once you're on it, it’s compulsory to
stay on it and do the things you’re
asked to do.

Other places you can go for advice
and support include drug and alcohol
treatment providers – many will run
an education, training or employment
(ETE) project or will be able to refer
you to a local service – some local
authorities also offer employment
support.

Six steps you can take now

• If you’re in treatment, discuss your
options with your treatment provider.
They can help you weigh up whether it’s
the right time to consider employment,
and help you consider the best way
ahead.

• The National Careers Service has
advice and information about careers,
training and education, including face
to face advice and information about
funding: https://nationalcareersservice.
direct.gov.uk/Pages/Home.aspx

• Think about adult education or training
as a step towards employment. Putting
effort into training and education now
can broaden your future career options.

• Jobcentre Plus and your local Volunteer
Centre can advise you about ways
to proceed and might be able to offer
training or volunteering opportunities. You
can often volunteer whilst on benefits,
but you should always talk to your JCP
adviser to make sure you stay within the
JSA, Employment and Support Allowance
or Universal Credit rules.

• If you’re interested in volunteering
rather than paid work, many places
have a volunteer centre – you can find
the nearest one to you at Volunteering
volunteering.org.uk/where-do-i-start

• If you start work on a low wage, you might
still be entitled to Housing Benefit, Tax
Credits or Universal Credit. Speak to a
welfare benefits adviser who will be able
to provide reliable information.

• Have realistic expectations. Particularly
right now, most people have to apply for
a lot of vacancies before they find paid
employment. This can be disheartening,
but remember – most people go through
this. Practice can make perfect, so
practise applications and mock interviews
can help you to perform when you really
need to.

This leaflet has been developed in
consultation with drug and alcohol service
users.
Having a voluntary or paid job can also give you the confidence to change the way you interact with other people, so you might be able to have better relationships with your family and friends. The friends you can make at work may also help you to feel more a part of your community, and to broaden your social horizons - which can be helpful to have a set of relationships that are not from a background of drug or alcohol use or dependency.

Volunteering and employment not only act to protect against lapsing or relapsing, they can also be a clear and visible commitment, a way to show yourself and others that you are determined to address your substance dependency. Most people also find it helpful to have a set of relationships in the workplace that are not from a background of drug or alcohol use or dependency.

'If you don't want to live on benefits, I want to be able to pay my rent. I want to be able to do this and go to work and earn my own money. It's time I put back into society.'

'Service User

'Getting a job is good for your mental health. Just getting out there, doing something. Whether it's a paid job or a voluntary job, it doesn't matter, because you're out there doing something. You're not bored, sat at home, like you used to be with your drug use. So it's healthy to get a job.'

'Service Provider

However whilst volunteering or paid employment can be good for your health and wellbeing, there may be times in your life when it's better to focus on other things, like ensuring you're getting the most out of treatment or dealing with health problems.

What kinds of employment are there?

As well as the traditional type of job, there are other options that can provide some flexibility, or can be useful steps on the path to full time, paid employment.

Volunteering can offer a routine and allow you to fill your time in a productive way, and help you to build up your confidence and feel more positively about yourself. Your energy, skills and experiences benefit other people in the community too of course. Volunteering is a widely recognised stepping stone towards employment, and it can also play an important role in preventing lapse or relapse back to substance dependency. It can be a good way of easing back into the routine of employment in a more supportive and less demanding environment than the paid workplace. There are opportunities to volunteer in a wide range of different areas of interest and locations, and you can often choose the times of volunteering to fit around the rest of your lifestyle. Apprenticeships are paid jobs that include training, aimed at people starting out in a new field. These can be in many different areas, from agriculture and construction to business and retail. Competition for apprenticeships can be strong, however and you may need to brush up on key skills before applying.

Internships or work experience can also ease the path into paid work, and whilst they are often unpaid, they can sometimes lead to paid work after the internship or work experience has been completed. Your treatment provider or Jobcentre Plus may be able to assist you to find work experience.

One of the advantages of all these forms of unpaid employment is that you get the opportunity to prove to an employer that you are committed to working, and that you can be reliable and dependable. They also help to build your CV and can be a source of positive employer references that will help to widen your opportunities.

‘From what I hear, a lot of people in recovery get voluntary work first and, there’s a natural progression into work from there. So it’s even involved. It seems more like a gateway thing that they do through voluntary work.’

'Service User

‘Voluntary work has been another way we move people towards the jobs market. Developing those skills, building their confidence and enabling them to do references and building a reputation for themselves.’

'Treatment Provider

What do you have to offer an employer?

If you have been through a difficult time but made a decision to change your life, this shows a level of commitment and determination that many other people may not have: employers often say that people with a history of drug or alcohol dependency make motivated and loyal employees

- they can be more productive, miss fewer days of work, and get on with colleagues just as well as anybody else.

Everybody is an individual, with different skills, experiences and characteristics, and anybody can have problems in their past. The right employer will be able to recognise your potential; your past history will only be one out of many aspects they consider.

Who can I go to for advice?

If you are currently unemployed and looking for work, you will probably already be going to Jobcentre Plus. They can help you to look for and apply for jobs or work experience, and can offer support to build up your CV and practice for interviews.

Jobcentre Plus can also refer you to the Work Programme or Work Choice. If you are claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), you may well be given a mandatory referral to the Work Programme after 3 or 12 months in any case, but if your adviser knows and understands your circumstances, you might be able to volunteer early. Remember though, even if you volunteer for the Work Programme,