



# Time2Work

## Module 3:

Support materials for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases returning to work after rehabilitation

### Retraining and building your confidence

It's not easy when you have to leave your job because of your rheumatic and musculoskeletal disease (RMD). It can knock your confidence and leave you feeling down and uncertain about getting back into work. For the purpose of this fact sheet we are focusing on paid employment, but the advice could also be applied to voluntary work, which might be an option, depending on what's important to you (*see step 1 below*), your level of disability and the work opportunities available in your area. Voluntary work can be rewarding in many ways, even if it does not provide a financial income. It could also be a good way of building your confidence and easing yourself back into paid employment, and/or provide you with an opportunity to learn new skills and meet people.

The first and often the most difficult step is to decide you want to be active and start working again. One good tip to motivate yourself to stay positive or even be enthusiastic about re-entering the workplace is to use your imagination and think of how your life could be in work, achieving your goals.

Second, **make a realistic, step-by-step plan**. This will give you a structure, help you to think what you want from work and allow you to set yourself small, achievable goals. **Setting goals and taking action stimulates motivation and enables you to take control of your life.**

At the end of this process you may decide that you are not ready to return to work, but this will be a positive, well considered decision allowing you to move forward in a direction of your choosing.

### Step 1: What is important to you about work?

Using the list below as a starting point, take time to think about why work is important to you and prioritise the top five reasons work is important to you:

- Freedom and flexibility
- Structure
- Security
- Social contact
- To achieve something
- To make a difference
- Status
- Purpose
- A certain level of income
- Independence
- Development
- Fulfilment
- Other?

### Step 2: What can you do?

It may not be possible for you to return to your old job, or even to perform the type of work you were doing. This can be hard, but try not to be dispirited. Think of this as a fresh start; be **open to new ideas**, adopt a **positive attitude**, be **motivated**, **look forward** and **focus on what you CAN do now and in the future**.

- What are the areas of work and/or hobbies, (e.g. gardening or music) that **interest** you?
- What are your **skills and abilities**? (*see separate fact sheet to help you make a list*)
- Ask others (family/friends) what they think about your skills

**Be inspired!** Using these two lists take your top five interests and top five skills and abilities and think about occupations or careers that might combine these. You may find it helpful to discuss these with a friend, mentor or a professional careers advisor and see what they suggest (*see step 4*).

### Step 3: What do you need?

**Be honest when assessing yourself and your abilities and set yourself SMART goals**, that is goals that are **S**pecific and defined; **M**easurable; **A**chievable and that can be evaluated; **R**ealistic and **T**imebound (have a deadline). Think positively and list the types of work that interest you and that could fit your intellectual and physical abilities and limitations. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Would I be able to do this type of work with the skills/abilities I currently have?
- Would I need training to give myself new/additional skills/qualifications?
- If so, would I be willing and/or able to find a suitable training course?
- Would I need any kind of workplace adaptations?
- Would I be prepared and/or able to travel to a location within a reasonable distance from where I live?
- Could I work full-time? If not, is this the sort of work I could do part-time/working flexible hours etc.?
- Would I be prepared to work from home?
- Would I consider being self-employed/starting/running my own business?
- Other?

### Work plan

Make a work plan that lists:

<b>What is important to me about work</b>	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
<b>Interests</b>	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
<b>Qualifications, skills and abilities</b>	1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
<b>Options</b> (types of work that might suit you)	
<b>Retraining needs</b>	
<b>Other considerations</b> (e.g. part time / flexible hours / office type work / workplace adaptations etc.)	

## Step 4: Who could help?

There are many people who can help.

### **Recruitment consultants, job centres, careers advisors**

It is their role to advise people and help them find work. They should know about the current job market and may be able to suggest types of work you had not thought of and/or re-training opportunities. They may also have access to jobs that are not advertised.

Take your work plan with you as a starting point for discussion.

### **Organisations for people with RMDs / people with disabilities and those aimed specifically on helping people re-enter the workforce after rehabilitation**

You can find out about these organisations from the internet, libraries and patient organisations. The health professionals who treat you, or your local hospitals and rehabilitation centres may also be able to support you.

Below is a list of useful addresses **[TO BE COMPLETED WITH NATIONAL / LOCAL INFORMATION]**

- *Business links / job centres / careers advisory services etc.*

### **Networking**

Tell family, friends and former colleagues about your plans and ask if they can help, or if they might be able to pass your name to their contacts.

### **Tip**

When approaching family, friends and colleagues be positive and concise about what you are looking for and how they might help – use your work plan as a discussion guide. If you don't hear anything back, follow-up with a gentle reminder.

**If you use the Internet**, look for any sites or networks that might suit your needs.

### **Training courses**

If you decide that you need additional training, identify the qualifications / attributes that could help you find suitable work:

- Self management courses **[DELETE IF NOT AVIALABLE IN COUNTRY]**
- University
- Apprenticeship
- College evening classes
- Trade, technical, vocational, proficiency courses
- Online courses
- Do voluntary work
- Correspondence courses etc.
- Work experience

Training fees can vary hugely, but you may be able to apply for a re-training grant or career development loan.

[NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS PROVIDE ANY NATIONAL ADVICE / INFORMATION HERE]

It should be noted that taking a training course or learning a new skill will not automatically guarantee you will secure a job. However, it could be an end in itself by broadening your knowledge, skills, abilities and self esteem.

### **Step 5: Start now!**

It's easy to put things off and wait for something to happen to you, but if you want to regain your confidence and get back into work you need to take charge of your life. Start now by listing what you have to do and by when, and establish a routine, just as you would in a work situation. When developing your tasks and deadlines, don't forget to plan and build in time for rest and recreational activities to balance your work and leisure time.

#### **Keep motivated, stay positive and focused**

Motivation, positivity and focus are the keys to success. If you don't get on a training course, or offered the first or second job you apply for, try not to become disheartened too quickly. Instead use the experience to learn and improve. It may help to:

- Obtain constructive feedback from the person who interviewed you
- Concentrate on improving your interview techniques by practicing with a friend or family member
- Think about anything you might change or improve upon next time
- Adjust your CV
- Consider if you have been over-ambitious and broaden your work criteria – be realistic
- Re-think your options

#### **There are many ways of working**

If at the end of this process you decide that you do not want, or are not able, to go back into paid or voluntary work at the moment, don't be despondent. Make this a positive, well considered decision and allow yourself to move forward in a new direction.

Use what you have learned by going through this process to help you find other activities that help bring structure, meaning and stimulation into your life.

## Summary of Key Actions

- Prioritise what is important to you about work
- Think about your skills and abilities, including those you have developed in non-work activities
- Set yourself SMART goals and develop a work plan
- Identify who might be able to help you
- Consider opportunities and new directions
- Think about what training might be helpful
- Stay motivated, positive and focused
- Use what you have learned to help you make the most of other areas of your life