



Information for Students

Faculty of Development and Society
Disability disclosure for students undertaking work placements



**Sheffield
Hallam University**

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Purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines are intended to help applicants and students 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. Placements and work based learning can sometimes pose additional issues in terms of preparing for and undertaking these activities. Therefore this document has been prepared to help students considering and managing disclosure in academic and professional settings.

What is the Equality Act?

The Equality Act (2010) supersedes the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1995, 2001, 2005) and provides rights for disabled people.

What does it say?

The Equality Act 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 also means that Sheffield Hallam University as an educational institution and its partner organisations '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 Equality Act covers such conditions as hearing and sight impairment, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, and mental health difficulties. It also covers a range of long term health problems e.g. diabetes, cancer, HIV, MS and epilepsy.

What does this mean to me?

Following disclosure of your disability to the University you are advised to register with Disabled Student Support. Once you've done this, Disabled Student Support will work with your Student Support Officer to provide support and direction to suit your specific needs.

Disabled Student Support, part of Student and Learning Services (SLS), provides excellent assessment and support focusing strongly on your academic learning experience.

However it is important to remember that you may also be spending a significant part of your course in a placement or work based learning setting. Thus when considering disclosure, equal attention must be paid to the impact of your disability or health condition for both settings.

Reasonable adjustments, if required, should be made in both the University and placement environment for you, although these may differ.

Placement learning issues should be discussed on an individual basis with the relevant academic or Student Support Officer and you will need to make decisions about disclosure to relevant people in your placement settings.



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 your academic tutor or course leader. Discussions with staff are confidential and will not be shared with other staff, students or placement providers unless you consent to this.

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 Disabled Student Support information about your disability that helps them support you appropriately from an academic perspective. However in the placement context you may prefer to disclose more, specific information, only to your placement supervisor/mentor but not to

your other placement colleagues. All the options and the implications attendant on them can be discussed with your academic tutor.

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 have to provide a letter confirming your health issue/disability from your specialist or GP. With dyslexia or similar learning needs, specific evidence of relevant psychological testing results is required. You can talk to your academic tutor or other support staff about these issues at any time.

Disclosing 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 see meeting the needs of disabled students as a high priority. However the University and placement providers are not allowed to share information about you or your disability with each other without your permission. Thus, if you need reasonable adjustments to be made by the placement provider, you are advised to agree arrangements with the relevant staff dealing with you placement about your needs. you need to be comfortable with, and feel in control of, the disclosure process therefore you might agree that the support staff 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 is your right under the law.

What can I gain from this?

Both the University and the placement providers understand that students may not wish to disclose personal, sensitive information about themselves, however 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 your academic tutor.

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 placement supervisors/mentors will be able to support your learning more effectively.
- disclosure will allow you to concentrate on your work on the placement clear from possible concerns you may have over the concealment of the effects of your disability.
- It is often easier to build an effective working relationship 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 Partnership team.
- 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. For example, you may already have learned many effective ways to communicate and check information that you can explain to your mentor/supervisor, forestalling any questions they may have with regard to these activities.
- you may have high levels of empathy with disabled patients 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 course, you can clearly be seen as a professional student which will be interpreted positively by future employers.

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

In a recent study the main reason given for not disclosing disability to an 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. Other important factors are:

- you give up the opportunity for reasonable adjustments to be made in the setting. This may impact on any placement assessment (where applicable)
- failing to work to your potential through lack of reasonable adjustments may reduce your effectiveness in the workplace. If you make a mistake that is clearly as 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 involves so a discussion with relevant staff prior to the placement may forestall any problems and enable you to plan for situations you had not previously considered.



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 your academic tutor, course leader or placement administrator.

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

As part of a supportive and confidential discussion with your academic tutor, course leader or placement administrator 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 the Employability and Partnerships team could contact the placement to discuss your disability and learning needs. Following disclosure, you can continue to receive support 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

The Equality Act 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 covers such conditions as hearing and sight impairment, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, and mental health difficulties. It also covers a range of long term health problems such as diabetes, cancer, HIV, MS and epilepsy.

Once you tell us about your disability or health condition (disclosure), Disabled Student Support works with faculties to provide support and direction to suit your 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.

If you wish the University to provide additional support for your needs while you are on your programme of study you will have to provide information confirming your health issue or disability.

There are many advantages if you disclose your disability.

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 on your ability to reach your full potential.

All students are strongly advised 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 your academic tutor, course leader or placement administrator.



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