

YOU CAN DO IT!



A GUIDE FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

Aimhigher...
leicester city + leicestershire

A GUIDE FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

Commencing a course at university is an exciting and challenging experience for anyone. There are many things to consider and many unknown factors that could cause anxiety, such as:

- ▶ **AM I DOING THE RIGHT COURSE?**
- ▶ **WHERE WILL I LIVE?**
- ▶ **WILL I MAKE FRIENDS?**
- ▶ **HOW WILL I MANAGE MY FINANCES?**

Coping with the rigours of university whilst dealing with the reality of living with mental health issues can be extra challenging. Every year there are many students who find life difficult and consideration of these issues is very important. It is therefore essential that before you choose a university and commence your studies, you consider the support and structures that will be in place to ensure that your time at university is a positive experience.

To help you with this process, this leaflet provides general answers to frequently asked questions. We would also encourage you to contact the university of your choice directly, and make further enquiries about services offered at that particular institution.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- ▶ **Will there be someone who knows about mental health issues that I can talk to at University?**

Most universities now employ a mental health specialist to support students who experience mental health difficulties. Their title and exact role differs from one university to another, but they will all have experience of working with people with mental health difficulties. Most will offer an assessment of needs, some regular one-to-one support, and assistance with accessing appropriate support and services from departments and agencies within and outside the university.

- ▶ **Will the University respond positively and sympathetically to mental health difficulties?**

Most universities now have a mental health policy or guidelines, which are embedded in the processes of the university. These will have been designed to ensure that good support systems are in place for students with mental health difficulties.

Most universities will offer mental health awareness training to staff, and organise events and workshops which promote positive mental well-being, raise awareness across the whole university and reduce stigma. All universities have a duty of care to their students and must make reasonable adjustments for students with identified mental health problems.

► **If I have a mental health difficulty, should I declare this when I apply to University?**

When applying for a place at university and then enrolling, you will be asked for a lot of personal information, for example whether you have any disabilities or health issues. Some students worry that they could be disadvantaged if they declare their history, but there is legislation to protect you from this sort of discrimination.

Some students choose to give the academic registry permission to discuss their needs with whomever they deem 'needs to know'. Other students will confide in staff individually as and when they feel it is appropriate or necessary. The choice is yours and either way can work effectively. However, it is important to know that universities seek this kind of information to ensure that they are providing the best support for their students, and to enable them to properly advise students about their choice of study. Remember, if you have support needs and you have not informed the relevant people, the university may not be able to meet these needs effectively.

► **If I disclose a history of mental health difficulties, will everybody at the University find out about it?**

No, but it is often useful to pass on information on a 'need to know' basis. Your permission would be sought in these circumstances. The majority of university staff are used to dealing with confidential and sensitive information, will treat your information with care and respect, and generally only use it for the purpose of supporting you.

► **What sort of support could I expect to find at University?**

Apart from the specialist mental health support, all universities will have a department of student services. These vary from university to university, but students who experience mental health difficulties should look to see that the university of their choice offers resources such as counselling, accommodation support, financial advice and support, learning support and health services such as a GP practice.

When you start at university you will be allocated a Personal Tutor within your department. This person will support your study needs and will also take an interest in your general wellbeing.

If you live in university accommodation such as a hall of residence, you may have access to a sub-warden or resident tutor who will be able to help direct you to further sources of support at your university. Please contact institutions directly to find out exactly what support is available in their accommodation.

The Students' Union is the social focus of most universities, but in addition most provide welfare services and offer confidential advice on a number of issues, including finance, academic grievances, complaints and legal matters. Most students' unions also provide a confidential telephone Helpline service, and volunteers are trained to listen to people in mental distress.

Most universities also have centres where students can go for religious and spiritual guidance, such as a Chaplaincy or Muslim Prayer Rooms. These centres are quiet places where you can meet people in a calm atmosphere, where there are people around to listen with a friendly ear, during good times and bad.

Of course, there will be many resources open to you outside the university too. The specialist mental health adviser would be a good person to ask for help in finding local resources that meet your needs.

► **Am I entitled to financial support to pay for extra resources I may need?**

You may be entitled to claim the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This is administered by Student Finance England. It is likely that you will be able to apply for DSA at the same time that you apply for university and your student loan. The DSA helps students to pay extra costs they may have when studying which arise as a direct result of their disability. The DSA could fund equipment, software, travel, and/or human support. If you live in Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales you will need to contact the relevant authority. Contact the disability officer at the universities which appeal to you for more information about the DSA and support you may require. All universities have Open Days or you may be able to arrange a visit at another time.

► **If I leave my home area to go to University, how will I continue to get medical support?**

Many universities have their own GP practice on campus, generally open during term time with special arrangements outside of term. Other universities link into community practices and are open all year round. All students will be encouraged to register with the appropriate GP practice as soon as they arrive at the university, and arrange for access to local specialist mental health services, if appropriate.

When planning to go to university it is advisable to contact the mental health specialist or disabilities department to find out about the resources available and what arrangements have been made with any local organisation you might wish to use.

CONTACTS

If there is anything else you would like to know before coming to university, please contact any of the following:



DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY

Amy Benning Mental Health Advisor, Student Services
De Montfort University, Gateway House, The Gateway, Leicester LE1 9BH
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LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

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UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

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