

Changing Careers and Re-training

Changing Careers

A job change due to ill health or injury ranks as a highly stressful experience. It is common to go through a cycle of shock, denial, anger, feelings of not being in control, guilt and loss of confidence. Even a person determined to face life's challenges with optimism will need time to adjust. Trying to think creatively about your future career may be hard until you have had time to come to terms with any uncomfortable or painful feelings.

Changing careers can be an exhilarating experience too; the excitement of taking control and the relief at breaking away from an unhappy work situation. It can be an opportunity to set some goals and have a vision that will give your life more direction, more purpose and be more rewarding. With the increasing pace of technology and an end to "jobs for life" almost everybody is going to be asked questions about what kind of career and life they really want.

Hasty decisions to give up work are not recommended until all alternative options have been investigated. In discussion with you, your employer should explore:

- reasonable adjustments: e.g. the use of alternative technology to get round most ergonomical problems
- reducing working hours
- varying workloads
- job share and reallocating duties within a team
- giving you time off for rehabilitation purposes (e.g. physiotherapy appointments)
- offer training in the use of equipment
- redeployment within the organisation

If after considering the above options, you find none of them are viable, then you may decide to change your career.

Evaluating your skills

When deciding on a new career, it is important for a person to assess what motivates them and what skills they already possess. Some skills are job specific, e.g. welding sheet metal, but many are transferable, e.g. communication, presentation and managerial skills, or the ability to organise work.

This can be an excellent time to update a CV as well as getting some help in completing application forms and improving interview techniques. Independent guidance agencies, careers service companies and JobCentrePlus can all provide assistance, as well as local colleges, which often run courses.

Voluntary work can also prove to be beneficial in developing new skills and gaining work experience.

Independent guidance agencies

These are generally based in larger cities, especially in London and the south. Generally listed in local business telephone directories, they offer in-depth services to clients which can include counselling and psychometric testing. However, they usually charge quite substantial fees as they generally work with managers or executives being paid for by their employer.

Careers service companies

These exist throughout the UK and increasingly work with adults in partnership with local lifelong learning initiatives. Services such as browsing their information library or making use of computer databases are usually free. Other options, testing or help with CVs, will probably be priced.

University or college careers service

These can also offer you advice and information.

Training

Whilst a proper presentation of your experience and skills to a prospective employer can be as important as your qualifications, there is an increasing need in the modern world for specialist training and further study. This applies not only to particular career areas but to working practices e.g. computer training, personal development and management training.

A number of professions require traditional qualifications, based on the theoretical study of academic subjects at diploma or degree level. Other vocational qualifications relate more directly to the world of work and the ability to do a particular job. They are available on a number of levels including National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs) and BTEC qualifications. Other bodies which administer awards include City & Guilds and OCR, which offers RSA and other qualifications. Almost every professional body has its own specific professional qualification.

The shift towards a lifelong learning culture means there are more 'second chances' in the education system than ever before. Nowadays there are many channels through which learning opportunities for adults are offered. These include:

Further education and tertiary colleges

These have traditionally offered vocational courses leading to qualifications at the equivalent of craft and technician levels, many now offer subjects up to professional and degree level. Course provision is becoming increasingly flexible, including part-time, day release and sandwich courses. Some offer courses geared specifically to the needs of people coming back into education after a number of years, often called Return To Learn, Fresh Start or something similar. Fees vary.

Higher education

Advanced level education (entry standard equivalent to A level or above), offered mainly through universities and colleges or institutes of higher education. Higher education includes degrees and diplomas. Most courses are full-time, but many can be taken part-time. Some tuition fees are normally payable. Bursaries, student loans and Access Funds may provide some financial assistance. Disabled Students Allowance, to pay for the cost of specialist equipment, may be available to students with an RSI condition.

Government-funded training programme

Independent training organisations, further education colleges or voluntary organisations which contract to provide free training for unemployed people. A training allowance equivalent to the trainee's benefits plus £10 a week is provided under the 'Work-based learning for Adults' programme ('Training for Work' in Scotland).

Adult and community education services

A range of courses for adults in a particular local education authority area. Mostly part-time with some courses in the evening. Usually these courses are non-advanced. Subjects can be work-related, leisure activities or hobbies. A realistic charge is usually made but some courses are offered for a token amount, especially if you are on benefits.

Voluntary organisations

Often provide free training, sometimes certified, for their volunteers.

Distance Learning

Very flexible independent learning, including correspondence, open learning centres, the internet, BBC radio and TV programmes and occasional tutorials or one-week residential courses. Many universities now offer this including The Open University.

New Deal

Part of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy. It gives New Deal job seekers aged 18-24, 25 plus and New Deal Jobseekers with disabilities an opportunity to develop their potential, gain skills and experience and find work. In addition, New Deal for Lone Parents and New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) offer opportunities to explore work options to those on health related benefits. A range of different organisations deliver NDDP and these organisations have set up Job Brokers. Job Brokers are organisations tasked with helping people into work through NDDP. Job Brokers provide:

- Advice about how to get a job
- Help matching your skills and abilities to what employers need
- Advice on training
- Support when you start work

You can get more information about NDDP and printed details of Job Brokers (Braille and audio versions are also available) operating in your area by:

Ringling the NDDP helpline on 0800 137 177. People with speech difficulties or those who are deaf or hard of hearing can use a textphone by dialling 0800 435550. Alternatively, contact your local Employment Services Office.

Funding

Possible sources of funding for vocational courses include Career Development Loans, offered through four of the major banks, and grants from charitable trusts. You may be eligible to undertake some courses whilst receiving certain benefits e.g. Income Support. For further details, contact your local benefit agency.

Returning to work

After retraining, you may begin applying for work. The RSI Association also produces a factsheet with tips on applying for work with RSI, including what to tell your potential employer.

Further Sources of information, advice and guidance

Learn Direct

A freephone helpline which helps callers with learning and career enquiries.

Telephone: 0800 100 900

Email: enquiries@learndirect.net

Web: www.learndirect.co.uk

CSU Prospects

A guide to graduate jobs, careers and post-graduate study.

Telephone: 44 (0) 161 277 5200

Fax: 44 (0) 161 277 5210

Web: www.prospects.csu.ac.uk

The Open University

Caters particularly for mature students, including those without any previous qualifications. The OU has some funds to help those on low incomes or on certain benefits.

Telephone: 01908 274 066

Fax: 01908 653 744

Web: www.open.ac.uk

Skill

National Bureau for Students with Disabilities promotes opportunities for young people and adults with any kind of disability in post-16 education, training and employment across the UK.

Telephone: 020 7450 0620 (voice/text)

Fax: 020 7450 0650

Email: skill@skill.org.uk

Web: www.skill.org.uk

Opportunities

Specialist agency dealing with employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Telephone: 020 7481 2727

Minicom: 020 7481 2727

Fax: 020 7481 9797

Email: eopps.ho@care4free.net

Web: www.opportunities.org.uk

National Extension College

Offers a range of subjects including GCSEs, A levels, accounting, marketing, IT skills, small business courses and counselling skills etc. It offers distance learning with support from tutors.

Telephone: 01223 400 200

Fax: 01223 400 325

E-mail: info@nec.ac.uk

Web: www.nec.ac.uk

The Open College of the Arts

Offers home study courses in the following areas: creative writing, art and design, photography, textiles, singing, video production, art history, painting, garden design, interior design and drawing. The college can offer discounts on its courses to people receiving welfare benefits.

Telephone: 01226 730 495

Minicom: 01226 205 255

Fax: 01226 730 838

E-mail: open.arts@ukonline.co.uk

Web: www.oca-uk.com

Association of British Correspondence Colleges (ABCC)

Aims to ensure that students get a high standard of service from correspondence courses. They produce a free sheet that gives a list of subjects available in their member colleges.

Telephone: 020 8544 9559

Fax: 020 8540 7657

E-mail: abcc@msn.com

Web: www.homestudy.org.uk

Open and Distance Learning Quality Council (ODLQC)

Checks the standards of correspondence courses. They produce a free information leaflet that lists the approved colleges and the courses offered at these colleges. This list is also available on the ODLQC website. They also give general advice on how to choose any open learning course.

Telephone: 020 7612 7090

Fax: 020 7612 7092

E-mail: odlqc@dial.pipex.com

Web: www.odlqc.org.uk

British Association for Open Learning (BAOL)

Promotes excellence and best practice in open, flexible and distance forms of learning. Their members work to a Code of Practice for open learning and can display the BAOL Quality Mark (a Q with BAOL written on it). They are listed on the BAOL website.

Telephone: 01462 485 588

Fax: 01462 485 633

E-mail: info@baol.co.uk

Web: www.baol.co.uk

Recommended reading

Breakthrough (Your Guide to Handling Career Opportunities and Changes)

Anthony Weldon

Bene Factum Publishing Ltd.

ISBN: 0952275465

What Color Is Your Parachute?

Richard Nelson Bolles

Ten Speed Press.

ISBN: 1580081231

I Could Do Anything (If Only I knew What It Was)

Barbara Sher

Hodder & Stoughton Publishers.

ISBN: 0340646950

Second Chances

Published every 18 months by the Careers and Occupational Information Centre (COIC). A national guide to adult education and training opportunities, including open learning.

ISBN 0 861 107 799. 12th edition. Free of charge.

Contact: Careers and Occupational Information Centre

Telephone: 020 8957 5030

Fax: 020 8957 5012

The Good Study Guide

Price £8.99. Aimed at people doing any sort of study who need some tips about how to go about it.

Available from bookshops. The OU also publishes The Arts Good Study Guide and The Sciences Good Study Guide.

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