

Support for Disabled Students

Introduction

The Careers Service offers support to all undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Sheffield and for up to three years after graduation. You are encouraged to take advantage of the information, advice and guidance offered and participate in careers events from an early stage in your course.

The help offered to students is tailored to your individual needs but this publication addresses some of the issues which will be of general concern to many students with a disability, or serious health problems.

Career planning

The advice given to any student or graduate in relation to career choice is often to 'play to your strengths'. Focus upon the skills and abilities developed through your academic study and any work experience which you possess, rather than dwelling on areas of weakness. However, you should also be realistic about the kind of activities which you find frustrating and time consuming, or which put you under increased stress. When making choices about your future career reflect upon what you know about yourself – your preferences and interests. If you haven't already spoken to a Careers Adviser about your future plans and aspirations, now might be a good time to do so.

Some of the issues which commonly concern disabled students include:

- How realistic are my future career plans? Am I underestimating / overestimating my potential?
- What help is available to help organise some relevant work experience?
- Should I mention my disability to a prospective employer or admissions tutor when making an application and if so, how and when?
- What special provision might be available during the recruitment and selection process?
- What financial support am I eligible for if I wish to undertake postgraduate study?
- How does equal opportunities legislation affect my future employment options?
- What additional technology or 'reasonable adjustments' might be available in the workplace?
- How 'disability friendly' are professionals working in my chosen occupational areas?

For general help with career planning, see the Careers Service guide '**Getting Started**'.

Gaining work experience

Undertaking work experience whilst at university, whether paid or unpaid, can be invaluable. Not only does it provide you with the opportunity to check out the ideas that you already have, it also gives you the chance to make some useful contacts and provides you with information to build into your CV and future applications. However, many disabled students and those with serious health problems find that simply keeping on top of their coursework and the necessary background reading can be much more time consuming than it is for other students. There just may not be enough time during the week to fit in part-time or voluntary work and the competition for formal summer internship programmes can be off-putting.

There are a number of specialist work experience schemes available to students with dyslexia and disabilities. If you are having difficulty setting up work experience, the Careers Service

has a list of such schemes, as well as the **'Finding Work Experience'** guide and information on work experience opportunities. We also run **Taste of Work** which offers a chance to undertake a short (3-4 hour) placement in a real work place. It is aimed at students who have no existing work experience. You will undertake relevant training and have a chance to observe how staff carry out their duties. For more information, see www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/tasteofwork.

Careers Service eMentoring

The Careers Service eMentoring Scheme can link students with a graduate who will be available to discuss career options and associated topics with you for 7 to 10 weeks via email, telephone and Skype. This will enable you to gain valuable insights into a career that interests you, a greater understanding of the world of work, plus increased confidence to apply for jobs. They can also provide you with tips on job hunting and the recruitment process, and help you identify how best to 'sell' your skills and experience to a prospective employer. Find out more at www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/careermentoring.

Work shadowing

It is not possible in all areas of work for employers to offer extended work experience and this might not be feasible for you either, so work shadowing is another option to consider. Work shadowing involves spending a short period of time observing a professional in their workplace to get a taste of what their job involves and what it is like to work for a certain organisation. You'll also have the opportunity to ask them questions. Afterwards, you should reflect on the experience and record it in a journal. For a broader view, you might try shadowing two or three professionals doing similar jobs but in different settings. Work shadowing can provide you with a real insight into what a job involves, broadening your horizons and possibly challenging your perceptions, to inform you about the skills, experience and training required. It may help you decide between different career options, while it will certainly demonstrate to employers that you are genuinely interested in their sector. It also adds value to your applications, as you will have more knowledge of the work involved. If you want advice about organising work shadowing, speak to a member of the Careers Service.

If you'd like support to develop your personal or study skills, visit '301: the Student Skills and Development Centre' at 301 Glossop Road www.shef.ac.uk/studentskills. If you'd like to find out more about extra-curricular activities at Sheffield which can help you develop personal skills, see the 'Experience Sheffield' webpages www.shef.ac.uk/experience. Also see The *Sheffield Graduate Award* pages which explain how you can gain a University award for taking part in different activities www.sheffield.ac.uk/thesheffieldgraduateaward.

Applications – declaring a disability

When making an application for employment or further study, one of the issues which concerns some students is whether to mention that they have a disability or serious health problem. The competition for graduate jobs and postgraduate courses is strong and there is a reluctance to highlight anything in their application which could disadvantage them further.

There is no legal obligation to mention disability at the application stage. However, it is also important to consider how your application will be viewed in comparison to others if it is **not** obvious that you are disabled. For example, the results you have achieved at university and school may not give an accurate picture of your potential. If you have limited work experience, this may be because you have needed to devote extra hours to your academic study, but an employer would not realise this unless told. Disclosing a disability in your application could serve to demonstrate your motivation and commitment to succeed, in spite of the obstacles.

If you decide not to mention a disability in an application, you may feel more comfortable talking to a prospective employer about this later over the telephone, or at the interview stage, explaining why you believe that your disability will not have any impact on your future work.

For advice on making applications, see our guide to '**Applications**', www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob.

Job Hunting

When looking at job adverts you may have noticed the two ticks symbol (√√). This indicates that the employer operates a policy of positive discrimination in favour of candidates who declare a disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia. So long as a candidate who has declared a disability meets the basic selection criteria, they will usually be offered an interview, so that they can outline in person what they offer as a candidate.

The Careers Service webpages on disability provide useful resources including 'Get that Job', a DVD with advice to disabled jobseekers from graduates, Careers Advisers and recruiters www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/equalops/opsone.

For general information about job hunting, read our guide to '**Job Hunting Strategies**', www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/jobs.

Additional support at the application and selection stage

The recruitment and selection process will vary greatly between organisations, but the majority of graduate recruiters now use on-line application forms and in some instances, on-line psychometric tests, as a first filter. If psychometric tests are used, these will be timed and it may not be possible to proceed to the next stage of the selection process, unless a minimum score is achieved on these tests.

Whatever decision you make about how much personal information to provide in your application, it is important to ensure that you are not disadvantaged in psychometric tests. Seek advice as to whether alternative arrangements are possible if you feel they might be necessary. Some employers may be willing to allow you to make a full application without sitting such tests if you declare that you have a disability. Alternatively they may be able to make adjustments to the way in which your test results are interpreted, or allow you extra time to complete the tests.

For more advice, read our guide to '**Psychometric Tests Used in Selection**' www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob.

For many graduate training schemes, the selection process can involve attendance at an assessment centre, where individual and group exercises are undertaken such as panel interviews, simulated business scenarios, case studies and other activities. If you need any special arrangements in order to participate fully, make sure that you have discussed this with the employer well in advance, whether it be to provide materials in an alternative format; to ensure that appropriate IT equipment or software is available; or to engage the services of an interpreter, etc.

Our '**Interviews and Assessment Centres**' guide has further information www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/gettingajob.

Postgraduate study

If you are from England and are on a full-time, part-time or distance learning course and have additional disability related course costs, you may be eligible for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). Unlike undergraduate DSA, there is one allowance for all costs, which for 2015/16 is a maximum of £10,362. If however, you hold an award from a Research Council or a bursary from the NHS, you are not eligible for DSA and should apply directly to your funding body for any additional disability related funding. For more about DSA see www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas. If you are not eligible for DSA, see the Student Finance advice at www.gov.uk/browse/education/student-finance.

Note: Students on postgraduate Initial Teacher Training courses (eg PGCEs) are eligible to apply for DSAs awarded to undergraduates.

For more advice on further study, read our guide to '**Postgraduate Study and Research**', www.shef.ac.uk/careers/students/worktypes/study.

Reasonable adjustments at work

Current legislation requires employers to make appropriate changes to enable disabled people to work. These are known as 'reasonable adjustments' and can include:

- Making changes to the building or premises where the person works
- Changing the way in which work is done
- Providing equipment that will help the person do their job

Most adjustments don't cost anything - just a change in attitude. For others that do involve a cost, the Government 'Access to Work' scheme can help you. The website www.gov.uk/access-to-work includes information on the support available to disabled jobseekers.

Careers Service support to disabled students and graduates

The Careers Service provides assistance to disabled students in a variety of ways:

- Individual careers guidance
- Help in constructing and updating your CV and answering difficult questions on applications
- Advice on the interview and selection process and extra support which might be available
- Impartial advice on disclosing disability to an employer or admissions tutor
- Advice on how to respond to questions about your disability / health problems
- Access to on-line psychometric testing practice materials
- Information about reasonable adjustments in the workplace
- To book an appointment with a Careers Adviser, contact the Careers Service on 0114 222 0910. Support is also available via the email enquiry service www.sheffield.ac.uk/careers/students/emailenquiry.

We recognise the particular needs of students with disabilities and try to ensure that they can access the full range of our materials (in alternative format if necessary). We also endeavour to facilitate participation in all events we organise. If you have any specific requirements in order to be able to access any of our events or services, please let us know and we will make every effort to accommodate these.

What next?

Hopefully this publication will have provided you with some useful advice. If there are still areas you are uncertain about, the Careers Service provides comprehensive careers information and support. You can contact us in person or use our Email Enquiry Service via our website.

Further resources in the Careers Service

'Dyslexia and Employment'

'Able to Succeed – Disabilities, Health and Job Choice'

Useful websites

Publications and weblinks on disability issues www.careers.dept.shef.ac.uk/infotree/Disability.php

Access to Work www.gov.uk/access-to-work

EmployAbility www.employ-ability.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com

Disability Rights www.disabilityrightsuk.org

HM Government www.gov.uk/browse/disabilities/work

Remploy www.remploy.co.uk

Scope www.scope.org.uk

Shaw Trust www.shawtrust.org.uk - help for unemployed young people.