# Self-employment

## About this factsheet

This factsheet is for anyone who is interested in starting their own business, or who is already in business, and whose visual impairment is having a negative impact on their business. The factsheet contains some basic information on self-employment as an option and writing a business plan. It also gives an overview of the potential sources of funding that are available to you.

If you think that you would like to become self-employed then you should get some expert advice and guidance. In section 6 of the factsheet there is a list of contacts for your convenience.

This factsheet is part of a series of factsheets on employment issues. At the end you will find the full list, and details of where to find them.

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### For further information

RNIB Helpline can refer you to a specialist for further advice and guidance relating to your employment situation. RNIB Helpline can also help you by providing information and advice on a range of topics, such as eye health, the latest products, leisure opportunities, benefits advice and emotional support.

Call the Helpline team on **0303 123 9999** or email [**helpline@rnib.org.uk**](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk).

## 1. Is self-employment right for you?

Although setting up and running your own business can be a very exciting prospect, it is also time consuming and challenging. Before you decide to set up your own business you will need to carefully consider whether becoming self-employed will suit your personality and abilities and fit in with your lifestyle. Talking to other self-employed people such as local shopkeepers will help you to gauge an idea of exactly what will be involved in running your own business.

### 1.1 Reasons for going into business

There are many reasons why you might wish to set up your own business. One of the primary factors could be that you want to have more control over the way you work, your working environment and your hours.

Other major reasons for going into business could be that you have identified a particular gap in the market or you may wish to supplement your existing income by setting up your own part-time business.

### 1.2 What do you need to run your own business?

Some of the characteristics associated with small business owners are listed below to help you identify your own abilities and training needs:

* A product or service to sell
* Entrepreneurial skills
* Self-motivated, self-disciplined and hardworking
* Committed to achieving results
* Highly organised
* Able to communicate effectively - ability to sell products and services
* Responsible, able to take calculated risks and cope with failure
* Creative, innovative and imaginative in coming up with new ideas
* Leadership skills if considering employing other people
* Knowledgeable and passionate about the products or services being sold or provided.

### 1.3 Developing your business ideas

There are some common steps that need to be taken whatever the reasons behind setting up your own business. It is vital that you conduct an assessment and carry out research to judge how viable your idea is, considering the following areas:

* Conduct market research to discover whether your idea fills a gap in the market.
* Do your products or services meet customer requirements? Consider pricing and quality issues.
* Do you know how to forecast your cashflow? What assistance will you need in bookkeeping and tax affairs?
* Consider the implications for your social and domestic life.

## 2. Preparing a business plan

It is vital that you produce a realistic working business plan. It can help you spot potential pitfalls before they happen, structure the financial side of your business efficiently, focus your development efforts and also work as a measure of your success. In addition, if you do not have a working business plan you will not be able to secure any funding. A business plan might include:

* Executive summary - this is an overview of the business you want to start.
* Business opportunity - who you are, your skills, experience and relevant training, what you plan to sell or offer, why and to whom.
* Marketing and sales strategy - why you think people will buy what you want to sell and how you plan to sell to them, who your key competitors are and how you plan to beat the competition.
* Management team and personnel - your credentials and the people you plan to recruit to work with you.
* Operations - your premises, production facilities, your management information systems and IT.
* Financial forecasts - this section translates everything you have said in the previous sections into numbers.

You should also try to think about how your sight loss might impact on your business. Organisations like RNIB can help you assess this.

## 3. Legal structure of the business

Once you have a clear idea of what products you will be selling, or services you will be providing, you need to decide on the type of business you wish to set up. Before you can start trading, you will need to decide on the legal structure of your business, legal implications of the name of your business, and register your business with official bodies.

### 3.1 Types of business structure

#### Sole-trader

This is the most common form of business structure. As a sole-trader, you have overall control of your business and you are solely responsible for the day-to-day running of the business. Also, you have unlimited liability for any business debts.

#### Partnership

This type of business is set up by 2 -20 people. All partners share the responsibility for the running of the business and the profits the business earns, as well as the liability for any business debts incurred.

#### Limited company

Unlike sole-trader and partnership businesses, you are not personally responsible for the business debts of a limited company. However, setting up a limited company is more complex, costly and involves a greater level of paperwork. This option is often chosen by those who are starting a high risk business and need a large amount of capital for the initial start-up.

### 3.2 Why is the structure important?

The legal structure you choose for your business will affect the level of tax and National Insurance contributions you pay. Therefore, you should consult your business adviser or accountant before to discuss the most appropriate legal structure for your business.

As your business grows, you may decide that you need to alter the legal structure to meet your changing needs or that a particular status does not suit your circumstances. While it is possible to change the legal status, this may cause problems by disrupting your business, and can be costly and time consuming. For this reason it is advisable to consider very carefully before you set up in business the type of legal status that will suit.

## 4. Potential sources of funding

There are four types of funding available:

* Grant funding - money given to you that does not have to be repaid. This can be obtained from a variety of sources.
* Loans - money loaned to you that has to be repaid.
* Benefits - money paid to top up your income as a self-employed person, such as Working Tax credit.
* Government support – support through the Access to Work scheme. Please see our **Access to Work** factsheet on this. Details of where to find it, and other factsheets in the series can be found in section 7 (Other factsheets in this series).

### 4.1 Grant funding

If you are able to put forward a well thought out case explaining why you would benefit from a grant, and can show that you have a viable business plan, then there is a chance that funding could be forthcoming.

The following organisations regularly give grant funding to help people set up in business:

#### Local Associations for the blind

There are local societies throughout the country and many associations’ award grants. Contact RNIB Helpline for details of your nearest society.

#### Liveries

These organisations were in many cases set up many hundreds of years ago to support tradesmen.

#### Trade benevolent funds

It is surprising how many trades and groups of workers have their own benevolent funds, which have been set up to help tradespeople who need financial help.

#### Trade unions

If you are, or have ever been, a member of a trade union, they may be able to offer or give you discretionary grants.

#### Rotary, Lion's Clubs and Round Table Associations

These organisations offer support to local people, and may be willing to consider helping you. The name and address of your local organisation is available from your local library.

#### Local initiatives

It is not unusual to find that grants are available from the local council to help people set up in business.

#### More sources of information

There are many more potential sources of funding. The website [**gov.uk**](http://www.gov.uk) has a searchable database of grant giving bodies.

### 4.2 Loans

#### High street banks

Your local bank will have a Small Business Adviser, who is there specifically to help people interested in setting up their own business.

#### Family and friends

If you do take advantage of an offer made to you by a family member, it is important to have a written agreement to make sure there can be no misunderstanding later. Being unable to repay loans to family or friends can cause rifts and end friendships.

#### The Prince’s Trust

If you are aged between 18-30 years of age, and currently unemployed, (or a graduate that has finished their education and been unemployed for 6 months or longer) and want to start up in business, then the Prince’s Trust will consider offering you a loan at a low interest rate. For more details contact the Prince’s Trust at the address or phone number given in section 6 of this factsheet.

### 4.3 Benefits

#### Working Tax Credit

Working Tax Credit (WTC) is a means-tested credit for working people on a low income. Self-employed people can claim WTC dependent upon age, hours of work, income and other circumstances. WTC includes a disability element.

#### Blind Person's Allowance

If you are certified blind and are on a local authority register, or if you live in Scotland or Northern Ireland and are unable to perform any work for which eyesight is essential, you can claim Blind Person's Allowance. If you can't use up some or all your allowance you may be able to transfer it. Blind Person's Allowance is added to your tax-free Personal Allowance - so it is an extra amount of income you can get each year without paying tax.

#### Permitted Work

Under the Permitted Work Scheme, you may be entitled to undertake a limited amount of work (up to 16 hours) whilst claiming Incapacity Benefit or Employment Support Allowance (ESA). There are rules about what work you can do and how many hours you can work and the amount of money that can be earned. Contact Jobcentre Plus for more information.

### 4.4 Government schemes

#### Access to Work

The scheme provides advice and practical support to people to help overcome work-related obstacles resulting from a disability. The scheme can provide a wide range of support including access technology, transport and support workers.

Requested assistance could be in the form of:

* adaptive and assistive technology (CCTV, screen reader software)
* environment adaptations to the place of business (Improved lighting)
* travelling to, from and during work (taxis or a support worker)
* a support worker (for reading, guiding or doing certain aspects of the business).

Access to Work (AtW) does not provide business start-up funding. In addition, an AtW Adviser is likely to check the validity of your business before approving any support. For further details, speak to Access to Work directly. Contact details can be found in section 6 (Further information) of this factsheet. You can also find out more about the scheme by reading our **Access to Work** factsheet. Details of where to find this are in section 7 of this factsheet (Other factsheets in this series).

## 5. Case studies

### Frank

Frank, aged 62, has been self-employed for the last two and a half years after deciding to take early retirement from teaching. He now works as an Education Adviser and also runs a catering business 'Leave It To Us Caterers’, which has been operating for just under a year.

Frank offers advice and consultancy to parents of visually impaired children regarding education-related options, and gives talks at parent support group meetings and schools. Parents find Frank inspirational and are reassured to be talking to someone who has extensive knowledge and who has succeeded despite his sight problem.

A year ago, Frank decided to venture into new territory by setting up a catering business. Having worked as a Public Relations Officer, Work Experience and Careers Co-ordinator, and Head of English Department, amongst various other roles within his previous teaching career, Frank was already equipped with leadership skills and management experience in addition to possessing excellent communication skills. Frank advised: "Consulting a friend who had been running her own catering business for ten years also really helped me as it gave me an insight into what is really involved in running a business of this nature. I think it is really important to thoroughly research into what running a business entails and going into it with your eyes open."

As part of his catering business, Frank deals with the marketing, sales and administrative side of the business by taking the bookings and visiting potential clients and the venues. His catering manager is responsible for the actual preparation and presentation of the food.

Frank uses a braille notetaker for administrative tasks and employs a support worker to assist him when travelling to see clients. Accurately judging the size of venues can also be problematic. Frank's philosophy is that "If you expect problems and try and find solutions, most of the issues that you may come across can be easily resolved."

### Steph

Steph, aged 30, is a Disability Equality Consultant. She runs her own award-winning business 'Open Eyed', a one stop shop for accessibility. Steph offers services such as transcribing information, web accessibility, British sign language interpreters and disability equality training for various sectors. Steph is also a professional motivational speaker and is regularly asked to speak at events about her experiences.

After graduating with a degree in Fashion, Steph became a successful fashion designer. Having worked for four years in the fashion industry, she was diagnosed with Leber's-optic Neuropathy, a genetic condition that causes central vision loss. Within three months of diagnosis, her eyesight started to deteriorate rapidly.

Steph chose to become self-employed because she was finding it hard to get a job. She thought she had a brilliant idea that would make a feasible business plan. Her inspiration came from her personal experience of the difficulties in accessing information and services after acquiring sight loss.

Steph is unable to read printed material, so she relies on speech software when accessing computer or phone. She has a part-time personal assistant to drive her to her appointments. Steph feels that without reasonable adjustments, she could not run her own business and would need a full-time assistant, which would not feel like being in control of and running her own business. Tasks such as proof reading, marketing services and accessing paperwork would be almost impossible.

When talking about other people's reactions to her disability, Steph says: "I have found most people to be positive. Although disability isn't a qualification, I feel that in my case it is because I run a disability-related business, so I am able to relate to clients from experience. In terms of networking, I get mixed reactions. Even though I have experienced quite severe sight loss, it is almost an invisible disability. It is not obvious to others immediately because I have peripheral vision, so I can go up to people and talk to them.”

"I would really recommend starting your own business. When you work for someone else you have to fit in with the company and how it works. But if you have your own business, you can run it how you wish, you are totally in control of your hours, your calendar, the way you do things, and it makes things a lot easier. You can make life as easy or hard for yourself and you don't have restrictions placed on you by anyone else.”

Steph now runs a personal development business called Making lemonade: **Making Lemonade - Facilitating disability confident & inclusive workplaces. (making-lemonade.co.uk)**

## 6. Further information

### Access to Work

Telephone: **0800 121 7479**   
Textphone: **0800 121 7579**

Website: **gov.uk/access-to-work/apply**

Monday to Friday: 8am – 6pm

### Association of Disabled Professionals

Email: **info@adp.org.uk**

Telephone: **01204 431638** (answerphone service only)

Website: **adp.org.uk**

ADP is a membership organisation that provides advice, information and peer support to disabled people interested in working in professional fields. ADP also provides a quarterly newsletter and a series of employment guides for disabled people.

### Business Support Helpline

Telephone: **0300 456 3565**   
Textphone: **0191 581 0052**   
Email: **enquiries@businesssupporthelpline.org**  
Monday to Friday: 9am – 6pm

### Business Wales Helpline

Telephone: **0300 060 3000**

Monday to Friday: 8:30am – 5:30pm

### Business Gateway (Scotland)

Telephone: **0300 013 4753**

Textphone: **0800 023 2071**

Monday to Friday: 8am – 6pm

### Invest Northern Ireland

Telephone: **0800 181 4422**  
Monday to Friday: 8:30am – 5pm

### Learndirect

Telephone: **0800 101 901**

Website: **learndirect.com**

Learndirect is a network of online learning and information services. It offers a wide range of training courses that may help you if you are thinking of setting up your own business. Topics covered include key management skills, marketing, business planning and so on. Courses are either offered at your local Learndirect centre or online via their website.

### Livewire

Shell LiveWIRE UK, Adamson House, 2nd Floor, 65 Westgate Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 1SG

Email: **enquiries@shell-livewire.org**

Telephone: **0191 691 4900**

Website: **shell-livewire.org**

Livewire is a national scheme sponsored by Shell, to help young people aged 16-30 to set up in business. Young people with projects can discuss their ideas with local advisers and financial awards may be given. Entrants to the scheme will be paired to an adviser who will help them on an individual basis to plan and develop their business idea.

### National Enterprise Network

National Enterprise Network, Acorn House, 381 Midsummer Boulevard,  
Milton Keynes MK9 3HP

**Email:** **enquiries@nationalenterprisenetwork.org**

**Telephone:**Amy Knight on **07547 400 721**

Website: **nationalenterprisenetwork.org**

The National Enterprise Network offers independent advice and support to those thinking about starting or already running a business.

### The Prince’s Trust

Telephone: **0800 842 842**

Website: **princes-trust.org.uk**

The Prince’s Trust can help young unemployed people aged 18-30 to set up their own businesses. The Trust can give loans, on-going business advice and help with marketing.

### PRIME Cymru

Mile End House, 9 Broad Street, Llandovery SA20 0AR

Email: **enquiries@primecymru.co.uk**

**Telephone: 01550 721813**

Website: **primecymru.co.uk**

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

PRIME Cymru is a registered charity and the only organisation in Wales dedicated to providing practical support to people aged 50 and over who want to become and remain economically active.

### The SAMEE Project

Telephone: **01202 424 477**

Mobile: **07967 452 558**

Website: **samee.co.uk/disability-business-advisors-mentors**

The SAMEE project helps you make decisions about your life and possible self-employment opportunities that may be available to you. They cover 7 counties from their base in Bournemouth (Dorset, Devon, Hampshire, Somerset, Wiltshire, Oxford, Berkshire, and the Thames Valley area). There are useful resources available on their website. Do contact them for advice even if you live outside their coverage area.

### UnLtd

Telephone: **0800 917 7113**

Website: **unltd.org.uk**

UnLtd is a charitable organisation set up by seven leading organisations that promote social entrepreneurship. UnLtd's Awards provide practical and financial support to social entrepreneurs in the UK; people with vision, passion, drive and commitment, who want to change the world for the better.

## 7. Other factsheets in this series

We also produce the following factsheets, which you may find of use:

* Access to Work
* Looking for work
* Staying in work
* Job seeking resources
* Equality Act

All these factsheets can be found in electronic form at **rnib.org.uk/employment**.

For print, braille, large print or audio, please contact our Helpline team on **0303 123 9999** or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**.

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