

**Social Firms** **Scotland**



# The Way To Work

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July 2007

Version 1



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

Published with funding from the Big Lottery Fund



# Introduction

## Is Work Good for You?

Returning to work if you have been out of work for a while, or going into work for the first time can seem like a daunting task.

In our society, work is an important way of defining who you are. Work is known to improve your sense of physical and emotional well-being whilst being unemployed, or not being involved in meaningful activity, is also known to have a negative effect on your well-being.

Being in some form of work can bring a sense of purpose, a focus for your day, improved confidence and self esteem, a sense of belonging, with new friendships and relationships that develop through work.

Work and work-related activity can also bring you more financial independence, a sense of earning your own money, and not relying on benefits.

Being in work brings additional responsibilities, and at times can be stressful, difficult and demanding. However, the benefits of being part of a team working towards a shared goal, building relationships, having a purpose, having a focus can far outweigh the more difficult aspects of being in work.

This booklet will hopefully provide you with some useful information that will help you on your journey into work, and guide you through the process of building your skills and confidence, trying things out, looking for work and the different kinds of work that might be available to actually starting work and staying in work.

At the end of the booklet there is a diary planner and action plans to help plan your journey towards returning to work, set goals for yourself to work towards, and keep track of how you are doing.

## **The booklet is divided into 7 sections:**

1. Thinking about work and work-related activity
2. Planning to go into work
3. Working in a Social Firm
4. Starting work
5. Staying in work
6. Organisations that can support you
7. Tools to help you plan - a) Diary Planner  
b) Action Plans



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### Starting out - building your confidence

There are lots of things that you can do to help you get ready for work, many steps that you can take to move towards some form of employment.

You hear people talking about being job ready - how do you get to be job ready and what does it mean? Here are some of the questions that you might be asking yourself when you're considering whether you're ready to think about work along with some answers.

#### > **How do I know if I am ready to start thinking about work?**

Have a chat with people who know you, including any support staff, your family and friends, your GP - talk to them about your ideas, and your hopes and fears about taking a step towards work. You will know yourself when you are ready to take a step. Talking through this with others around you may give you ideas as to what steps you need to take. It is useful to gather information about what is available in your area for you to try out, and to decide what feels comfortable for you to try.

#### > **My life is still quite unsettled - so how can I think about work as an option for me?**

It is important when you start thinking about going into some form of employment that you are feeling fairly settled, feeling fairly well, and with some stability around you. Taking steps towards going into work itself can help you to become more settled and focused. Starting to increase the activities that you are involved in may also help you get back on your feet. Taking small steps

towards achieving any goals and dreams that you have will help you to recover your confidence and self esteem.

### **> I struggle to get up in the morning - so how can I work?**

Developing a regular sleep routine is important, making sure you go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Plan to do something once you're up to make sure that you get used to it, even if it's going for a walk . This can help to motivate you for the rest of the day. If you are on medication that makes you tired in the morning, speak to your GP about changing when you take it. For information on getting a good nights sleep go to [www.sleepcouncil.com](http://www.sleepcouncil.com)

### **> I'm not sure if I can keep to a routine - how can I work?**

Try building up your weekly activities whether it's picking up old hobbies or trying something new. Keeping a diary will help you to structure your time, and plan what you want to do with your week. There is a small diary at the back of the booklet that can help you get started.

### **> How can I test the water and try things out?**

Find activities, groups, classes, or opportunities that you think you will enjoy - think about hobbies and interests that you used to have, or have always wanted to try. Start with something that you feel you can manage. It is usually better to build up your stamina over time, rather than taking on too much too quickly. Your local Voluntary Services (CVS) will have information about

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volunteering opportunities that are available in your area. To find your local CVS go to [www.scvo.org.uk/cvsnetwork](http://www.scvo.org.uk/cvsnetwork).

Your city council or Local Authority's Community Education department will be able to give you information about Adult Learning courses, and your local college may have courses that could get you started.

Sometimes it can take a while to figure out what you like and don't like and what environment you prefer to learn in, so give things a try until you find what it is you enjoy best.

### > **I want to do something work related but don't know what I want to do?**

Look for something that you get pleasure from - think about your hobbies and interests as this can sometimes help you figure out what you enjoy doing. If you have worked before, think about the skills that you used then, and what you enjoyed doing. If you have never worked, think about groups or activities that you have been involved in and what you did - all of these experiences can help you to figure out what you might be interested in. Think also about what is important to you - do you prefer doing physical activities, or working at a computer?

Careers Scotland can help you identify what your preferences might be. They can be contacted on 0845 8502 502 or visit their website: [www.careers-scotland.org.uk](http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk)

## > **What different opportunities are there for me to try?**

Volunteering and getting involved in training may be a good way for you to start building up your confidence, and finding out what you enjoy.

To find out more about local volunteering opportunities, contact your CVS or visit [www.volunteerscotland.info](http://www.volunteerscotland.info).

There may also be employment-related projects in your area. These often provide a range of opportunities. Your local council and/or social work department should be able to give you more information.

Social Firms are another possibility. A Social Firm is a business set up to create good quality employment for people who are furthest from the labour market and have many barriers to moving into work. They offer a number of employment opportunities, often offering training or volunteering opportunities in the business. Section 3 in this booklet tells you more about working in a Social Firm.

## > **What will happen to my benefits if I start getting involved in work related activity?**

Before you start work you can get a better-off calculation done, to see if you will have more money if you work than you get on benefits now. Some benefits do not change if you work. There are some extra benefits you can get if you work. Some benefits will be less or will stop. Your benefits will depend on things like how many hours you work each week and how much your wages are. You can get a better-off calculation done at an Advice Centre or at the Jobcentre or DWP office.

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It is always better to get advice from Jobcentre Plus advisers if you are going to receive any payment so that you do not put yourself at risk of losing your benefits.

You can volunteer for as many hours as you want without it affecting your benefits. You also need to be aware that if you are volunteering and get more money than the agreed out of pocket expenses these will be treated as income by the Department for Work and Pensions, so make sure you keep copies of receipts. For more information go to the Department for Work and Pensions website - [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk).

### > **What information will I need to provide when I go and find out about how work will affect my benefits?**

You will need to bring the information listed below if you want advice on your benefits or if you want to find out if you will be better off working. If you don't have all the information, bring what you can.

- National insurance number - this will be a number on your benefit book or on any letters about your benefit
- Date of birth
- Information about any benefits are you getting now
- Information about any other money coming in. For example, any wages from work that you do
- Information about any savings in the bank, building society or post office
- Information about how much your rent is

- Information about any benefit you get to help pay your rent.
- If possible, bring your benefit books, bank statements, rent book, pay slips and council tax bills
- They will also want to know if you get help at home from a support worker, or if you live with a partner. If you do live with a partner, bring in their benefit book, bank statement or pay slips.

### > **Will there be additional financial costs to anything that I do?**

This will depend what it is that you are doing. If you are on long term Incapacity Related Benefits many courses for instance are free. Check with the training provider and with Jobcentre Plus.

You may be able to get financial help towards the cost of specific courses from an Individual Learning Account. For information visit [www.ilascotland.org.uk](http://www.ilascotland.org.uk) or phone 0808 100 9000.

Your local college should also be able to advise you about financial help.

Many volunteering opportunities will reimburse reasonable out of pocket expenses. This means any expenses that you incur to do the role. You will be informed of this when you apply for any volunteering opportunities.

If you are involved in other kinds of groups or activities, you may need to think about paying for drinks, meals or travel expenses - ask the group leader/tutor about this before you start.

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### > **I have been out of work for a long time - how do I know if I can build good relationships with people?**

Getting on with and working alongside people is an essential part of working. It may be useful to think about ways that you can develop your communication skills - you can do this by getting involved in groups, or through training courses that look at communication, confidence building, and assertiveness. It may be useful to identify someone - a support worker or a good friend who can give you feedback about how you relate to others. Use this feedback to develop your communication skills. Be yourself, be polite, and be prepared to chat to people.

### > **I am still not sure that I can cope with the pressure of being at work - what should I do?**

Only you can decide when you are ready to go into any kind of work related activity - and you may surprise yourself by being able to cope with far more than you thought you could! It will take time to build your confidence and stamina. Getting to know the job and the people you work with will take time too. Be prepared to feel potentially awkward in your first few days as you get to know things.

Talk to people about how they cope with the pressures of work and what they enjoy.

Don't worry if it doesn't work out first time, it just means that you'll be more prepared for next time!

### **> There are times when I am still not well - does this mean I can't work?**

No. Becoming involved in work and work-related activity may help you to feel more confident and improve your sense of well being. It also means that you have to find ways to work around your illness with your employer. Some people find it helpful to inform their employers in advance of any signs to look out for when your illness kicks in. With a supportive employer you should not feel you have to hide this.

You may also want to try volunteering or working just a few hours per week to build up a picture of what you feel able to do.

If you are concerned about your health there are a list of organisations at the back of the book that can support you to look at some of the difficulties you are having.

### **> I am concerned that I may start drinking or using drugs again - can I still work?**

Yes. Like the previous question it may mean that you have to find ways around this with your employer and your own support network. For health and safety reasons, you will not be able to go into a work place of any kind if you are under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol.

There are organisations that can support you to manage your alcohol and drug use - some of these are listed at the back of the booklet. They will also be able to provide information and advice about going back to work.



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### Getting ready to go into work

Once you have built up your activities, and you have a better understanding of your interests and strengths, you may start to feel more confident. You will have a better understanding of what you enjoy doing and what you are good at. You will have developed some coping skills.

Work might seem like more of a reality so what do you need to know to make it happen?

#### > **What employment opportunities are available to me?**

You may want to consider getting involved in employment or training projects first, which offer opportunities to train and get work related experience in a supportive setting. This will help you to develop your skills and confidence. Your city council or Local Authority should be able to tell you what is available in your area.

You may want to test work out in a real job. More people stay in work or move in to work by taking the plunge with the right support.

There are a number of organisations that can support you to get a work placement. Work placements usually last from 2-13 weeks, depending on who organises it with you, and can be an opportunity for you to try out a job in the workplace, and get some experience.

Job Centre Plus offer a number of schemes which could help you with this including: Job Introduction Scheme, Work Trials, Work Preparation, Progress 2 Work, Workstep and Pathways to Work - talk to your Personal Adviser

or Disability Employment Adviser about what might best suit your needs.

In addition there are support agencies around, depending on which area you live in, that offer a range of support for moving into work - contact your local Jobcentre Plus, CVS or local council for more information on what support services are available in your area.

Social Firms are another opportunity. They are businesses that are set up to create jobs for people who have perhaps never worked or have had difficulty moving into work due to their disability or other issues. They can offer a range of employment opportunities including part and full time employment in a real business. They have a really supportive working atmosphere where the people who work there understand any issues you may have, e.g. mental illness for instance. There is more information about working in Social Firms in Section 3 or visit [www.socialfirms.org.uk](http://www.socialfirms.org.uk) for more information on where your nearest Social Firm is located.

### > **What are the different types of work?**

**Full-time work:** This is paid work you usually do for 16 hours or more a week.

**Part-time work:** This is paid work you usually do for less than 16 hours a week.

**Temporary work:** This means work that only lasts for a few days or weeks.

**Voluntary work:** This is not paid work - you are only paid expenses, like money for travel or meals.

**Permitted Work:** This is paid work you can do for up to 16 hours a week and perhaps keep your Incapacity

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Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance or Income Support if you receive Disability Premium too. It is not the same for everyone and you would have to check with Jobcentre Plus what you would be eligible for and how much you can earn.

### > **How do I know I've got the skills I need for the jobs that are available?**

The Personal Advisors and Disability Employment Advisors in Jobcentre Plus should be able to advise about the kinds of jobs that are available in your area, the skills that employers are looking for, and ways that you could develop your skills.

Your local Careers Scotland office should also be able to provide you with some advice and support to look at the different options, the skills that you have, and the opportunities for you in the local area.

Careers Scotland has a useful tool online, called Careers Match, where you can enter your preferences for working in different environments and using different skills. It then gives you a list of jobs based on your preferences.

Careers Advisers can also help you to explore what is important to you in terms of the work that you do, what opportunities are available, and help you to match these. Think about not only what you will bring to the role that you are considering, but also what it will demand of you e.g. hours of work, place of work, type of work, the effect on other commitments that you have. Writing all this down can help you to focus on what is important to you, and then to identify the steps you need to take to get there.

## > What can I do as I have no qualifications?

Not all jobs need qualifications, and often any skills you have gained through different life experiences can be as useful as any formal qualifications to an employer. If you would like to find out about gaining some qualifications, your local college should be able to advise you about the courses that they offer, and how they might help you get into work. Many people find doing a computing course is essential, as most jobs will involve some form of computer work. Careers Scotland can advise you about specific qualifications for particular jobs.

## > Can I go to college - I have learning needs?

Yes. All colleges should provide a range of learning opportunities and should be able to support you with additional learning needs.

Specialist support organisations often run courses.

Your city Council, or CVS should be able to help you to find the right organisation.

## > Who can support me to look for a job?

If you are on Incapacity Related Benefits, there are a number of options. In addition to Personal Advisers, Disability Employment Advisors at Jobcentre Plus can help you. There are also a number of Job Brokers who have a contract with Jobcentre Plus to provide this kind of support. They can support you to develop a range of skills relating to looking for and getting work, including preparing a CV and developing skills for interview.

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If you are on Job Seekers Allowance or other benefits, you should talk to a Personal Adviser at JobCentre Plus.

Some local councils have Employment Support Services who may be able to help you.

There are many voluntary organisations who also provide support to get into work. Your local council or CVS should be able to help you find out what support is available in your area. At the back of this booklet is a list of some of these organisations.

### > **What should I tell prospective employers about the gaps in my employment history and my past?**

There is no clear answer to this and it really depends on how you would wish to handle this. Some things that might help you in this are as follows:

- Explain any gaps in your employment history in a positive way - talk about your voluntary work, any courses or life experiences that you think will demonstrate your skills and abilities.
- Show you have a positive attitude. Employers want to employ people who have a positive attitude and are willing to learn. It is this positive attitude that may get you the job even if you do not have as much experience as someone else
- If the gaps are due to a period of illness, e.g. mental illness, explain briefly what the experience was but emphasise that you have recovered. Speak to someone who can help you put things down in a positive way, such as your Personal or Disability Employment Advisor at Jobcentre Plus or any other employment advisor you are working with.

## > **What are the implications if I don't tell them about my history if they ask me?**

There are a couple of issues here. First, if you have a disability as defined under the Disability Discrimination Act, and you do not declare it, the employer cannot make reasonable adjustments to the workplace. Employers now have a legal obligation to make "reasonable adjustments" to the work place for employees. This includes making adjustments to recruitment processes.

If there is a problem later in the workplace relating to your disability, e.g. taking time off for doctor's appointments, and you haven't told the employer, they can argue that as you haven't informed them, they cannot make "reasonable adjustments" for you.

If you do not tell them anything about your history and then it comes out later on, this could be seen as dishonesty and may affect your relationship with your employer. It is important to be honest, while explaining things positively.

If you have been supported to overcome a drug or alcohol addiction, or experienced homelessness, these are not covered under the Disability Discrimination Act. Organisations such as Apex Scotland can advise you about what you should tell your employer and how.

For information about The Disability Discrimination Act visit [www.drc-gb.org.uk](http://www.drc-gb.org.uk)

## > **Do I have to declare any criminal convictions?**

If an employer asks you to declare any convictions you are legally obliged to do so.

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In Scotland, if you are working with vulnerable people in any way, you will be asked to go through an Enhanced Disclosure check. Enhanced disclosures are the most common ones for employment purposes. The Enhanced check highlights any convictions that you have had, including spent and unspent ones. Employers should follow clear guidelines about how information from a Disclosure Check will be used. Information from Disclosure Checks should only be used if it is relevant to the work placement.

Disclosure Scotland ([www.disclosurescotland.co.uk](http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk)) processes the applications forms, and provides guidance and advice about the process. Apex Scotland ([www.apexscotland.org.uk](http://www.apexscotland.org.uk)) can provide further information and advice about the how previous convictions may affect employment prospects.

### > How can Jobcentre Plus help me?

Jobcentre Plus offers a range of supports into work. If you are looking to get into work, you will be allocated a Personal Advisor, and if you have a disability, a Disability Employment Advisor. They will help you to find out what is available for you, help you to look and apply for work, and advise you about your benefits and all your entitlements.

Jobcentre Plus runs a number of New Deal programmes, which support people in different situations to get into work. For more information visit the JobCentre Plus website; [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

Jobcentre Plus can offer you a Work Trial (two week trial in a job), Job Introduction Schemes (work with your new employer to support you to start work), Workstep (under New Deal for Disabled People, which includes support

to look for and stay in work), Pathways 2 Work (a programme of support to get into work that includes condition management training, and incentive payments once you start work) and a number of other programmes. Each programme offers a different type of support - it will depend on your personal situation what you are entitled to and what would best suit your needs.

### > **What will the impact on my benefits be if I start work?**

This depends on how many hours you work and how much money you earn each week.

Before you start work you can get a better-off calculation done, to see if you will have more money if you work than you get on benefits now. Some benefits do not change if you work. There are some extra benefits you can get if you work. Some benefits will be less or will stop. Your benefits will depend on things like how many hours you work each week and how much your wages are. You can get a better-off calculation done at an Advice Centre or at the Jobcentre or DWP office.

See Section 1 for more information on what is required to do a Better-off calculation.

Plans are underway to introduce changes to the Welfare Benefits system in 2008. Jobcentre Plus should be able to keep you up to date with how these changes may affect your entitlements. At present these changes in 2008 will only affect new benefit claimants.

### > **What will happen if I can't keep up the work?**

You should make sure that you apply for the Linking Rule through Jobcentre Plus, which allows you to go

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straight back onto your benefits if the employment doesn't work. You can claim under the Linking for up to 104 weeks after starting work. For more information on the linking rule, go to the DWP website.

### > What do employers look for in their employees?

Recent research suggests that employers are most keen for the people they recruit to be willing to learn, committed, co-operative, be able to communicate well and willing to work as a team. Employers feel that new recruits can learn the skills of the job once they have started. It is worth thinking about developing good communication skills. It is also important to turn up on time, and to be well presented and appropriately dressed for the working environment.

Most jobs nowadays involve using a computer, so developing computer related skills will always be of benefit. ECDL (European Computer Driving License) is one of the best recognised qualifications. Your local college and some local community groups will run the ECDL course.

### > How do I look for a job?

The Jobcentre Plus always has a list of vacancies that are available. Your local paper will have jobs listed. The internet advertises many jobs.

It may be worthwhile getting an idea of what kind of job you would like to do, using the experiences you have had so far, and using the advice of Careers Scotland. Putting together a CV at this early stage can help you have a clear idea about the skills that you have.

If you want to work in a Social Firm, it is worth contacting them directly or asking someone who supports you to do so. Have a look on Social Firms Scotland's website to find the Social Firm nearest you [www.socialfirms.org.uk](http://www.socialfirms.org.uk).

### > **How do I apply for jobs?**

Many jobs will ask for a CV (Curriculum Vitae) which is a summary of your skills and work experience. It is best to ask for professional advice about putting a CV together as they will help you to sell yourself positively to a prospective employer. Jobcentre Plus, Job Brokers and other employment advisers will be able to help you to do this.

Some employers will ask you to complete an application form. You can practice this by sending off for application forms for jobs that you are not sure about, or not ready for, and practice filling them in. Always read the instructions for completing application forms closely - some employers prefer typed application forms, while many prefer hand written application forms.

When completing application forms, always do a couple of practice runs first on photocopies of the application form – you can then easily correct any mistakes. Always keep a photocopy of an application form once you've sent it, so you can remind yourself what you wrote when you go for an interview. If you have additional needs in terms of communication, employers can no longer discriminate, and best practice advises employers to provide a number of formats – e.g. online application, large text, audio format. Contact the employer to ask for a different format of the application form if you need one.

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### > I find it difficult to understand what employers are looking for – how can I make sense of the jargon especially in relation to qualifications?

Talk to whoever is supporting you with your journey back to work. It may be that particular jobs need particular qualifications – you should be able to find this out from searching the web, or talking to the local college, your employment adviser or Careers Scotland. Whoever is supporting you should be able to help you to find this out. They should also be able to find out if any qualifications that you have are relevant and how to update them.

Most job descriptions and person specifications list essential qualities that are being looked for and desirable qualities. It is the essential qualities that are most important to the employer, so don't be put off if you think you do not have all of the desirable qualities.

### > Who can help me to fill in forms?

Any of the employment support providers can help you fill in forms. Jobcentre Plus staff should also be able to help you with this. Friends and family who are working may also help you out.

### > I haven't got any interview experience - how can I prepare for an interview?

Your Personal Advisor, Disability Employment Advisor, Job Broker or other employment adviser should be able to help you prepare for your interview, by doing mock interviews with you, and giving you feedback on areas that you need to develop. This might feel awkward or

embarrassing, but it's very useful for developing a good interview technique and becoming more confident!

Everyone gets nervous at interviews. The best thing you can do is be professional and be yourself, answer the questions you are asked and remember to smile. Think about how you are going to sit or position yourself. Keep your posture open and don't slouch or mumble. If you don't understand a question ask them to phrase it a different way or ask them to clarify what they mean.

While interviews are the most commonly used way of selecting an employee, there may be other techniques used e.g. doing a work test. A work test will involve you performing a task and being assessed on how you do.

### > **What if I need physical adaptations at work?**

You can get advice about physical adaptations to your work place from Access to Work. This is a Jobcentre Plus programme that helps employees and employers identify and get the right adaptations for the work. You must apply for Access to Work within 6 weeks of starting work. Access to Work should cover most if not all of the costs of any adaptations. You can still contact them if you have been in work for longer than 6 weeks. However Access to Work will not cover as much of the cost of any adaptations as they would within the first 6 weeks of employment.

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### > I am in debt and am worried about how I can manage this if I start work and come off my benefits?

Many people on benefits have debts that are frozen, and which become activated once they start work. To get proper debt advice with a debt counsellor, contact your Citizens Advice Bureau – go to [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk), or the National Debtline ([www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/Scotland](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/Scotland) or phone 0808 808 4000). They will help you to manage the debts, and may be able to negotiate with you debtors on your behalf.

### > I don't want to go back to what I did previously as it contributed to the difficulties I have had...

Sometimes work can contribute to the difficulties people have, through stress at work, disability or injury. The Disability Employment Adviser at Jobcentre Plus should be able to establish with you what kind of work you could do.

An Occupational Psychologist can offer advice about the type of work that might suit you - you should be able to be referred for an appointment through Jobcentre Plus.

Careers Scotland can help you to explore different kinds of jobs or careers that you could transfer your skills into. Many of the skills that you will have developed in your previous job and throughout your life will be transferable into your next job.

## > I don't have any clothes for work or for an interview...

The Jobcentre Advisor Discretionary Fund should be able to provide you with some financial assistance to buy appropriate clothing.

Always make sure that anything you do buy, you feel comfortable in.

## > What incentives are available to me?

Some Job Brokers (under New Deal for Disabled People) have incentive payments when you start a job – this varies according to the Job Brokers. You may also be entitled to a Job Grant if you are starting work of over 16 hours a week – talk to the Job Centre about this payment.

Being in work brings other non financial incentives – feeling part of something, making new friends, learning new skills, and feeling part of society are all important benefits of working.

## > What should I look for in an employer?



Talk to others about the employer's reputation. During an interview don't be afraid to ask the employer about how they support their staff, and how they might support you at work. Look for the double tick symbol – this is a quality symbol given by Jobcentre Plus to employers who have made a commitment to good practice in recruiting, employing, supporting and developing people with a disability.

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All employers should pay at least the National Minimum Wage for the work that you do, except if you are doing voluntary work, which is unpaid. For more information about the National Minimum Wage, visit [www.hmrc.gov.uk/nmw](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/nmw).

### > What will my employer expect of me?

An employer will expect you to turn up on time, to be willing to learn the job and to work co-operatively with the rest of the team. They will expect you to follow any procedures in place, in particular health and safety procedures, to be polite, and to be clean and tidy when you go to work. They will also expect you to do the job to the best of your ability, and will expect you to engage in relevant training.

### > How long will it take me to find a suitable job?

It may take time to get the right opportunity for you, and you may start to feel frustrated and as if you're not going to be able to get work. Stick with it, keep developing your skills and confidence throughout the process, use your support networks, and expect set backs – everyone has them. It is important to keep up what you have already worked hard to establish, and to keep contact with your support network - keep persevering! Look in different places, at different types of jobs, ones that you perhaps would not have considered before – sometimes we close our minds to things because we have a fixed idea of what we think we want or need, and miss out on an opportunity because we haven't been open to it.

## > Do I have to take any job that is offered me?

If you are on Job Seekers Allowance the Jobcentre can pressurise you take a job, even if you do not want it and do not think it is suitable. If you are on other New Deal programmes, such as New Deal for Disabled People and New Deal for Lone Parents there is less pressure. However, if you are offered a job, and don't think that it is right for you, explain to your adviser why you do not think it is suitable for you. It can be distressing, disheartening and stressful to take a job that is not suitable for you.

## > I can't work because of childcare costs...

Childcare is a major barrier to many parents. Under government legislation, any child of 3-4 years old is entitled to 12.5 hours free childcare by a registered provider. For more information about child care, go to [www.directgov.org.uk](http://www.directgov.org.uk).

Surestart ([www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)) also have information about child care, how to look for registered childcare services, and tax credits. New Deal for Lone Parents provides support and advice about childcare costs. Some employers may also provide childcare services to their employees.

You may be entitled to tax credits that will help you pay further costs towards childcare - talk to Jobcentre Plus about this.



## Section 3

### **Working in a Social Firm – a route into employment?**

#### **> What is a Social Firm?**

A Social Firm is a business set up specifically to create good quality jobs for people who are severely disadvantaged in the labour market. Most Social Firms will offer a range of opportunities from volunteering through to full and part time work. Many Social Firms will offer training and work placement opportunities, to help you build up your skills, confidence and stamina to work.

#### **> What kind of work can I do in a Social Firm?**

A Social Firm can be any type of business – from a café, laundry, hotel/B&B, to a research and consultancy business, to gardening and landscaping. Social Firms offer a range of opportunities including volunteering, training and work placements, part and full time work. It will depend on the Social Firm and the area you live in.

#### **> How do I get to work in a Social Firm?**

Social Firms will advertise their training / work placement opportunities with a range of social services, and local employment support organisations and services.

Social Firms will advertise jobs in a variety of ways, including in the papers and through Jobcentre Plus. There should be an application and selection procedure to help you to determine if what they are offering is what you want, and to determine if you have the skills,

aptitudes and attitudes to work that they are looking for.

Social Firms are committed to equality of opportunity, and will advertise and recruit for staff in ways that do not discriminate. This means using a variety of techniques and being flexible, to encourage and support anyone who has a disadvantage to feel able to apply for the job.

Social Firms can also be approached directly so don't be afraid to call them for a chat. Find out where your nearest Social Firm is by going to [www.socialfirms.org.uk](http://www.socialfirms.org.uk).

### > **What is the difference between a training placement, work placement, volunteering and paid work in a Social Firm?**

As a **volunteer**, you work in the Social Firm in an unpaid capacity. You will not have the same obligations as an employee. The Social Firm should make an agreement with you about what you are being asked to do and the hours that you want to work, as well as the support that you will get in the workplace. As a volunteer you should be able to claim reasonable out of pocket expenses that you incur as a result of your voluntary placement.

If you are on a **training placement**, you will be working in the Social Firm and undertaking some form of accredited training. This may be time limited and depends on the Social Firm itself. At the end of the training placement there may be further opportunities for you in the Social Firm or it may be that you need to look for other opportunities. Unless the training is sponsored by the Government, you should get paid a wage for working in the business. Any wages should be paid at the National Minimum Wage rate.

## Section 3

If you are on a **work placement**, this will generally be short term to get some work experience, and it is likely that you will be supported by another employment support agency – work placements can run for a few days up to 6 months, and may include you having to show that you have developed your skills as agreed with your work placement organiser and the Social Firm. While you are on a work placement you will work in the Social Firm's business, and will be supported by them, but there is no guarantee that there will be a job for you at the end of the placement.

If you are **employed** to work in a Social Firm, you are employed on the same basis as any other employee, with the same rights, responsibilities and expectations. All Social Firms pay you the going rate or slightly higher for the job that you are doing whether it's part-time or full-time.

### > How many hours can I work?

You can work as many hours you want and as many hours as the Social Firm wishes to employ you for.

A Better Off calculation will give you an idea of how the number of hours worked will affect the benefits that you currently receive. Each person is slightly different so it is always worth insisting on getting this done. This will then enable you to make an informed decision as to how many hours you would want to work.

You may also have to take into consideration any debts that are currently frozen as these might be reactivated as your income increases.

## > **What makes a Social Firm different from other types of businesses?**

As a business Social Firms are the same as any other business. They need to generate enough income through selling their goods and/or services to meet their costs. What's different is that any profit that the Social Firm makes goes back into creating more jobs for people who are currently excluded from working.

As an employer Social Firms are quite different from other businesses. Your disability, mental illness, social issues are accepted as the norm. Social Firms want to concentrate not on your disadvantage but on your skills and experiences and how these can be used to grow the business. Social Firms actively encourage you to get involved in the business, look for your ideas and will support you to develop in your job and as a person.

Social Firms want you to maximise your potential and will actively encourage you to look for further opportunities. They are the only business model that want to see their best staff move on and progress themselves!

Social Firms have been described as feeling like a small family business, as the emphasis is on creating a supportive work environment.

Social Firms also employ a mix of people on an equal basis with the same rights and responsibilities regardless of your disadvantage.

## > **Is there a Social Firm in my area?**

There are Social Firms growing across Scotland – for more information please visit [www.socialfirms.org.uk](http://www.socialfirms.org.uk).

## Section 3

### > Can I start off as a volunteer and build my way up to working full time?

Social Firms are designed to create employment opportunities for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market. As the business grows, it may create more jobs. If you feel you are ready to take on more responsibility, come off benefits, and work longer hours, and there is an opportunity that arises in the Social Firm for a job that you would be qualified to do, then you would be able to apply for the job. Your experience of working in the Social Firm would obviously stand you in good stead for getting the job. There are a number of people who have made this transition, while others have used the experience of working in a Social Firm to move on to new opportunities to work.

### > What training and support will I get if I work in a Social Firm?

At the very least, you should get a good induction when you first start, whether you're working as a volunteer, or on a training or work placement, or as full or part time staff. The induction will introduce you to your colleagues, your work place, go through health and safety policies and procedures, explain what is expected of you, and tell you more about your job. The induction should also explain who will be managing and supporting you in the workplace, and how this should happen.

Your new Social Firm employer should discuss any additional support that you might need. The Social Firm may have additional informal counselling support available or access to other organisations that can provide additional support in your workplace. The Social Firm will welcome any other support that you have in relation

to returning to work.

The Social Firm will also offer regular training opportunities and personal development.

As with any good employer, you should have regular meetings with your supervisor, a regular appraisal, which will look at how you are doing, and what you should be working towards. The culture of the Social Firm will be supportive so that you will be given support, training and guidance to do the work and to learn new skills.

### > **Should I tell the Social Firm about my past/history?**

Part of the ethos of a Social Firm is to create an atmosphere where people's difficulties are not judged, and that you are supported to work to the best of your ability while being encouraged to develop personally and professionally. It is up to you what you tell them, you will find that you will not be judged, or patronised for whatever your experiences are.

If you need additional support it may be useful to share with them some of the difficulties you are facing so that they can support you to maintain your work.

As Social Firms employ people who are vulnerable, most ask for a Disclosure check before you start working there. This is standard and nothing to worry about.

### > **How long can I stay working in a Social Firm?**

If you are there on a training or work placement, this is usually time limited, and may have some form of recognised qualification attached to them. This will depend on the Social Firm in question.

## Section 3

If you are employed then you remain employed the same as in any other business.

If you are working as a volunteer, this is also usually time limited with the potential for extending the agreement.

### > **Will the Social Firm help me to move on if I want to?**

As a small business, Social Firms actively develop a team of employees that are committed to the business and skilled in their jobs. However, as with any good employer, the Social Firm will also encourage you to consider your professional development, and will encourage you to continue to develop, both within the Social Firm and beyond. If you decide to move on the Social Firm will support you to do this.

### > **What will happen to my benefits if I start working in a Social Firm?**

Always seek advice from Jobcentre Plus about your benefits and request a Better Off calculation (See Section 1 for more details). Each person is slightly different due to the range of different benefit combinations.

If you are volunteering, then you can work as many hours as you want and it will not affect your benefits.

Part time work is classified as anything under 16 hours. Full time work is anything over 16 hours. There are many options available to you depending on the number of hours you wish to work. Jobcentre Plus will be able to give you more information on your personal situation.

## > **What additional costs will there be for me working in a Social Firm?**

If you are working as a volunteer, you should be entitled to reasonable out of pocket expenses.

The Social Firm should provide you with any equipment or clothing that you need to do the job safely, whether you are a volunteer, trainee or employee.

If you are employed it is likely that you will have to pay your travel costs to get to and from work. Check any arrangements for providing lunches/meals/drinks so you can plan for this.

## > **What if there are no Social Firms in my area, or none that suit what I am looking for?**

Social Firms are a fairly new model for creating employment opportunities for people who are distanced from the labour market. There may not be one near you, or it may not provide what you are looking for.

There are likely to be plenty of other opportunities to support you into work – the following sections look at some of the questions that you may have about other opportunities in your area.

If you have any business ideas that you think could become a Social Firm get in touch with Social Firms Scotland [sfs@socialfirms.org.uk](mailto:sfs@socialfirms.org.uk).



## Section 4

### Starting work

Once you've been through the process of looking for work, and secured a job, the next step is starting the job. This applies to Social Firms and open employment.

#### > What should I expect when I start a new job?

Expect to feel nervous, unsure, even terrified on the first day, and even over the first few weeks. It will take time to get to know everyone, and get to know the environment, the routines, the job itself. Everyone expects that new employees are going to be scared, and hopefully they will support you to adjust. Be prepared to be polite and to talk to people. If you are starting work in a Social Firm you should expect everyone there to pay particular attention to welcoming you into your new job and helping to settle in.

#### > What will happen on my first day?

On your first day and over the course of your first week, you should be given an induction. The induction should cover basic health and safety, show you round, introducing you to your colleagues, tell you a bit more about the job and the company and explaining how things are done. Concentrate on getting to know who you will be working with, who will be showing you what to do, where you will be working and where everything is. It might be useful to make a note of any questions that occur to you to bring up in the first few days. Don't be afraid to ask what seem to be silly questions - it will help you to get to know your new job faster, and help you to settle in.

## > **Is there any thing I should do on my first day?**

Take some money for lunch or drinks, and bus fares/travel expenses, just in case. If you can find out before you start what facilities there are then this will help you to prepare.

It might be worth making the journey to your new job before you start so you know how long it will take you. It also means that you can check out at your own pace what amenities there are around your new workplace.

## > **What support is there for me starting work?**

It's useful to keep in touch or make contact with your Personal Advisor, Disability Employment Advisor, Job Broker or other employment adviser when you start work, and come to an agreement with them about what support they can offer.

A good employer will spend time inducting you into your new role over the first few days or weeks, so that you get to know the job, what is expected of you, and the support that you can expect from the employer.

If you have access to Workstep, they may negotiate with the employer to provide you with job coaching to help you into your new job.

If you have had support from another employment service, they may be able to support you on your first day – talk to them about what would be best for you.

## Section 4

### > How can I protect myself financially?

Coming off your benefits is going to be a bit daunting. Those who have made the transition feel that they are more in control of their own money, and feel good not being dependent on the benefits system.

Make sure you get appropriate advice from Jobcentre Plus about any financial benefits, including Working Tax Credits or Return to Work Credits if you are being supported by Pathways to Work. Find out if you are entitled to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for the first month. It is also a good idea to get a travel pass if you use public transport to get to work for the first few weeks - the Jobcentre may be able to help with this.

If you are on Incapacity Benefit and you start work, make sure also that any paper work with regards to the Linking Rule is completed. The linking rule means that if the work does not work out for whatever reason you can automatically go back onto the benefits you were on. This can happen up to 104 weeks (2 years) after you have started work.





## Section 5

### Staying in Work

#### > What support can I expect from my employer?

Any good employer should spend time helping you to get to know the job and the company. This may involve training, regular meetings and feedback. Under the Disability Discrimination Act, employers must also make reasonable adjustments to the work place for their employees who have a long term physical or mental impairment (this includes long term illnesses). This means you have to talk to your employer about your needs.

A good employer will keep their employees informed about its goals in the company. A good manager will meet formally and informally with staff to give feedback, set goals, and resolve any difficulties. They should also make sure you have what you need to do the job well.

#### > What should I do if I am bullied at work?

All good employers should have policies to protect their staff from bullying and harassment. Make sure that you are familiar with these policies, and you know how to follow them and who to approach if you think you are being bullied or harassed at work.

There are a number of laws that protect you from harassment whether it be because of your disability, race, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs. Find someone that you can talk to, either in the workplace or outside of work who can advise and support you to address any issues of bullying and harassment.

## > What other support can I have to stay in work?

It may be useful to keep in contact with any support that you have had to get you into work, and to negotiate with them the support that you need. Most employment support agencies will support you once you have started work, especially in the first few weeks, and will be able to help you negotiate any issues or difficulties that come up with your employer.

## > What other protection is there for me at work?

Trade Unions are a source of support for employees – find out if your employer recognises a particular union and how to join it. If your employer does not recognise a union, you can still join one. For information on how to join a union, visit [www.stuc.co.uk](http://www.stuc.co.uk). The STUC is the overarching body for all the unions in Scotland and they will be able to advise you about the best union to join for your industry, how to join, and the benefits of joining. Accessing the union can give you additional independent support if you are having difficulties in the workplace.

## Summary

There are many steps that you can take towards work, and to staying in work, whether this is in open employment or working in a Social Firm. There are many organisations and people who can support you in your journey - the next section has a list of some of the organisations that will support you, and which have been mentioned throughout the booklet.



## Section 6

### Useful contacts

#### To find local services:

To find your local colleges -  
[www.scotlandinter.net/colleges](http://www.scotlandinter.net/colleges)

To find your local council - [www.cosla.gov.uk/councils](http://www.cosla.gov.uk/councils)

To find your local Council for Voluntary services-  
[www.scvo.org.uk/cvsnetwork](http://www.scvo.org.uk/cvsnetwork)

To find your local Social Firms - [www.socialfirms.org.uk](http://www.socialfirms.org.uk)

#### For information about benefits and finances

Jobcentre plus - offers a range of information and support about going into work. They will advise about and process your benefits - [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk)

Department for Work and Pensions - provides information about benefits - [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

Citizens Advice Bureau - free information and advice about legal and financial matters, including managing debt - [www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

National Debt line - free confidential and independent advise about dealing with debt -  
[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk/scotland)  
phone number 0808 080 4000

## For support going into work

Careers Scotland - provide information and advice about jobs, choosing a career, and applying for jobs - [www.careers-scotland.org.uk](http://www.careers-scotland.org.uk) - phone number 0845 8502502

The Shaw Trust - provide employment services across the UK to people with disabilities - [www.shaw-trust.org.uk](http://www.shaw-trust.org.uk)

Momentum - a national organisation supporting disabled people to achieve their goals, including a number of employment services - [www.momentumsotland.org](http://www.momentumsotland.org)

Yes2work - an organisation supporting disabled people to find and keep employment - [www.yes2work.org.uk](http://www.yes2work.org.uk)

Apex Scotland - an organisation working with ex-offenders to support them back to work. Apex Scotland offers information and advice about disclosing criminal convictions - [www.apexscotland.org.uk](http://www.apexscotland.org.uk) - phone line about disclosure is open Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5pm except for holidays

## Websites advertising jobs in Scotland

Many offer guidance about CVs, careers, and interviews

[www.s1jobs.com](http://www.s1jobs.com)

[www.thisisnorthscotland.com](http://www.thisisnorthscotland.com)

[www.monsterscotland.co.uk](http://www.monsterscotland.co.uk)

[www.scotcareers.co.uk](http://www.scotcareers.co.uk)

[www.theherald.co.uk/appointments](http://www.theherald.co.uk/appointments)

[www.fish4.co.uk](http://www.fish4.co.uk)

[www.scottishjobtoday.co.uk](http://www.scottishjobtoday.co.uk)

## Section 6

### **For information about volunteering**

[www.volunteerscotland.info](http://www.volunteerscotland.info)

### **Other useful contacts**

Disclosure Scotland- administers the Disclosure checks in Scotland, and advises about the process - [www.disclosurescotland.co.uk](http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk)

Surestart - has information about childcare - [www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

Directgov - website of information about public services, including employment and disability - [www.directgov.uk](http://www.directgov.uk)

Disability Rights Commission - advice and information about the rights of disabled people including in employment - [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)  
phone line: 08457 622633

### **Organisations providing information and support about mental health issues, learning disabilities, drug and alcohol use and homelessness**

Scottish Recovery Network - information and advice about recovering from mental health problems- [www.scottishrecovery.net](http://www.scottishrecovery.net)

Mind (National Association for Mental Health) - information about all aspects of mental health and mental illness including a section on returning to work - [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) Mind Infoline is available Monday to Friday 9.15am to 5.15pm on 0845 7660163

**Samaritans** - 24 hour confidential emotional support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide - 08457 909090 - [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**Breathing Space** -free confidential phoneline for people experiencing low mood, depression or worry 0800 838587  
and online information about dealing with these feelings  
- [www.breathingspace.co.uk](http://www.breathingspace.co.uk)

**Alchol Focus Scotland** - information about alcohol use and links to services to help overcome misuse -  
[www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk)

**Scottish Drugs Forum** - information about drugs and drug use in Scotland, with a search facility to find drug support services - [www.sdf.org.uk](http://www.sdf.org.uk)

**Shelter** - information and support to address homelessness including Free Housing Advice Helpline open 8am to 12 midnight 0808 800 4444.  
- <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk>



## Section 7a

This section will help get you started on planning what you are doing. Based on 3 calendar months, there is space for you to list what it is you are going to do. You can think about what you are going to do in terms of things that you **need** to do (there is a space to list what you need to do), what you **want** to (again, there is a space for you to list these). You can then plan them in your calendar. Think about what might get in the way of you doing what you set out to, and how you can overcome this. Using the action plans in Section 7B might be a way of helping you plan your diary more easily.

Things I **need** to do this month:

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## Section 7a

Things I **need** to do this month:

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Things I **want** to do this month:

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Things I **need** to do this month:

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Things I **want** to do this month:

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## Section 7b

### Why keep an action plan?

Keeping an action plan can help you to identify your goals, and the steps you need to take towards meeting them. When you are setting your goals, make it realistic, and a little bit of a challenge, and something that you can clearly "see" when you have done it. It is also a good idea to set yourself a target date, which will help keep you focussed.

Breaking your goal down into smaller steps can make it easier to see that you are making progress, and can motivate you to keep moving towards your goal.

If you do not meet your goal take a bit of time to think about what got in the way, what worked and didn't work - there are many reasons why we do not reach the goals that we have set for ourselves. This will help you to adjust your goal, to set a new goal or to think of other steps that you can take towards achieving it.

**What is my goal?**

**What steps do I need to take to achieve this goal and when will I do this by?**

	Date completed
<b>Step 1:</b>	
<b>Step 2:</b>	
<b>Step 3:</b>	

What is getting in the way of me achieving my goal?

How can I overcome this?

What do I need to change/do differently to achieve my goal?

I completed this goal on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ having met this goal!

## Section 7b

**What is my goal?**

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**What steps do I need to take to achieve this goal and when will I do this by?**

	Date completed
<b>Step 1:</b>	
<b>Step 2:</b>	
<b>Step 3:</b>	

What is getting in the way of me achieving my goal?

How can I overcome this?

What do I need to change/do differently to achieve my goal?

I completed this goal on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ having met this goal!

**What is my goal?**

**What steps do I need to take to achieve this goal and when will I do this by?**

	Date completed
<b>Step 1:</b>	
<b>Step 2:</b>	
<b>Step 3:</b>	

What is getting in the way of me achieving my goal?

How can I overcome this?

What do I need to change/do differently to achieve my goal?

I completed this goal on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ having met this goal!





Published by Social Firms Scotland with funding from the Big Lottery Fund

Designed by Foyer Graphics,

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the information contained in these pages, to sharing their experiences and knowledge of ways of overcoming the barriers to work - including Forth Sector, Grampian Opportunities, Momentum's Employment Support Team, SAMH - Workstep, Apex Scotland in Aberdeen, Edinburgh Cyrenians, Cornerstone's Employment Project, the employees from the Social Firms who contributed to this, and those who edited it.

Disclaimer - the information contained here was deemed to be correct at the time of publication

**Social Firms** **Scotland**