



Stay Active

# Mission and activities of VIRK

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VIRK – Vocational Rehabilitation Fund is a private foundation of which all the major unions and employers in the labour market are members.

VIRK's mission is to develop, integrate and monitor services in the field of vocational rehabilitation; aiming systematically for employment of individuals following illness or injury.

The purpose of VIRK's services is to help people return to work. This involves expert advice and services in the field of vocational rehabilitation that requires full participation of the individual concerned.

VIRK operates in close cooperation with unions, employers, various service providers in vocational rehabilitation and welfare agencies. Vocational rehabilitation counsellors work on behalf of VIRK and are situated with the unions across the country. VIRK services are free of charge for individuals.

## Additional information

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**Information about VIRK's services and its results are available at VIRK's website [www.virk.is](http://www.virk.is). There you can for example, find information about the following:**

- Detailed information on services for individuals and collaboration with professionals
- Contact list of VIRK's counsellors at unions across the country
- Information prior to the first appointment with a counsellor
- Experiences and stories from individuals who have received services at VIRK

**Do not hesitate to contact us with questions or comments.**

# Who are entitled to services from VIRK?

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## The following criteria must be met to qualify for VIRK's services:

- An individual who is unable to do his/her job or participate in the labour market due to barriers caused by health problems and has a referral from a physician
- The goal of the individual is to become an active participant in the labour market or to increase his/her participation in the labour market
- The service is likely to be effective at the point in time when it is provided

## In addition, it is important that:

- The individual is willing and able to actively participate in the vocational rehabilitation. He/she must be able to perform routine daily activities and be an active participant in his/her own vocational rehabilitation
- Collaboration takes place with other parties involved in the individual's care, e.g. his/her primary care physician and other treatment specialists
- The individual has a good relationship with his/her workplace if employed



# How to apply for services

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**If the individual meets the above requirements for services the next step is to make an appointment with a VIRK counsellor. Further information about VIRK counsellors is available as listed below:**

- VIRK's website **[www.virk.is](http://www.virk.is)** has a list of VIRK counsellors with information on their location, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses
- **Unions** around the country provide information about VIRK counsellors located in their community
- Employees at VIRK's head office provide information about all VIRK's counsellors – telephone number **535 5700**

## What occurs after the first visit to a counsellor?

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From the start the vocational rehabilitation program is formulated in cooperation with the individual, the counsellor, the referring physician, and other specialists as required. The program is defined with a timeline and clear objectives regarding participation in the labour market.

Emphasis is placed on finding effective ways in the vocational rehabilitation for every individual. The focus is on supporting, encouraging, and strengthening the individual's capacity for actively participating in the labour market. When appropriate, the employer is consulted where an employment relationship exists.

When an individual's case is complex, additional experts may need to be consulted for successful vocational rehabilitation. The individual will then meet specially selected experts for further evaluation of his/her current status and options. These experts can be physicians, psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, and social workers. The aim is to ensure that services are in accordance to the needs and abilities of the individual at all times. Various service providers may participate in an individual's vocational rehabilitation, such as special vocational rehabilitation centres throughout the country, psychologists, physiotherapists, and continuing education experts.

## Assessment of whether services are likely to be successful

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Occasionally, there is a need to assess whether vocational rehabilitation is appropriate and likely to be successful before the individual is assigned a VIRK counsellor. In those cases the individual is given an appointment with a physician and possibly other specialists from VIRK who use examinations, interviews, and questionnaires to evaluate his/her current status. The results of this evaluation are presented to both the individual concerned and his/her physician.

## Participation

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It is important that each individual participates fully in the vocational rehabilitation program and follows the scheduled vocational rehabilitation plan. If an individual repeatedly does not attend scheduled appointments with a counsellor or with any of the other parties involved in his/her treatment (such as psychologists, physiotherapists, vocational rehabilitation centres, or continuing education specialists), and there are no valid reasons for the absence, VIRK may assume that the individual is no longer accepting the services provided by VIRK, resulting in a discharge.



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## Work ability assessment

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If the individual is unable to fully participate in the labour market at the conclusion of VIRK's services, an assessment will be carried out of his/her current status and options, a so called "work ability assessment". Here the individual's strengths and opportunities are assessed, as well as barriers identified, that could prevent him/her from active employment. In the work ability assessment the specialists evaluate the results of the vocational rehabilitation program and consider the following factors:

- Has vocational rehabilitation been fully tried?
- Does the individual have sufficient work capabilities to be able to participate in a paid employment on the labour market and if so, to what extent?

Furthermore, results from the work ability assessment may be sent to parties responsible for permanent pension payments according to laws and agreements on the labour market.

## End of services

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After completing the vocational rehabilitation, most individuals enter into paid employment, active job search, or studies that qualify for student loans. In other cases, a work ability assessment will take place at end of VIRK's services (see above). The results from the work ability assessment may be used as the foundation for decision making in relation to the individual's right to permanent benefit payments from the appropriate institutions/government bodies. Therefore it is important that the individual complete the vocational rehabilitation program, either by participating in the labour market (paid employment, active job search, or studies that qualify for a loan) or by completing a work ability assessment at the completion of the vocational rehabilitation.

## Information and security

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At VIRK all information regarding individuals is handled as confidential information and in accordance with laws and regulations regarding the protection and processing of personal data. Strict security rules apply to all work processes, information gathering, information processing, and storing of data. By signing an informed consent form the individual gives his/her approval for storing and handling of information that concerns his/her case at VIRK. The professionals involved in the individual's vocational rehabilitation are granted temporary access to this information. In addition, the parties responsible for paying the rehabilitation and disability benefits (e.g. pension funds and the Social Insurance Administration) can also request information about individual's vocational rehabilitation program, period of service, attendance, and results. This however, only applies if the information requested is necessary as a premise for benefit payments.



Studies have demonstrated that, in general, prolonged absences from the labour market are a greater threat to the health and quality of life of individuals than many life-threatening diseases. Participation in the labour market has generally a positive effect on both the physical and mental health of individuals - including those who struggle with various permanent health problems.

Individuals receiving VIRK's services have, in general, been very successful in their vocational rehabilitation. The majority of those who have completed the services are active in the labour market. VIRK's customer surveys have, in addition, demonstrated that participants are almost unanimously happy with the services they have received and believe it to significantly increase their quality of life as well as their work capacity.



[www.virk.is](http://www.virk.is)

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