
- Careers advisers at school or college.
- You can also get advice online from the National Careers Service (<https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>)

You could also try reading through some prospectuses or looking up different subjects on the internet to see what you are interested in.

You should also think about whether you want to study full-time or part-time. You should think about how much full or part-time study will cost. You should also think about whether full or part-time study would be better for your lifestyle. For example, you may already have other commitments such as a family. You may find part-time study less stressful than full-time.

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## **2. Finding a college or university**

### **Making your decision**

Everyone who decides to go to college or university has to decide where they want to study. You will often need to visit the college or university to decide. If you are moving away from home, it also helps to find out more about the city or town to see if you like it.

Colleges and universities run open days so that prospective students can visit the university, view the facilities and get more information about the courses they are interested in. Normally current students will be available to speak to you. There may also be tours of the halls of residence.

It can be expensive to attend open days if you have to travel to a different town or city. Therefore it can help to do some research before you decide which colleges or universities you would like to visit. Looking at the college or university prospectus is a good way of doing this. You can normally 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 consider. If you need to make a choice between two or more colleges or universities you may find it helpful to compare them against the questions below.

### **Course**

- Is the course what you are looking for and interested in?
- If you have a particular career in mind, will the course help you with this?
- How much does the course cost?
- How is the course assessed (coursework, end of year exams or a mixture of both?) Does this suit how you learn?

### **University/ College**

- What learning facilities 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 you think you will be happy there?

### **Accommodation**

- Do you want to move or stay at home?
- Are there halls of residence?
- Will you be guaranteed university accommodation? If yes, how long for?
- Is the accommodation single or mixed sex?
- What are the halls of residence like? Could you see yourself 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 is a dedicated student support office?
- Are there peer support services?
- Would you be allocated a personal tutor who could offer pastoral support?

### **Support Facilities for people with mental health problems**

All universities and colleges have student support services which usually offer counselling. Some universities and colleges offer specialised support to people who have experienced mental health problems.

Some universities will ask you to visit a disability adviser. This person can find out what you need if you start studying there. If you are considering a particular college or university, it may help to contact them directly to find out what additional help and support they can offer to students with mental health problems.

Students may also be given a tutor in their department or who teaches on their course who can offer advice and support for personal problems. These tutors are sometimes called “personal tutors” or “pastoral support tutors”. They may be able to arrange extra help for you during your studies and are someone you visit to talk about problems you are having coping with stress, college or university work or college or university life.

Extra help can come in the form of -

- exams in a separate room
- seating near a door or a window in exams
- extra time in exams
- extra time for assignments
- a laptop computer so you can work from home if you are too ill to attend university
- personal support where you have a particular person to go to if you have any problems
- counselling from the university or an outside counselling service
- benefits advice

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

### **Mentoring**

Some universities have mentor schemes. You will be paired up with someone, usually another student, who understands mental illness or your particular condition. The mentor can be around as and when you need them. When you are well you may not see them a lot but if you begin to feel unwell or just want to talk they can be there for you. Many people find this sort of support helpful.

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## **3. Applying for a course**

### **What next?**

When you have decided where you want to go you will need to apply. You will need to think about whether you want to tell the college or university about your mental illness and how much detail you want to give them.

Colleges and universities will ask if you have a disability. Disability can include mental illness. For some courses it is usually helpful to declare that you have a disability. You can then make sure you receive any additional help or support with your studies that you need. The positives to sharing information about your mental illness are-

- if you put your mental illness on your application form or in a personal statement you can present it in a positive way

- support can be put in place for you as soon as you start the course
- you may be entitled to extra help with living at university and your studies, even if you do not need it to start with
- you may be entitled to extra top up benefits
- you may have one less worry to think 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<sup>1 2</sup>

Professional bodies set certain ‘fitness to practise’ regulations for these professions. The ‘fitness to practise’ rules are to make sure someone can deal with the demands of the particular career.

The process involves a health questionnaire and sometimes an occupational health assessment. However no-one should assume that a disabled person can’t become a teacher or health professional. Any reasonable changes that can be made to the job, which would allow you to work (known as “reasonable adjustments”) should be taken into account 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](http://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 a piece of legislation that covers when people are treated unfairly in a way that breaks the law. This is called unlawful discrimination. This includes discrimination against disabled people and includes the area of 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. For their contact details please see the end of this factsheet.

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

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## **4. Difficulties while studying**

Studying at university can be a stressful time. You may feel under pressure because of your academic work. You may find social situations difficult or you may have money worries. These things can cause mental illness in some people.

If you already have a mental illness, you may find that these things you affect you more than other people. This can make your mental health worse. 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-

- work in groups
- communicate or work with other people – fellow students or tutors and lecturers
- attend everything you need to or get there on time
- be around large groups of people, for example, in lectures, libraries, examinations
- concentrate
- do all the work you need to, which could affect your academic performance
- meet assignment deadlines
- live in shared student accommodation.

### **What should I do if I start to experience mental health problems at university or my problems get worse?**

If you feel that you are experiencing mental health problems you should speak to someone as soon as possible. Who this is will depend on who you feel most comfortable confiding in. People you could contact include:

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

Your friend or relative could support you in making an appointment to see your GP or psychiatrist so that you get access to medical help and support.

If you have recently moved away from home to study, you may not yet have registered with a new GP in the area. If you urgently need to see a GP but have not registered with a surgery yet, you can get an appointment to see a local GP as a temporary patient. The university or college student support service should 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](http://www.rethink.org) or call 0300 5000 927 and ask for a copy to be sent to you.

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## 5. Benefits, mental illness and studying

There are a range of grants, loans and benefits that students may be able to claim while in higher education. Among the possible sources of funds open to you are -

- Student Loans
- Sponsorship
- Career Development Loans
- Access to Learning Fund
- Bursaries
- Maintenance grants

The GOV.UK website, [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), has a variety of financial information that may be helpful for students. As well as information on general student finance, there is also information on support for disabled people at college or university.

Disabled students may be able to claim additional funding such as Disabled Students' Allowance.

Disabled students may be able to claim certain welfare benefits, such as Personal Independence Payments, Employment and Support Allowance or Universal Credit. You can find out more about these benefits from [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) or call 0300 5000 927 and we can send this information to you.

People on certain benefits or who have a low income may be able to get help with prescription costs, dental and optician charges. The GOV.UK website has information on this or you can telephone the NHS Low Income Scheme helpline for further information on 0300 330 1343

In addition to grants, loans and benefits, as a student you will not have to pay Council tax (if you live with other students).<sup>3</sup>

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**Skill** was a national bureau for students with disabilities. It provided information and support for students, colleges and universities. Unfortunately, the organisation closed in 2011. However, the information booklets it produced are still freely available on the website [www.skill.org.uk](http://www.skill.org.uk).

**Disability Rights UK** has taken over some of Skill's publications and also runs an Information Helpline.

Tel: - 0800 328 5050

Tuesday 11.30am-1.30pm, Thursday 1.30pm to 3.30pm.

Email: [skill4disabledstudents@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:skill4disabledstudents@disabilityrightsuk.org).

Web: [www.disabilityrightsuk.org/](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/)



The **Citizens Advice Bureau** offers free, confidential, impartial and independent advice. It can usually advise on benefits but does not always have expertise in claims involving mental illness.

Tel: 08444 111 444 (England only)

Web: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/)

The **Disability Law Service** advises on a number of areas related to disability, including disability discrimination.

Tel: 020 7791 9800 (Monday to Friday, 10am - 5pm)

Minicom: 020 7791 9802

Address: Disability Law Service, 39-45 Cavell Street, London, E1 2BP

Email: [advice@dls.org.uk](mailto:advice@dls.org.uk)

Web: [www.dls.org.uk](http://www.dls.org.uk)

The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** 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/](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/)

The **Equality Advisory Support Service** provides advice on discrimination and human rights issues 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

Web: [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com)

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

<sup>2</sup> 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.*

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





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This factsheet is available  
in large print.



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## Rethink Mental Illness

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm

Email [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

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### Did this help?

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

Drop us a line at: [feedback@rethink.org](mailto: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](mailto:info@rethink.org)

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

### Need more help?

Go to [www.rethink.org](http://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](http://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](http://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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