

# Studying and mental health

Studying can be a positive and enjoyable experience. It can help you build confidence, increase your skills and improve your mental health. But it can also be challenging and stressful. 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.
- Studying can help you gain new knowledge and skills for a particular job or career.
- Studying can create extra pressures. These pressures can affect your mental health.
- If you have an existing mental health condition, you may be able to get extra help and financial support while you are studying.
- Your college or university may have a student support service. There may also be help available from the Students' Union and student-led support groups.

## This factsheet covers:

1. [What course should I choose?](#)
2. [What support can I get for my mental health?](#)
3. [How much information should I share about my mental health?](#)
4. [What financial support can I get while studying?](#)
5. [What if I experience difficulties while studying?](#)

## 1. What course should I choose?

Choosing what course you want to do will depend on what you want to achieve afterwards. You could pick a course that lets you increase your skills and experience, or you may want to study something completely new. If you want to have a certain career you should think about the qualifications and skills you need for it.

### **Leisure courses**

These courses may not lead to a qualification. You may choose a course relating to your interests and hobbies.

The course could be a part of your mental health recovery and allow you to meet new people with similar interests.

### **Vocational course/apprenticeship**

These courses give you practical training in a skill or trade, such as carpentry or childcare.

### **Further or higher education**

These courses lead to a higher level qualification at college or university. You may already have a degree but want to consider post-graduate study to improve your knowledge and skills.

Most courses will have a course guide on the college or university website. You could also get a hard copy of this, called a prospectus.

If you are not sure exactly what you want to study, you may find it helpful to speak to a careers adviser. You can find a list of [Useful Contacts](#) at the end of this factsheet.

## 2. What support can I get for my mental health?

Most colleges and universities have student support services. These offer different kinds of support to make student life easier. This could include:

- disability support services,
- counselling, or
- money advice.

### **Before starting a course**

Before you start a course you may be asked 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 could ask the following.

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

### **After starting a course**

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

### **What type of help could I ask for?**

You could ask for extra help during your studies. This might include:

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

### **Peer support**

Some universities and colleges have support services run by students. They may offer emotional support, or they may run a student 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.

### **Peer Mentoring**

Some universities and colleges have peer mentoring schemes. This means that you and another student will pair up to support each other. They should be someone who understands mental illness or your condition. You can ask for their support when you need it.

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## **3. How much information should I share about my mental health?**

When you start a course you may feel anxious about sharing information about your mental health. How much information you share is up to you. You could think about the following points to help you decide on what information to share.

## **The Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 is the law that protects people being treated unfairly because of their disability by employers and service providers.<sup>1</sup> This includes disabled people in education.

Colleges and universities may ask you if you have a disability. If you tell them, you could ask for 'reasonable adjustments'.<sup>2</sup> These are changes that the college or university could make to try and reduce the disadvantage you have because of your condition.

If you choose not to share that you have a mental illness this may delay you getting extra support.

You can find more information about '**Discrimination and Mental Health**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7000 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

## **Fitness to practise**

There are some courses where having a mental illness may affect your application. You will need to be assessed for 'fitness to practise' before starting the course. The 'fitness to practise' rules are to make sure someone can deal with the demands of the career.

If you want to study for a job involving children or vulnerable adults, such as a doctor<sup>3</sup>, nurse<sup>4</sup>, teacher<sup>5</sup> or social worker<sup>6</sup> you will be asked to share information about your mental health. If you want to join the Armed Forces you will need to share your medical information.<sup>7</sup>

If you want to do these jobs you should look at their 'fitness to practise' regulations.

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## **4. What financial support can I get while studying?**

### **Grants and bursaries for adult learners**

As an adult learner, you can apply for grants and bursaries to help pay for courses and training. Usually, you don't have to pay this money back. For most grants and bursaries you apply directly to the organisation that gives them out. They'll have an application form and will be able to tell you if you qualify.

### **College and university hardship funds**

Some universities or colleges offer extra money if you're struggling with money. You should contact your college and university to find out if you're eligible for their help.

You can search for organisations that offer educational grants and bursaries by using the grant search on the Turn2Us website here: [www.turn2us.org.uk/](http://www.turn2us.org.uk/)

## **Funding for higher education**

If you are studying for a degree or other higher level qualification, you may be eligible to apply for a loan or grant to pay for your tuition fees and living costs. You could be eligible for:

- student loans, including tuition fee loans and maintenance loans, or
- career development loans

You can find out more here: [www.gov.uk/education/student-grants-bursaries-scholarships](http://www.gov.uk/education/student-grants-bursaries-scholarships)

## **Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs)<sup>8</sup>**

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.

You can find out more information on how to apply at: [www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/how-to-claim](http://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/how-to-claim)

## **Welfare benefits**

Disabled students may be able to claim some welfare benefits.

You can find more information about:

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

at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

## **Help with health costs**

You may be able to get help with prescription costs, dental and optician charges. This will depend on things such as your age, medical condition or what benefits you claim.<sup>9</sup> Contact the NHS Low Income Scheme helpline for more information on 0300 330 1343 or 0191 279 0565

## **Council tax exemption**

As a full-time student you may not have to pay Council tax if you only live with other full-time students.<sup>10</sup>

You can find out more information here: [www.gov.uk/council-tax/discounts-for-full-time-students](http://www.gov.uk/council-tax/discounts-for-full-time-students)

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## **5. 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. 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 to look out for.

You may find it difficult to:

- concentrate,
- work in groups,
- talk to or work with other people such as 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.

If you are struggling with these things, and feel you need more support then 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 moved to the place where you study, you might 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 about **‘What to expect from your GP’** at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

### **Who can help me if I have experienced discrimination?**

If you think that you may have been discriminated against, you may be able to get independent advice and support from your Student’s Union. The Disability Law Service or Equality Advisory Support Service may also be able to advise you. Their details are in the [Useful Contacts](#) section of this factsheet below.

You can find more information about **‘Discrimination and Mental Health’** at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.



### **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 (Open 11am – 1pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays)

**Email:** [students@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:students@disabilityrightsuk.org)

**Web:** <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/helplines/disabled-students-helpline>

### **Citizens Advice**

They offer free, confidential advice on different areas including your discrimination, laws and rights and welfare benefits.

**Tel:** 03444 111 444

**Webchat:** <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/web-chat-service/>

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

### **Disability Law Service**

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

**Telephone:** 020 7791 9800 (Open Monday to Friday from 10am-1pm and 2pm-5pm)

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

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

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

### **Equality Advisory Support Service**

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

**Tel:** 0808 800 0082 (Open Monday to Friday from 9am to 7pm and Saturday 10am to 2pm)

**Address:** FREEPOST EASS HELPLINE FPN6521

**Email:** Via website here [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/ask](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/ask)

**Webchat:** via website here

[www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/chat/chat\\_launch/chat\\_data/cV9pZD0xJg==/request\\_source/7](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/app/chat/chat_launch/chat_data/cV9pZD0xJg==/request_source/7)

**Website:** [www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/](http://www.equalityadvisoryservice.com/)

**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/student-finance](http://www.gov.uk/student-finance)

**Open University**

General enquiries about distance learning courses and student finance at the Open University.

**Telephone:** 0300 303 5303 (Open Monday to Friday, from 8am- 8pm and Saturday 9am-5pm)

**Email:** <http://www.open.ac.uk/contact/new>

**Website:** [www.open.ac.uk/](http://www.open.ac.uk/)

**National Careers Service**

Provides information, advice and guidance to adults based in the UK. They can help you make decisions on learning, training and work.

**Telephone:** 0800 100 900 (8am to 10pm, 7 days a week)

**Webchat:** On their website [here](#)

**Email:** On their website [here](#)

**Website:** [www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx](http://www.nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx).

**Prospects**

Provides online careers information, advice and guidance to students and graduates based in the UK.

**Website:** [www.prospects.ac.uk](http://www.prospects.ac.uk)

**Student Minds**

This is a UK based student mental health charity. They can offer support to both students and staff struggling with their mental health.

**Telephone:** 01865 264168 (general enquiries only, not a crisis line)

**Email:** [info@studentminds.org.uk](mailto:info@studentminds.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.studentminds.org.uk](http://www.studentminds.org.uk)

If you are already studying at university or recently graduated you could speak to your university careers or graduate employment service.





- <sup>1</sup> GOV.UK. *Equality Act 2010 Guidance*. [www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance) (accessed 20th October 2017).
- <sup>2</sup> s20, Equality Act 2010, c.15.
- <sup>3</sup> General Medical Council. *Medical students: professionalism and fitness to practise*. [www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/29224.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/29224.asp) (accessed 13th November 2017).
- <sup>4</sup> Nursing & Midwifery Council. *Good health and good character guidance for students, nurses and midwives*. [www.nmc-uk.org/Students/Good-Health-and-Good-Character-for-students-nurses-and-midwives/](http://www.nmc-uk.org/Students/Good-Health-and-Good-Character-for-students-nurses-and-midwives/) . (accessed 20 October 2017).
- <sup>5</sup> Department for Education. *Initial teacher training: criteria for providers*. [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/594123/Initial\\_teacher\\_training\\_criteria\\_and\\_supporting\\_advice.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/594123/Initial_teacher_training_criteria_and_supporting_advice.pdf) Pages 11-12. (Accessed 13th November 2017).
- <sup>6</sup> Health & Care Professions Council. *The fitness to practise process*. [www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/assets/documents/10001FC8TheFTPprocess\\_cfw.pdf](http://www.hcpc-uk.co.uk/assets/documents/10001FC8TheFTPprocess_cfw.pdf) Pages 1-2. (accessed 13<sup>th</sup> November 2017).
- <sup>7</sup> British Army. *How to join*. [www.army.mod.uk/join/How-to-join.aspx](http://www.army.mod.uk/join/How-to-join.aspx) (Accessed 20 October 2017).
- <sup>8</sup> UCAS. *Disabled Students' Allowances*. [www.ucas.com/disabled-students-allowances-dsas](http://www.ucas.com/disabled-students-allowances-dsas). (accessed 13th November 2017)
- <sup>9</sup> NHS Business Services Authority. *Free NHS Prescriptions*. <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-nhs-prescription-costs/free-nhs-prescriptions> (accessed 20 October 2017).
- <sup>10</sup> GOV.UK. *Council Tax and Students*. [www.gov.uk/council-tax/full-time-students](http://www.gov.uk/council-tax/full-time-students) (accessed 20 September 2017).

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This factsheet is available  
in large print.



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## Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

**Phone 0300 5000 927**

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

**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:**

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](mailto:info@rethink.org)



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**[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.

### 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](http://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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