

# **Disabled Students – Including Students with Learning Differences and Mental Health Conditions**

Every year, over 60,000 students with physical and/or mental health conditions and learning differences apply through UCAS to study at a university or college in the UK and access a range of support to help them succeed with their studies, day-to-day activities, travel, and lifestyle.

## **Guidance for students with disabilities**

If you have a disability, our guide will help you make sure you have all the support you need for your course.

Do not forget to tell the university or college about any impairment or condition on your UCAS application – this helps them to put the support in place ready for your arrival. **This information is not used to make a decision on your application, and it is only shared with those involved in supporting you or making the arrangements for your support.**

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## **Do your research**

Research is vital to making your choices, and there is lots to think about. This year, the COVID-19 pandemic means universities and colleges are putting extra measures in place to ensure the health and safety of students and staff. They recognise some students will be shielding and may have reservations and questions about the decision to go to university or college. See below for some considerations to take into account when thinking about your options.

Never be put off by any assumptions about your impairment as most courses (and professions) can be made accessible with the appropriate support – the Equality Act 2010 gives employers a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to make sure disabled people aren't at a disadvantage. Read more about what the Equality Act 2010 means for disabled students on the Disability Rights UK website. <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/understanding-equality-act-information-disabled-students>

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## **Guidance for students with disabilities BSL**

### **The university website**

In most instances, the provider's website will be your starting point. Here, you will be able to easily find information and advice for disabled students, and those with mental health conditions, long-term illnesses, and learning differences. This may include information about learning and assessment methods, support provided, and the contact details of the disability, mental health, and/or wellbeing support teams.

If you cannot find the information you need, contact student support services at the university, who will be able to help.

### **Advice from disability officers**

Find out what disability officers at universities say about the support available, and why it's good to tell the universities you're applying to about any disabilities.

## **Talk to course providers**

To help you reach your full potential, most universities and colleges have disability support teams and mental health and wellbeing advisers. They are always happy to speak to applicants about support and answer any questions you may have – even if you choose not to apply there. This could include advice about funding (including Disabled Students' Allowances), and about academic and lifestyle support and facilities at that university. You will find the contact details of the student support teams on the university website.

If you're not sure what to ask when speaking to the support team, we've put together a detailed checklist to help you get started – read our advice on speaking to student support services. <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/individual-needs/disabled-students/speaking-disability-support-team-or-mental-health-adviser>

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## **What to consider now**

### **1. Academic support and learning facilities**

- Is there information about learning delivery and assessment methods – particularly as a result of changes made due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How will social distancing affect your access to non-medical helpers (e.g. note takers, sign language interpreters)?
- What accessible and inclusive online platforms are used to deliver online learning and assessment? Do all departments use the same technology?
- How will the university ensure you can access all aspects of blended learning and assessment methods (i.e. face-to-face and virtual elements)?
- Do they anticipate any impact on work placements or practical elements of the course due to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Check lecture halls, libraries, and living accommodation are all accessible and suited to your requirements – speak to the disability support team if you anticipate any challenges.

### **2. Accommodation and lifestyle**

- How will social distancing work on campus (e.g. in lecture theatres and classrooms)?
- If a COVID-19 resurgence means the campus needs to close again, how will that affect accommodation costs?

**It is a huge change and takes a lot of getting used to, but I now love living away from home and my new-found independence - Catherine Alexander, studying BA (Hons) English at Lancaster University**

## **Open days and visits**

Open days are a valuable way to find out about a university or college first-hand – you can tour the facilities, speak to staff and current students, and really get a feel for whether you would like to study

there. Lots of universities offer virtual open days too, so if you cannot visit in person, you do not have to miss out.

**What to consider now:**

- Is the university running virtual open days this year? If so, do they include information on accessibility and support?
- If you do need to see the university facilities in person, check if you can arrange a visit. The disability support team will be able to advise and, if necessary, make arrangements.
- Open days are a good opportunity to speak to current students about their experiences, but you don't need to miss out if you can't attend one in person – chat to students online at your university.  
<https://www.ucas.com/chat-to-students>

Visit the open days page (including virtual events) - <https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/what-and-where-study/events-and-open-days>

Read our checklist for disabled students when preparing for open days and visits.  
<https://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-university/individual-needs/disabled-students/disabled-students-preparing-open-days-and-visits>

**I think if you are deaf, you are much more in charge of yourself. You have to take the first steps and that can be pretty challenging because deafness no doubt causes a lack of confidence. But if you build the larger part of the bridge towards other students, work closely together with the people who want to help you, then it is worth it and I can absolutely recommend having the courage and taking the step towards university. - Fred Suter, studying BA (Hons) Modern Languages at University of Southampton**

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## **What are Disabled Students' Allowances?**

Find out what Disabled Students' Allowances are, the help you might be able to get, and how to apply.

### **Financial support**

In addition to your student finance arrangements, you may also be eligible for Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) which help cover some of the extra study-related costs you incur due to a physical or mental health condition or learning difference. This is a non-repayable allowance which is in addition to other student finance.

**Start applying for DSAs as soon as possible** – you do not need a confirmed university place to apply.

Visit the Diversity and Ability website for lots of straightforward advice on what DSAs cover and how to apply. <https://diversityandability.com/disabled-students-allowance-dsa-find-your-way/>

**Note:** For students starting courses from September 2020, there are some changes to the way DSAs are calculated – visit the GOK.UK website for full details. - <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas>

Depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for additional funding and support – find out more about scholarships, grants and bursaries. - <https://www.ucas.com/finance/scholarships-grants-and-bursaries/scholarships-grants-and-bursaries-disabled-students>

Read the Disability Rights UK factsheet on funding higher education for disabled students - <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/fundinghighereducation>

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## Support with transition

A new start can make you feel excited and nervous – there is a lot to think about.

Some universities and colleges offer summer schools and courses to help you manage the change, particularly if you are finding it challenging. For example, some summer schools are specifically designed to help students with anxiety or autistic spectrum conditions settle in.

It's good to be prepared and know what to expect, so the Know Before You Go guide from Student Minds - <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/knowbeforeyogo.html> is a great resource to help you get ready for the change.

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## Fitness to practice

In professions where you are responsible for the health and safety of other people, such as medicine or nursing, it is necessary that you meet 'fitness to practise' regulations. This means practitioners must demonstrate the skills and knowledge to carry out their duties safely and effectively. This is usually assessed through a questionnaire about your health, and an occupational health assessment may be required.

An impairment, mental health condition, learning difference or illness, is unlikely to affect your fitness to practise. Universities and employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to support disabled people under the Equality Act 2010.

Check the guidance about fitness to practise from your chosen professional course (e.g. social work, teaching, medicine, nursing) – your course provider will be able to help with this.

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## Further information and support

- Read our frequently asked questions about support for disabled students. <https://www.ucas.com/support-disabled-students-your-questions-answered>
- Read the **Office for Students'** briefing note on the steps universities and colleges are taking to help disabled students during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/coronavirus-briefing-note-disabled-students/>
- **Student Minds** is the UK's student mental health charity – visit their website for support and resources on coping with the challenges university life can bring. <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/>
- The **University Mental Health Advisers Network (UMHAN)** has a useful list of resources to support mental health and wellbeing, has some useful information, and how a mental health adviser can help.
  - <https://www.umhan.com/pages/14-seeking-support-signposting-information>
  - <https://www.umhan.com/pages/7-mental-health-advisers>

- **Disability Rights UK** publishes a comprehensive guide to applying to higher education, and getting support – Read Into Higher Education - <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/intohe>
- **Diversity and Ability** is an organisation that works to improve inclusivity. Check out their guide to free resources to support disabled and neurodiverse students. We also recommend you read their DSA: Find your way page.
  - <https://diversityandability.com/disabled-students-allowance-dsa-find-your-way/>
  - <https://diversityandability.com/resources/>

## **Helpful blog articles**

Hear more from students about their own experiences of going to university with a physical or mental health condition or learning difference, and from organisations offering expert advice.

- **The National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP)** works with professionals who support disabled students in post-16 education. Read their blog article, Working for a successful student journey for disabled students, which explains who to contact at your university or college, and how a disability adviser can support you through your journey to uni. - <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/working-successful-student-journey-disabled-students>
- For a student's own experience with mental health related conditions at university, read Zoe's story. - <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/my-experience-mental-health-related-conditions-university>
- **Ability Net** helps disabled people access and use technology, and offers free advice and resources — how they can help you and what support you may be eligible for. - <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/results-day-are-you-university-you-may-be-eligible-additional-support>
- **Student Minds** and **UMHAN** have created three joint blogs: Disclosing a mental health difficulty on your UCAS application, The benefits of disclosing a mental health difficulty, and Disclosing a mental health difficulty: your rights
  - <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/disclosing-mental-health-difficulty-your-ucas-application>
  - <https://www.ucas.com/connect/blogs/disclosing-mental-health-difficulty-your-rights>

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