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Employment specialist

Employment specialists work with clinical teams to support adults and young people receiving mental health services to find or keep the right job for them.

You'll support job seekers to identify their strengths, skills and aspirations and provide support to them and their employer once they're in a job.



Life as an employment specialist

Every day you'll provide intensive, personalised support to people who are receiving help from mental health services and are unemployed, and who wish to find or return to work or who may need some help to stay in their current job.

You'll support your clients to identify their strengths, skills and aspirations to create the right job match, including working to understand their background and experience and their aspirations for paid work.

You'll help your clients break down barriers and challenges faced by:

- preparing clients for interviews
- working with colleagues to explore possible changes in medication
- advising on reasonable adjustments at work
- finding strategies to meet clients' goals
- being creative in job searches

Paul Wilkinson

Employment specialist

I have always had an interest in the job market, employment and supporting people into work.

Read Paul's story [1]

Another key part of your role will be to build relationships with employers to source job opportunities that aren't always obvious.

For clients already in a job, you'll support them and their employer to make reasonable adjustments. This could involve educating and supporting employers to develop return to work strategies, and providing ongoing contact and support once clients have returned to work.

You will work with members of a community mental health team, drug and alcohol teams or within the NHS Talking Therapies service (previously Improving Access to Psychological Therapies - IAPT). You'll be based in a local health centre, in a talking therapies service, a drug and alcohol team, or in an office in a local community mental health team.

Your work as part of a community mental health team will support a tried and tested approach called Individual Placement and Support [2] which helps to bridge the gap between mental healthcare and employment services. Using this approach will help you support people with mental health problems to secure and stay in a job.

Wherever you're based, you will be part of a multidisciplinary team and be an advocate for employers. You will need to travel around your local area meeting people and employers in the community, and visiting places of work if needed.

You will be required to monitor progress and make sure the support you provide is effective, and keep abreast of changing practice within the area of employment support and rehabilitation.

You'll work independently and remotely for a significant part of your working week, but will be supported by a team supervisor and colleagues in your mental health team.

Must-have skills

To be an employment specialist, you'll need to be a self-starter with a passionate belief that anyone can work.

You'll need:

- excellent interpersonal skills and the ability to build relationships with a range of people
- the ability to build close, trusting and productive relationships with people
- to be able work well within a multidisciplinary team
- the ability to approach employers and build relationships with them, often from scratch
- a good understanding of mental health issues

- strong written and verbal communication skills, tailored to a variety of audiences
- to be able to work independently and use initiative to think quickly on the spot in often challenging situations
- creativity to solve problems and tackle obstacles
- effective time management for tight deadlines and managing competing demands
- tenacity and drive
- a focus on achieving good outcomes for clients and employers

Entry requirements

There are no set entry requirements to become an employment specialist. However, some employers may ask for a qualification in healthcare and/or relevant experience and some may require you to hold an undergraduate degree in areas such as health or social care.

Employers will expect good literacy and numeracy. They may ask for GCSEs 9-4 (A-C) or equivalent.

They may want to see that you have experience or an understanding of mental health services from doing paid or voluntary work with people with mental health issues.

Your experience could also be from your personal circumstances, for example looking after someone with mental health issues or dealing with your own mental health issues.

Any experience of supporting people with health issues into work or voluntary work positions will be an advantage, or if you have experience working with other agencies including Job Centre Plus.

Pay and benefits

Employment specialists working in the NHS are paid on the Agenda for Change (AfC [3]) pay system. You may start on a band 3/4/5 depending on job location and experience.

The standard working hours are 37.5 hours a week, but you may sometimes be required to work outside the hours of 9am and 5pm.

Terms and conditions may be different for those employed outside of the NHS.

How to become an employment specialist

Your personality and attitude are very important in this role, along with a genuine belief that someone with a history of poor mental health or addictions can find sustainable employment. You'll need to be passionate about making a difference and be able to build hopeful relationships.

As part of your induction, you'll undertake a seven week e-learning course covering how to support individuals with mental health conditions into work and Individual Placement and Support (IPS).

Through this, you will have knowledge and understanding of:

- the link between health and employment
- how IPS helps people back to work
- what the role of the employment specialist involves
- how to deliver IPS most effectively to help clients reach their potential

You will have ongoing training to keep your skills and knowledge up to date.

Where a career as an employment specialist can take you

You may be able to progress to becoming a senior employment specialist or the team leader of a group of employment specialists. This will involve providing supervision, training, and mentoring to your team, and offering a pivotal role in managing a high-quality service.

You could also choose to apply to train as a mental health nurse or social worker or pursue a career in one of the psychological professions, for example as a psychological wellbeing practitioner.

There are also opportunities in commissioning employment support services or wider supported employment programmes.

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[1] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/clinical-support-staff/employment-adviser/real-life-story-paul-wilkinson>

[2] <https://ipsgrow.org.uk/careers/why-work-in-ips/> [3] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#AfC>

[4] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/wider-healthcare-team/roles-wider-healthcare-team/clinical-support-staff/social-prescribing-link-worker> [5] <https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/psychological-therapies/roles-psychological-therapies/peer-support-worker>

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