

# Disability Disclosure for Students on a Nursing, Social Work or Allied Health Professional Education Programme

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*Information for Applicants/Students*



## The purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines are intended to help applicants and students to decide what, when and to whom they wish to disclose sensitive personal information about a disability or long term health condition. The University respects that disclosure is a personal decision and something that any student with a disability or long term health condition needs to manage with careful consideration.

Professional education programmes for nurses, social workers and allied health professionals pose additional issues in terms of preparing for and undertaking professional practice. Therefore this document has been prepared to help students in considering and managing disclosure in academic and professional settings.

It is important to recognise that courses that lead to professional registration require both physical and mental resilience; the ability to recover easily and quickly from the demands and setbacks that occur in life. With any disclosure of a disability it is wise to consider carefully whether you can demonstrate consistent and sustained level of physical/mental energy as this is an essential requirement needed to perform multiple tasks in a given period of time to provide safe and effective care. Seeking advice from the course team would help you identify the kind of 'adjustments', if any, that can be made to support you if you think 'resilience' may be a specific issue for you.

## What is the Equality Act 2010?

The Equality Act 2010 is a piece of legislation which replaced the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and its amendments of 2001 and 2005. The Equality Act 2010 protects disabled people from direct and indirect discrimination in education and in the workplace. The Act also allows Universities and employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people where needed.

The Equality Act 2010 has created a new legal definition of disability as:

'A physical or mental impairment which has a long-term and substantial effect on the ability of a person to carry out normal day to day activities'

(Equality Act 2010 - Part 5 rights of disabled people in employment, Part 6 Education, Part 3 the provision of goods and services).

The Act also protects students from discrimination in relation to a detriment that arises from their disability.

## What does it say?

The Equality Act 2010 says that employers or education providers are not allowed to discriminate against you because you have a disability. What this means is that they are not allowed to treat you less favourably because you are disabled (for example, not admitting you to a course because of this) and that they must make reasonable adjustments to enable you to do a course (for example, provide specialist equipment or software or human support).

The Equality Act 2010 also means that Sheffield Hallam university as an educational institution and its partner organisations such as NHS trusts and Social Care agencies 'promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons, to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life, and to promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons'.

The term 'Impairment' covers all physical impairments including sensory impairments i.e. sight or hearing impairments. A severe disfigurement also sits with the definition. Mental impairment is any impairment which relates to mental functioning and learning disabilities.

A person does not need to have received a medical diagnosis for the impairment to come within the Equality Act 2010 definition. The effect of the impairment is the significant element, although it is likely that in the majority of cases an individual will have a medical diagnosis.

Special rules apply to some progressive conditions which will automatically be considered a disability under the Equality Act. Furthermore anyone who has HIV, Cancer, Multiple Sclerosis automatically comes under the definition.

The Equality Act 2010 sets out that Sheffield Hallam University and its partner organisations have a duty to advance equality of opportunity.

## What does this mean to me?

Students are encouraged to tell the University about any disabilities they may have at their earliest opportunity. You will find that you are asked about this on a number of occasions during selection, admission, and induction events. Following initial disclosure to the University, the Disabled Student Support Team will work with the Faculty disability co-ordinators and student support officers to provide support and direction to suit your specific needs.

The Disabled Student Support Team (DSST) provides assessment and support focusing on your academic learning experience. It is important to remember that on any nursing, allied health or social work profession programme you will spend a large portion of time in the placement setting. When considering disclosure it is important that you consider the impact of your disability or health condition for both academic and placement settings.

Reasonable adjustments, if required, should be made in both the University and placement environment. Placement learning issues should be discussed on an individual basis with the Faculty disability co-ordinator or student support officer and you will need to make decisions about disclosure to relevant people in your placement setting.

I have declared to/told the occupational health staff about my disability/health issue. What happens next?



The Occupational Health Department cannot share any information about you without your permission. This means that if you want to discuss your health issue/disability and how it might affect your learning as a student you have to tell us about it yourself. The best place to start is to talk to one of the Faculty disability co-ordinators or student support officers, these discussions will be confidential and will not be shared with others staff, students or placement providers unless you consent to this.

In the placement context you may prefer to disclose more specific information, only to your placement mentor but not to your other placement colleagues. All the options and the implications of this can be discussed with your disability co-ordinator or student support officer.

How much information should I disclose?

Disclosure is not an 'all or nothing' decision. You may not have to disclose the details of your disability to receive the reasonable adjustments. For example, you may give the Disabled Student Support team information about your disability that helps them support you appropriately from an academic perspective. In a placement context you may prefer to disclose more specific information to your placement mentor but not to other placement colleagues. All the options and the implications can be discussed with your disability co-ordinator or student support officer.

Do I have to provide formal evidence of my health condition or disability?

If you wish the University to support you formally on your programme, you will need to provide a letter confirming your health issue/disability from your specialist or GP. With dyslexia or similar learning needs, specific evidence or relevant psychological testing results is required. You can talk to the disability co-ordinator, student support officer or other support staff about these issues at any time.

Disclosure of disabilities, how will the University support me?

Sheffield Hallam University has a good system for encouraging and supporting disabled students in the University setting. Placement providers also regard meeting

the needs of disabled students as a high priority. The University and placement providers are not allowed to share information about your disability with each other without your permission. If you need reasonable adjustments to be made by your placement provider, you are advised to agree arrangements with the disability co-Ordinator or student support officer for sharing information about your needs with relevant placement staff. You need to be comfortable with, and feel in control of, the disclosure process therefore you might agree that the disability co-Ordinator or student support officer should brief relevant staff or that you will do this personally. In addition, the earlier this disclosure occurs the better prepared the placement provider is likely to be.

Remember: reasonable adjustments for the disabilities you disclose are your right under the law.

What can I, and the service users or carers I care for or support, gain from this?

Both the University and the placement providers understand that students may not wish to disclose personal, sensitive information about themselves. It is important that any decision about disclosure is properly informed. The following section outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages of disclosure as seen from a professional perspective. Individual issues can be discussed with the disability co-ordinators or student support officer.

There are a number of advantages if you disclose your disability in the placement setting.

- Disclosure allows adjustments to be made which should enable you to fulfil your potential and achieve the learning outcomes of your course
- When you are working to your potential then patients/service users/carers will receive better care and mentors will be able to support your learning more effectively
- Disclosure will allow you to concentrate on your work on placement. You will not need to worry about any of the effects of your disability from your colleagues on placement
- It is often easier to build effective working relations when the people involved feel they can be open about issues that are relevant to the placement. Meeting with the placement staff to discuss your needs can be supported by the disability co-ordinator, student support officer or the clinical link if you want to build a relationship with your mentor before and after disclosing your disability to them.
- Managing your disclosure at a time and pace that you choose and ideally before any issues emerge enables you to describe your disability in a positive way as well as any positive effects it has had on your life. For example, if you have a hearing impairment your other communication skills may be strong,

such as attention and use of eye contact or body language. If you have dyslexia you may have particular strengths in creative thinking and provide innovative solutions to problems.

- You have the opportunity to show how you can perform effectively in the placement setting. For example, you may already have learned many effective ways to communicate and check information that you can explain to your mentor, forestalling any questions they may have with regard to these activities.
- You may have high levels of empathy with disabled patients and service users and in some instances can be a reassuring presence for them.
- If you demonstrate a professional approach to the management of your disability/long term health condition whilst undertaking the programme and you can clearly be seen to have developed as a capable student health care or/social work professional, who also has a disability/long term health condition, this is likely to be interpreted positively by future employers. References do not have to divulge any details of disabilities or health conditions they can just acknowledge e.g. 'a highly professional approach to learning, under challenging personal circumstances'.

### What if I choose not to disclose in the placement area?



In a recent study of health professionals who have a disability, the main reason given for not disclosing their disability to the employer/education provider was that they were concerned about being stigmatised and discriminated against. This is not an easy fear to overcome but if you do not disclose your disability to those who have an obligation to support you then it is much more difficult to challenge discrimination later should you feel this is occurring.

On occasion there are circumstances where reasonable adjustments must be in place before the start of a placement to ensure a safe working environment, in these cases disclosure may be necessary to implement the adjustment. We would recommend that you discuss this with your disability co-ordinator or student support officer to understand how your disability can be supported in practice.

Other important factors are:

- You give up the opportunity for reasonable adjustments to be made in the practice setting. This may impact upon your ability to fulfil your potential or pass your placement assessment because your mentor does not know what adjustments need to be made.

- Failing to work to your potential through lack of reasonable adjustments may reduce the effectiveness of the care to patients/service users/carers that you provide. In extreme cases, it is even possible for patient/service user care to be compromised because you have not been given the correct help to support your learning. If you make a mistake that is clearly a result of your disability, any investigation or disciplinary procedure will be unable to take into account that reasonable adjustments were not made.
- Before your placement, you may think that disclosure is unnecessary because your health condition is not relevant to the work. However placement staff are likely to have a better understanding of what the placement entails so an open discussion with relevant staff before the placement starts may forestall problems and enable you to plan for situations that you had not previously considered.

## The relevance of disclosure to becoming a professional practitioner

Why is this particularly important for nursing, allied health profession and social work students?

In order to learn and perform safely and effectively, all students who are studying on programmes leading to professional qualifications need to develop an effective understanding of their professional responsibilities and duty of care in relation to the care and support of patients/service users/carers. This means that seeking disclosure advice and support regarding a disability, particularly in preparation for placement learning, is seen as safe practice and is thus an essential part of personal and professional development.

### Seek disclosure advice

Taken together the advantages and disadvantages above make a powerful case for disabled students to seek advice and consider carefully any decision they make regarding disclosure. Your first port of call to do this is to meet for a supportive and confidential discussion with one of the disability coordinators or student support officers.

If I decide I want to disclose my disability in the placement area, what happens next?

As part of a supportive and confidential discussion the disability coordinators will help you decide how and when you want to disclose information about your disability. They can also help you decide what information you want others to know and also discuss with you how you might want to manage the disclosure situation. For example, a member of your course team could support you directly by visiting the clinical setting with you to discuss your disability and learning needs. Alternatively a

'placement learning statement' could be written, agreed by you, to be used to support disclosure and help negotiate reasonable adjustments. Following disclosure the disability co-ordinator or student support officer can also continue to support you, if for example, any issues arise about your disclosure or the reasonable adjustments that have been made for you in the placement setting.

## Summary

### Information for students

Disability disclosure for students on a nursing, allied health professions or social work education programme.

- The Equality Act 2010 says that employers or education providers are not allowed to discriminate against you because you are disabled.
- Sheffield Hallam University as an educational institution and its partner organisations and placement providers are expected to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons.
- The Equality Act 2010 covers all impairments as detailed earlier.
- Once you tell us about your disability or health condition (disclosure) the Disabled Student Support team works with the Faculty disability co-ordinator or student support officer to provide support and direction to suit your specific needs.
- Disclosure is not an 'all or nothing' decision. You may wish to limit the information that is given in different situations to different people. The disability co-ordinator or student support officer can give support and direction with this.
- If you wish the University to provide additional support for your needs while you are on the programme you will have to provide information confirming your health issue or disability.
- There are many advantages if you disclose your disability (please see the main disclosure information document).

**Remember: reasonable adjustments for the disabilities you disclose are your right under the law**

- Choosing not to disclose a disability in the placement, can have a number of negative impacts, not least it may impact on your ability to reach your full potential on your programme.
- All students are strongly advised to seek advice and consider carefully any decision they make regarding disclosure. Your first point of contact for this is to meet you disability co-ordinator or student support officer for a supportive and confidential discussion.



## Links

1. Equality Act (2010) - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
2. Telling People About Your Disability - <http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/telling-people-you%E2%80%99re-disabled-clear-and-easy-guide-students>
3. Data Protection Act 1998 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/all?title=data%20protection>
4. How the University process your personal data - <https://students.shu.ac.uk/regulations/access-to-information>  
<https://staff.shu.ac.uk/sls/qess/ss/confidentiality.asp>
5. Access via Disability Rights UK website  
<http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/studentpublications>  
<http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/student-related-website-links>
6. The Equality and Human Rights Commission 'Disclosing Disability' document can be found by scrolling down the following page - <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/advice-and-guidance/before-the-equality-act/guidance-for-education-providers-pre-october-2010/maintaining-standards-promoting-disability-equality/>  
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance>

## Disability Coordinator and Student Support Officer details

Please note, all current contact details of our Faculty Disability Coordinators and student support officers for students on courses leading to professional qualifications are available from the Helpdesk and Student Services team at:

Faculty of Health and Wellbeing  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Robert Winston Building  
Collegiate Crescent campus  
11-15 Broomhall Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2BP

Telephone: 0114 225 5564