

## **Opening the Door to Support for Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work Students:**

Guidelines for Disclosure of Disabilities,  
Specific Learning Difficulties and Long-Term Health  
Conditions



**Division of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work**

## Purpose of these guidelines

Disclosure is the official term for telling the University or placement provider about a disability, specific learning difficulty or long term health condition<sup>1</sup>. In this document we will also use words such as share, tell and inform, which would also mean disclosure.

These guidelines are intended to help applicants and students decide what, when and to whom they wish to disclose. These guidelines cover such conditions as hearing and sight impairment, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, and mental health difficulties. They also cover a range of long term health conditions such as diabetes, cancer, human immunodeficiency virus, multiple sclerosis and epilepsy<sup>1</sup>. In these guidelines disability will also be used as a term to include specific learning difficulties and long-term health conditions.

Note: Due to professional confidentiality requirements disclosing to the Occupational Health Services (OHS), for example completing the medical questionnaire, is not the same as disclosing to the University. In very rare circumstances where there is concern for the health and safety of you or others it may be necessary to share information without your consent. If you require further information on this, please contact the Disability Advisory and Support Service (DASS) or OHS.



## The Equality Act<sup>2</sup>

The Equality Act (2010) states that education providers are not allowed to discriminate because of a disability.

The Act does not define what 'reasonable steps' an institution should take, but says that adjustments must be made where disabled people experience a 'substantial disadvantage'.

From April 2011, the Equality Act places a duty on public authorities—in this instance, the University of Manchester, as an educational institution, and its partner organisations, NHS Trusts, local authorities etc, - to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to promote equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations. The Act clarifies that in order to do this public authorities may need to treat disabled people more favourably.

1 [Definition of a long term health condition](#)

2 The Equality Act 2010 — <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>



## Why is this particularly important for nursing, midwifery and social work students?

Nursing, midwifery and social work students are required under the regulations of their professional bodies<sup>3</sup> to comply with the standards for professional registration relating to good character and good health and academic achievement and practice learning competencies.

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<sup>4</sup>.

3 Nursing and Midwifery : <http://www.nmc-uk.org/Students/Guidance-forstudents/>

Social Work: <http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002c16guidanceonconductandethicsforstudents.pdf>

4 <http://www.sraid.manchester.ac.uk/downloads/policy-procedure-and-good-practice/procedure-of-admitting-applicants-with-a-disability-2010.doc>

## What does this mean to me?

All students are encouraged to tell the University about any disabilities and specific learning difficulties at the earliest opportunity. All students on programmes leading to professional registration are required to inform the University of any health conditions. It is also your responsibility to inform the University of any changes to your health throughout your programme.

You will find that you are asked about disabilities, specific learning difficulties and long-term health conditions on a number of occasions during the application, selection, admission, and induction process. The application process may involve UCAS, an interview, an Occupational Health screening and a Disclosure & Barring Service check, dependent on whether you are applying for undergraduate or postgraduate study<sup>5</sup>. All students must be successful in all aspects of the application process before your place on the programme is confirmed. Following initial disclosure to the University, the DASS and/or OHS will work with the School's disability coordinators to provide reasonable adjustments to support your specific needs.

The University of Manchester has a legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments to enable prospective students to undertake their studies. Whilst it is acknowledged that there can be no adjustments to the Programme Entry Competences in themselves we will endeavour to make reasonable adjustment to the way applicants are asked to demonstrate that they can meet these competences.

It is important to remember that on undergraduate nursing and midwifery and postgraduate social work programmes you will spend up to 50% of your time in the placement setting. When considering disclosure, equal attention must be paid to the impact on both the academic and practice placement settings. Reasonable adjustments may be required in both the University and placement environment.

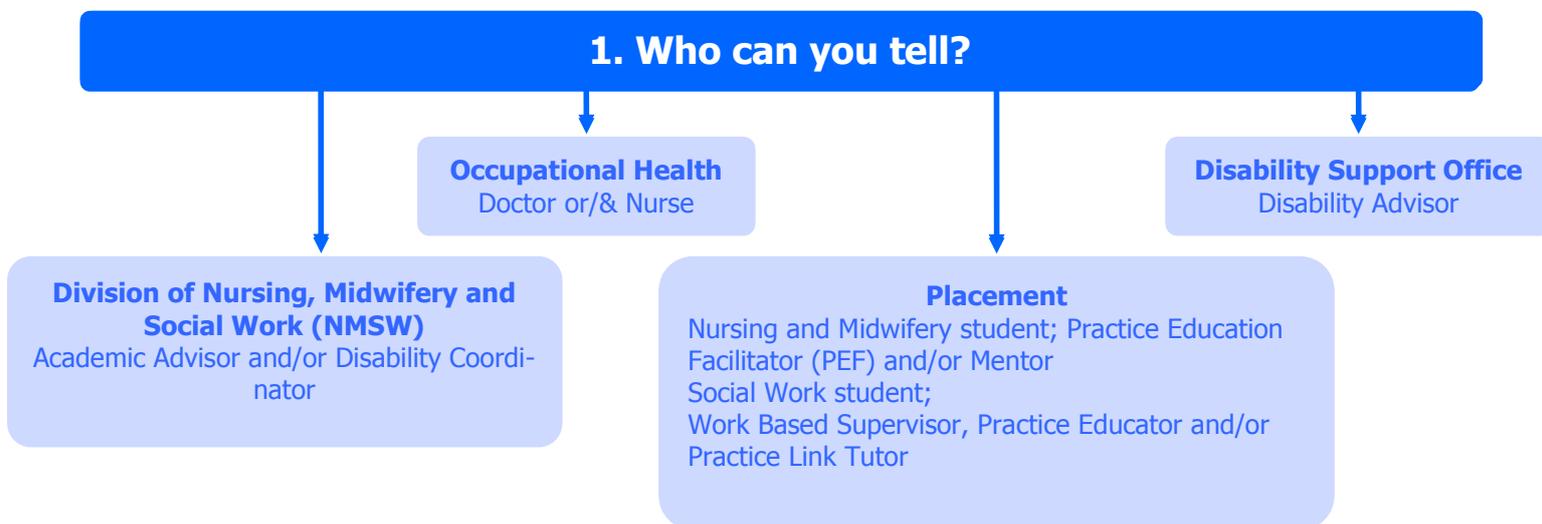
5 <http://www.nursing.manchester.ac.uk/>

# Who do I disclose to?

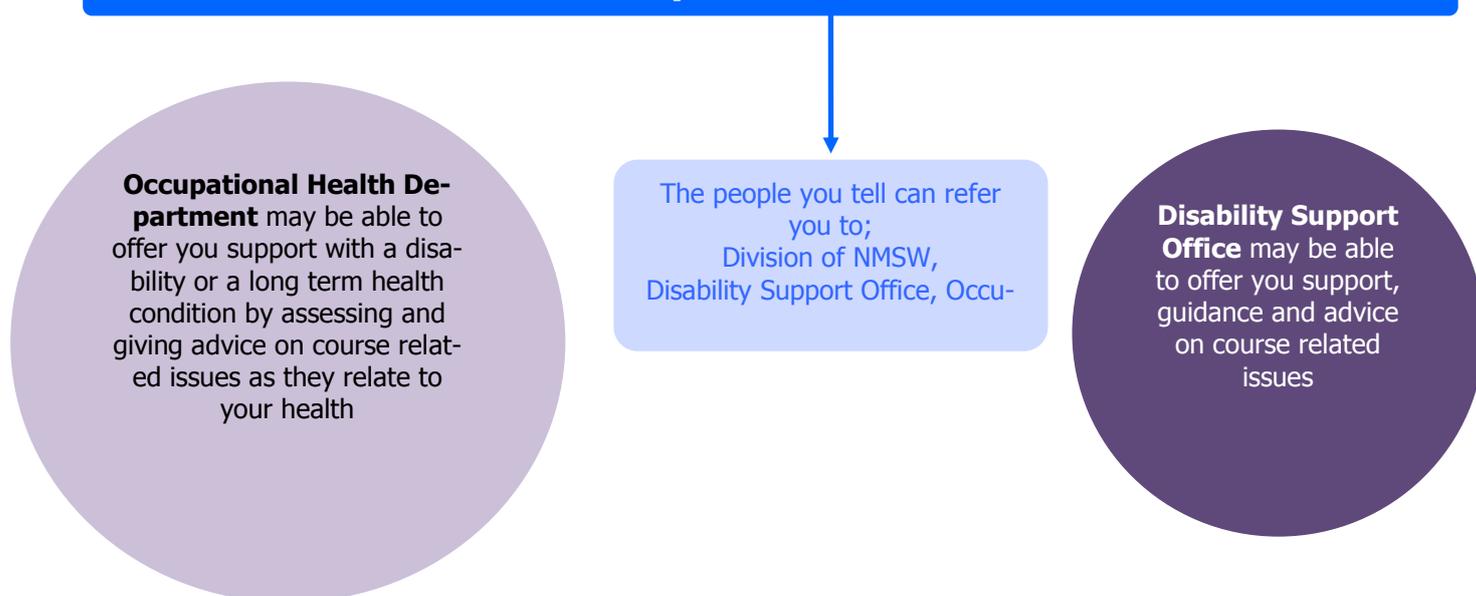
## Routes of Referral for Students with a Disabilities, Specific Learning Difficulties and Long-Term Health Conditions

N.B. Information will only be referred on to other departments if you explicitly give permission \*

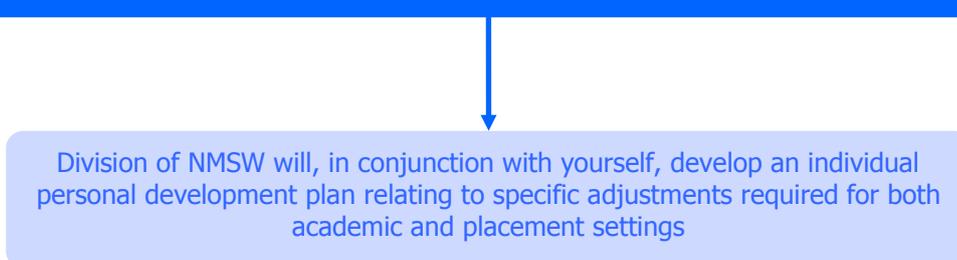
### 1. Who can you tell?



### 2. What will they do with the information?



### 3. How will this information be used?



\* In very rare circumstances where there is concern for the health and safety of you or others it may be necessary to share information without your consent



## 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 to the DASS or OHS. With dyslexia or similar learning needs, specific evidence of relevant psychological testing results is required. You can talk to the DASS, OHS or other support staff about these issues at any time.

Your information will be handled sensitively. It will not be shared without discussion with you and consent unless necessary.





## What are the advantages of disclosure?

Disclosure is recognised as providing many advantages including:

- demonstrating a proactive approach to the management of your condition which reflects a sense of professional responsibility.
- allowing reasonable adjustments to be made which should enable you to fulfil your potential and concentrate on your studies.
- when you are working to your potential patients/service users/carers will receive better care and mentors and/or practice educators and academic tutors will be able to support your learning more effectively.
- 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 course. For example, meeting with placement staff to discuss your needs can be supported by the DASS and/or OHS and academic staff.
- managing your disclosure 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.



## What if I choose not to disclose?

In a recent study of health professionals who have a disability, the main reason given for not disclosing their disability to their employer/education provider was that they were concerned about being stigmatised and discriminated against. This is not an easy concern to overcome, however:

- if you do not disclose your disability then it is much more difficult to challenge discrimination later should you feel this is occurring.
- you give up the opportunity for reasonable adjustments to be made. This may impact upon your ability to fulfil your potential or pass your assessments.
- 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 possible for patient 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.
- you may think that disclosure is unnecessary because your condition is not relevant to the work. However University and placement staff have a detailed understanding of what the programme entails, so an open discussion with relevant staff may forestall problems and enable you to plan for situations that you had not previously considered.

## Summary

- the Equality Act (2010) covers such conditions as hearing and sight impairment, specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia, and mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression. It also covers a range of long term health conditions such as diabetes, cancer, HIV, MS and epilepsy.
- the Equality Act (2010) says that employers or education providers are not allowed to discriminate against you because you have a disability.
- the University of Manchester as an educational institution and its partner organisations, NHS trusts, local authorities and other placement providers promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.
- if you wish the University to provide additional support while you are on your programme you will have to provide information confirming your health issue or disability to the DASS and/or the OHS.
- there are many advantages to disclosure.
- choosing not to disclose 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. Following disclosure the DASS and/or Occupational Health Services work with the school and practice placement areas to provide reasonable adjustments, where necessary, to support your specific needs.
- nursing, midwifery and social work graduates are required under the regulations of their professional bodies to comply with their standards for professional registration relating to good character and good health and academic achievement and practice learning competencies.



## References

The Equality Act 2010 — <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

The University of Manchester — [Procedure for admitting applicants for courses requiring Medical Fitness Assessment](#)

General Social Care Council Code — <http://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Standards-legislation/Code-of-Conduct/Code-of-Conduct.aspx>

Nursing and Midwifery Council Guidance for Students  
<http://www.nmc-uk.org/Students/Guidance-for-students/>

<http://www.nursing.manchester.ac.uk/>

RCN: Dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia: a toolkit for nursing staff (2010), <https://www.rcn.org.uk/professional-development/publications/pub-003835>

## Useful Contact Details

Disability Support Office:

Tel: 0161 275 7512

Email: [dass@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:dass@manchester.ac.uk)

Website: <http://www.dass.manchester.ac.uk/>

Occupational Health Service:

Tel: 0161 306 5806

Email: [millocchealth@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:millocchealth@manchester.ac.uk)

DNMSW Student Support Office

Tel: 0161 306 7717

Email: [sso.intern@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:sso.intern@manchester.ac.uk)

