



Work, welfare and mental health Transitions over time

Project update
DECEMBER 2023

A huge thank you!

It's been a busy few months as we've been visiting (or Zooming!) with all of you to catch up on what's been happening over the past six months. We want to say an **ENORMOUS** thank you to everyone for your commitment and enthusiasm for the project.

Every single one of the 23 study participants has stayed in touch and been keen to meet up for a second interview if they can. It is extremely unusual for a research project to have such a high level of continuity and this just shows what an amazing group of participants you are.

We know it hasn't been easy for some people to take part this time, be that due to work commitments, mental health challenges or caring for family members. So we are even more grateful for you giving your time to keep supporting the research project. Thank you.



What's changing?

There has been a lot going on for people!

Several participants have changed jobs in recent months, some have started and then left jobs, and some who were in work are now looking for something new. A few people have started online courses or volunteer training.

For people who have stayed in the same job, there have often been some changes to their role and new things to get used to. This can bring a mixture of challenges and exciting opportunities.

Some people have been going through an assessment process to find out if their experiences might be linked to neurodiversity. Others have been back in touch with mental health services and have started to receive useful support in individual or group sessions.

But several people have also spoken about waiting - waiting for mental health assessments, waiting for social services, waiting for pre-employment checks to be processed, waiting to hear back from DWP. This waiting game can be frustrating and sometimes distressing.



Support at work

People have told us about the real value of supportive managers when they are going through changes and challenges in their work or personal life. If managers look out for people and help to guide them through difficult times, people can keep doing a great job. If people feel unsupported or that their needs or wishes are not being listened to, then they sometimes choose to leave and look for something else.

Lots of people have explained how important it is to take care of their mental health so that work doesn't become overwhelming. For some people this means sticking to part-time work or finding roles that offer flexibility to sometimes work from home. It's been great to hear about all the things you do to support your wellbeing and keep that important work-life balance, including time in nature, faith and spirituality, meditation, gardening, crafts and gaming.

Other things that help are finding a job that feels meaningful and suits your interests and aspirations. For some people, it can be hard to figure out exactly what this might be. The cost of retraining or knowing whether to take the gamble of investing in further qualifications has come through as a theme in some interviews.



Dealing with DWP

Many of you have described your experiences of claiming benefits and going through the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and the PIP assessment. Sometimes things do go smoothly, but often these assessments are very worrying and upsetting to go through. We really appreciate how you have spoken openly about how it feels and what a difference these benefits can make.

You might have seen in the news that the government is planning changes to the WCA and health-related benefits over the next few years. We are following these discussions closely and will do our best to find opportunities to share the findings of this research project with DWP.

What is really clear from your experiences is that the relationship between mental health, work and welfare is an extremely varied picture. Everyone's experience of mental health is different and there is no single answer to 'what works'.

Most people are dealing with a complex combination of challenges, for example, caring commitments, physical health problems, neurodiversity, difficulties in personal relationships, barriers to further education and obstacles that stem from the employer side.

Next year we will be working hard to draw out these key messages and think about what a better welfare system could look like.

That's all from us for now! Thank you so much once again for all of your help so far.

We really hope you will stay with the project for a final interview next summer.

In the meantime, please do keep in touch on the Indeemo app or just send Annie an email or text if you have some news to share!

