

Specialist Mentoring for Students with Mental Health Difficulties and Chronic Conditions

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What is mentoring?

- Mentoring aims to provide support which facilitates competence in self-management of a mental health difficulty or other chronic condition.
- Mentors can help students to develop and maintain more realistic study patterns, enhancing their ability to overcome barriers to success, and thereby providing them with a more equal chance of achieving academic and personal goals.
- They can provide support with timetabling, goal-setting, and managing self-imposed expectations about appropriate levels of study.
- Mentors can also help students come to terms with their diagnosis and any medication they have been prescribed in relation to the impact it may have on their studies.

Mentoring is not:

- the same as Study Skills Tuition, which some students with specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia and dyspraxia) may require. However, a mentor can help students develop more effective study

strategies if they are struggling with organisation, motivation, time management, and staying focussed on their work.

- the same as counselling, the main difference being that the focus of mentoring sessions can be more practical. Mentors can also work with you on a more long-term basis than a counsellor might normally be able to. However, all of the mentors have a professional psychological or other related background, and their therapeutic training and skills will inform the type of work that they do with you.
- a substitute for support from statutory services. Your mentor (and/or Disability Advisor) will be able to advise on National Health Service (NHS) referral pathways and can, with your permission, act as a point of contact and liaise with statutory services (e.g. College Doctors, Community Mental Health Teams, Eating Disorder and other specialist services) in order to ensure that you receive a comprehensive and coordinated package of support.

Am I eligible for mentoring?

Many students are not aware that their difficulties may constitute a 'disability' which would make them eligible for support. The Equality Act (2010) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in providing protection and legal rights for disabled people. It uses the following definition of disability:

“The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (i.e. has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

Mentors can work with students with a range of mental health difficulties, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, bipolar disorder, psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia, obsessive compulsive disorder, etc.

Students with chronic fatigue syndrome/M.E. or chronic health conditions which affect their studies can also benefit from mentoring.

Furthermore, the mentors can work with some students with attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder and severe dyspraxia if they are particularly struggling with organisation and staying focussed on their work.

Who arranges mentoring?

The Counselling and Disability Advisory Services are part of the University's 'Student Welfare and Support Services', and collaborate to deliver the specialist mentoring service which is accessed by roughly 80 students with mental health difficulties and chronic conditions each year.

Mentoring is usually paid for via the 'non-medical helper' (NMH) component of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). DSA is a non-means tested and non-repayable source of funding administered by your funding body (e.g. Student Finance England/Wales, the Student Awards Agency for Scotland, the Northern Ireland Educational and Library Boards, and Research Councils UK).

Non-UK students are not eligible for the DSA, but the University has funding provisions to cover the costs of their disability-related support.

The Disability Advisory Service can explain how to apply for the DSA or other disability-related funding. Contact an Advisor for more information, or visit our web pages: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding.

How can I access the service?

The first step to accessing mentoring support is to register with the Disability Advisory Service by completing a 'Disclosure and Study Support form' (available to download from the 'useful documents' section on the Disability Advisory Service website: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/contacts).

You will need to provide a Doctor's letter confirming the nature of your difficulties (including any diagnosis), the length of time over which you have had difficulties, and any treatment/support/interventions you are currently receiving.

You will then need to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance (contact a Disability Advisor for more information, or visit our web pages: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding). This will result in a Study Needs Assessment which makes recommendations for funding for your support. We can now offer assessments in the Oxford University Assessment Centre: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/assessment.

In the meantime, in order to prevent unnecessary delays in accessing support, it might be possible for the service to provide you with a mentor pending authorisation of the Study Needs Assessment recommendations by your funding body.

With your permission, your College will be informed about the support arrangements.

What can I expect from my Mentor?

A professional and high quality service:

- The Disability Advisory Service employs a professional team of qualified counsellors, psychologists and psychotherapists to work as specialist mentors.
- The mentors are experienced in delivering interventions for a range of psychological and/or health problems at significant depth, and are skilled at drawing on a range of psychological theories and frameworks to assist students in overcoming disability-related barriers.
- They are also familiar with evidence based best practice in clinical work, mental and chronic health issues, and are able to adapt this appropriately into the mentoring work.

Confidentiality:

- Details of your mentoring sessions will not be shared with anyone outside the service without your express permission, unless there are concerns about a significant and imminent risk to your own or someone else's health and wellbeing.
- If you provide information which indicates an imminent threat of harm to yourself or another person, the mentor may need to break confidentiality. They would normally discuss this with you first, but if there is no way of preventing such an outcome they may have to inform their supervisor and/or your GP.
- In some circumstances you may find it helpful for your mentor to liaise with College/academic staff or others involved in your academic life.
- You may also find it useful for your mentor to liaise and collaborate with health service professionals to ensure that your support is coordinated.
- Your mentor will always seek your permission before sharing information with people outside the service, with the exception of the concerns outlined above.

Regular meetings:

- Students usually see their mentor for an hour once or twice a week during term time, and your mentor will arrange a regular meeting with you.

- Meetings usually take place on the same day and at the same time each week, although there may be some flexibility and it may be possible to see the mentor more or less regularly at different points in the academic calendar depending on study, medical or personal commitments, and the amount of funding agreed by your funding body.
- Your mentor will tell you how you can contact them outside session times (e.g. telephone, email). They may not always be able to return calls or emails immediately but will explain during the first session when they are contactable and the likely timeframe for response.
- Your mentor will always try to give you at least 24-hours notice if they need to cancel an appointment. In some situations when this is not possible (e.g. due to sudden/unexpected illness) they will notify you at the earliest possible opportunity and reschedule for another time. If you have any issues which you needed to discuss with your mentor that cannot wait, you should contact the Disability Advisory Service to see if any other help can be provided in the interim.

Feedback and review:

- There will be opportunities to review how things are going with your mentor throughout the term.
- Your mentor will monitor how many hours of support have been provided to ensure that the funding recommended in the Study Needs Assessment and agreed to by your funding body is not exceeded. If it looks like you may exceed the funding limit, the mentor will liaise with your Disability Advisor who will establish whether it might be possible to request additional funding.
- At the end of each term your mentor will help you to reflect on your progress and establish any goals for future mentoring work. They will also provide formal feedback to your Disability Advisor.
- At the end of each term you will be sent a survey to complete via the Disability Advisory Service in which you will have the opportunity to comment on the type/level/frequency of the support you have received.
- However, you can speak to your mentor or contact the Disability Advisory Service at any point if you wish to discuss or review the support provision.

What does my Mentor expect from me?

- Your mentor expects you to turn up on time for appointments.
- You will be required to sign a timesheet after each session as part of the process of paying the mentor.
- You must provide at least 24-hours notice if you need to cancel an appointment with your mentor. If you are unable to provide 24-hours notice you may still be required to sign a timesheet so that your mentor can be paid for the session. In situations when it is not possible to give 24-hours notice (e.g. due to sudden/unexpected illness), you must notify your mentor at the earliest possible opportunity.
- If you regularly fail to turn up for or have to cancel pre-arranged mentoring sessions, your funding body may not be prepared to continue providing you with support. In this situation your mentor will review with you (in collaboration with your Disability Advisor) whether it is feasible or appropriate to continue with the sessions.

What if I do not want to continue with the mentoring sessions?

There is no obligation to continue with mentoring if you feel that you no longer require it. If you are unable to continue with the mentoring sessions or you are not finding them useful, you should discuss this with your mentor in the first instance so that they have the opportunity to review with you whether a different meeting timetabling arrangement (e.g. more/less frequent) or a slightly different approach to the sessions might be helpful.

You should tell your mentor if you don't feel you need to see them regularly so that you can both decide on an appropriate way forward. If you feel uncomfortable about discussing this with your mentor for any reason, you should contact the Disability Advisory Service so they can either mediate or explore whether it would be appropriate and/or possible to allocate a new Mentor to work with you. However, it is usually preferable to try and work through any problems with your mentor)

Useful contacts

The Disability Advisory Service:

3 Worcester Street, Oxford, OX1 2BX

Telephone: +44 (0)1865 280 459

Email: disability@admin.ox.ac.uk

Website: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das

The University Counselling Service:

3 Worcester Street, Oxford, OX1 2BX

Telephone: +44 (0)1865 270 300

Email: reception@counserv.ox.ac.uk

Website: www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/counselling

The Samaritans: (confidential out of hours supportive listening service)

Telephone (UK): 0845 90 90 90

Telephone (ROI): 1850 60 90 90

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org