

About UMHAN

The University Mental Health Advisers Network (UMHAN) is a national UK charity. We are a network of people who are dedicated to, and have a specific practical role in, supporting students with mental health difficulties in Higher Education Institutions.

UMHAN is involved in:

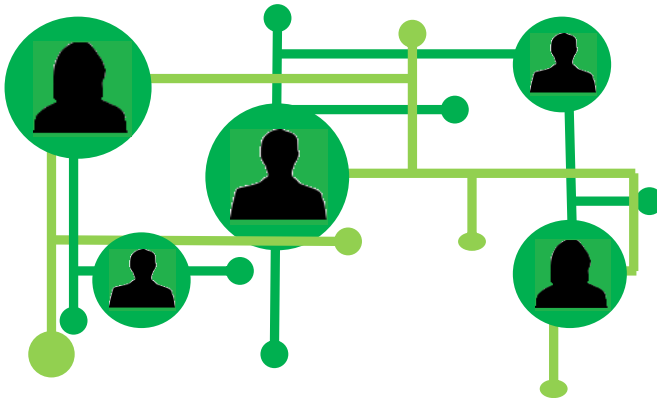
Influencing policy and guidance

Promoting rights and citizenship

Sharing good practice

Peer support and development

Mental health promotion



Our work has a focus on Mental Health Promotion, Disabled Students Allowance, Equality and Mental Health. Please see our website for UMHAN guidance and position statements on such topics.

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Mental Health Difficulties and the Equality Act

The Equality Act 2010 is legislation designed to give rights to those with 'protected characteristics'; disability is one of those characteristics and this encompasses mental health difficulties.



For a mental health difficulty to come under the protection of the law:

- There must be a substantial (more than minor, not trivial), adverse impairment in relation to daily activities.
- The difficulty should be long term (has lasted, or may well last, 12 months).
- The cumulative effects of a mental health difficulty may combine to render its total effect 'substantial'.
- Difficulties that are episodic in nature are covered, if they are likely to reoccur.
- A person who has recovered from a mental health difficulty also remains protected by the Act if the difficulty is likely to reoccur.
- A person does not need to show that the adverse effects impact on any particular capacity (e.g. memory or concentration).

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What are Mental Health Difficulties?

There is no standard definition of what constitutes a mental health difficulty. For the purpose of this leaflet, it includes: depression, anxiety difficulties (including panic attacks), schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), eating disorders, and self harm.

Mental health difficulties are more common than people realise: depression and anxiety take up more of a GP's time than any physical conditions. In fact, 1 in 4 of us consult a GP in any year with mental health-related difficulties.

The likelihood is that in most University classes, there will be people whose studies are affected by mental health difficulties.



The Equality Act and University

If a student does disclose difficulties, the Equality Act means it would be unlawful for anyone employed by the university to discriminate against them. The university is required to make 'reasonable adjustments' to take account of students' needs if they should disclose difficulties.

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Mental Health Difficulties and Disabled Students' Allowance

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is an allowance to help with any additional costs you may incur as a result of mental health difficulties while studying. DSA is intended to help students experiencing mental health difficulties to study on an equal basis with students who do not have these difficulties. It is a non-means tested grant that does not have to be repaid at the end of the course.

Entitlements

When you have mental health difficulties, you are often encouraged to access treatment, such as medication or talking therapies. It is less common for you to be encouraged to think about the additional resources that you may need, or rights that you may be eligible to receive. For example, your right to access education.

Most students with mental health difficulties would consider it reasonable for the university to make adjustments which take into account the needs of a student who uses a wheelchair. However, many of the same students do not realise that they are entitled to similar resources to facilitate access to their course. Some students also assume that their situation cannot be changed and delay discussing their needs because they think that other people's difficulties must be much worse.

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What Can the DSA Help With?

There are a wide range of adjustments which can be made, many of which you may not have thought of.

The DSA can be used, for example, to help pay for the following:

- Any specialist equipment required for studying. E.g. assistive software, recording devices to use during lectures.
- A non-medical helper such as a mental health adviser, or other type of support worker.
- Other costs, e.g. photocopying or book allowances, printer consumables, etc. to support the specific needs identified or to assist with other equipment.

Applying for the DSA

Students can apply for DSA if they are a UK student, studying a full-time course that lasts at least one year, or they are studying a part-time course that lasts at least one year and doesn't take more than twice as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course.

Applications must be accompanied by a medical letter.

It can take a couple of months from the point of application to process an application, so it is advisable to apply at the earliest opportunity.

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Disclosure

Many students fear that disclosing their difficulties to universities may cause discrimination, however, mental health difficulties are extremely common.

Should I Disclose?

You can disclose at any time; during the UCAS process, before beginning your course, or during the university experience but deciding to do so is a personal and unique process.

- Expect to be treated equally.
- Expect to have some discussion about how your difficulties may affect your university experiences.
- Having disclosed, you may feel less pressure and potential issues could be headed off before they occur.
- You may be entitled to receive 'reasonable adjustments', which can be implemented to enable you to fulfil your potential at university.

Deciding to disclose can be a positive and empowering experience. Universities would prefer to work with you on preventing things getting worse and to anticipate difficulties you may encounter.



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University Mental Health and Wellbeing Day (UMHAWD)

UMHAWD is an annual event which was initiated by UMHAN and began in February 2012.

The day aims to focus efforts that promote the mental health of people within Higher Education.



Wednesday
18th February
2015

Each year, we focus on a different theme that is not limited to a specific condition as the aim is to promote shared challenges that many can relate to. For 2015, the day will be about choosing to disclose.



Previous University Mental Health and Wellbeing Days have focused on promoting the 5 a day for mental wellbeing with 'mind apple' activities.

We welcome the contribution of others, if you would like to get involved or have any ideas, please let us know!

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