



Higher
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Support for Disabled Students at University

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If you have a disability, mental health condition, long-term illness, or specific learning difference, there is lots of support available for you at university. Most universities have large Student Support teams. It's their job to make sure that every student can succeed at university.

You can tell your university about your disability when you apply. You don't have to do this, but it can help you get extra support when you're there. You might get extra time to complete assignments or exams, access to assistive technology, or non-medical helpers like note takers for your lectures. You can also apply for Disabled Students' Allowance. DSA is a government bursary to help pay for any extra support you might need.

This booklet explains the key things you should know about how universities support disabled students.

If you have any questions, you can chat to our friendly team at:

www.higherhorizons.co.uk/ask

Before we get started, we should explain what we mean by disability. The UK Government passed a law in 2010 called the Equality Act. This law says that you are disabled if "you have a physical or mental impairment that has substantial and long-term negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities."

Disability can include physical disabilities, mental health conditions, long-term illnesses and specific learning differences. Don't worry too much about the definitions. You should know if this includes you. If you aren't sure, talk to your parents or carers.



Choosing a University

You can choose to study in a way that suits you. You don't have to move away from home and be a full-time student. You may be able to commute to a local university, study for a degree at a local College, or study for a degree part-time.

If you do want to study at a university full time or part time, you might want to think about whether you want to stay close to home or move away. At home you have a support network of friends, family, and carers to support you. If you move away, you may need to find a new network to support you. Don't let this put you off – all universities will offer you professional support staff if you need them, and you will make lots of new friends at your chosen university.

Some universities also offer distance learning options. The most famous of these is The Open University, which is dedicated to flexible online learning. Distance learning means that you study at home, at your own pace, accessing lectures, resources and time with your tutors online. This might be a good option if you're not sure about moving away from home, have other commitments, or aren't sure if you can commit to full-time study.



Accommodation

If you do want to move away from home, it might be a good idea to research the different types of accommodation offered by your chosen university. Most universities own accommodation that they rent out to students called Halls of Residence. These are owned by the university and often conveniently located on-campus or nearby. You might also find some universities have private student accommodation nearby – this might be student Halls of Residence owned by a private company rather than the university, or student houses owned by individual landlords. You will have lots of choice and should be able to find something that suits your needs.

There are a few things to consider to help you narrow down your choice of accommodation. A lot of these are questions that all potential students should consider like:

Location

Is the accommodation close to where you will be taught, the library, and other campus buildings?

Price

How much does it cost? Can you afford this from your maintenance loan?

Bathrooms

Would you prefer to have your own bathroom or would you share?

Sharing

Would you prefer to live with people of the same gender or in mixed-gender halls?

Catering

Are you happy to cook (and share a kitchen) or would you prefer catered halls?

You might also want to think about:

Accessibility

Do you need accessible accommodation? Consider your needs and make sure that the accommodation will meet them. This includes things like wheelchair accessibility, adapted facilities like laundry rooms and kitchens, hearing induction loops, flashing fire alarms, and adequate lighting.

Length of Stay

How long do you need to stay in your accommodation? Many university-owned Halls usually offer term-time only contracts since they assume students might move back home in the holidays. Longer contracts are available, so make sure you talk to your chosen university and tell them what you need.

Applying to University

Every young person in England applies to university through UCAS. You apply online at ucas.com. You have to fill in some details about yourself, information about the grades you got at school, sixth form and/or college, and write a personal statement explaining why you want to study your chosen course. You can use the UCAS website to search for courses you're interested in and see the differences between them.

During your application you can declare that you have a disability. This information is given to the universities you have applied to but they will not use it to make a decision about whether to offer you a place. If you declare your disability you may find that your university gets in touch with you to ask about any support you might need when you arrive in September.



Top Tip!

Before you apply to universities you will probably visit them on an Open Day. This is a great chance to get a feel for what a university is like. It is also a great time to talk to Student Support staff and find out how the university would support you.

Look out for the Student Support team during information fairs at Open Days. They will be happy to answer any questions you have.

Student Finance

Every eligible student can apply for student loans to support them at university. These consist of a tuition fee loan, which covers the cost of your tuition fees and is paid directly to the university, and a maintenance loan, which helps pay for things like your accommodation, food, travel, any materials you need to study, and other lifestyle costs.

Disabled students are also able to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance. This is extra money you do not have to pay back.

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA)

The money is for help and support that you might need at University due to your health condition. It covers people with:

- physical disabilities
- mental health conditions
- long-term illnesses
- specific learning differences

You can buy things that you might need to help you manage your condition. These costs need to connect to your condition in some way. It can include things like:

- non-medical helpers
- equipment and software
- travel costs

For example, if you have dyslexia and you find it difficult to take notes during lectures, you could use the money to use a professional note taker. This is someone who comes into class with you and takes notes on your

lectures. Or you could buy a digital recorder to record your lectures to refer back to afterwards.

The amount of money you get is based on what you need and is split into three categories: specialist equipment allowance, non-medical helper allowance, and a general allowance. Unlike the rest of your loan, it is not based on your family's income, but how you are studying (full time or part time) can affect the amount you get.

You can apply for Disabled Students' Allowances through your student finance account online but make sure you do this before you start at university as it can take around 14 weeks to process. This means if you are successful, they will be aware that you are receiving DSA and can help you with how best to use the money.

You can find out exactly what you might be eligible for at:
www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

Support at University

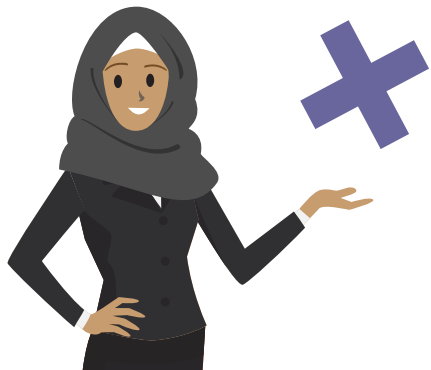
Every university has a Student Services or Student Support department. Their job is to help every student succeed, and they may be able to provide or help you access extra support throughout your studies. Different universities might call this team different things, but they usually have speciality staff in five areas:

1. Disability Services
2. Mental Health Services
3. Wellbeing Support
4. Study Support
5. Welfare Support

When you arrive at university, all students should receive information about what support is available and where to go to find it, but if you don't, you can search the university website to find out more.

Disability Services

All universities have a disability advisor. This is a named person who is aware of the kinds of support that students with disabilities might need. Their main role is to ensure that the correct adjustments are in place for students who declare a disability.



You can contact them before you arrive to talk through your needs. They can help you by:

- Planning with you how best to support you at university and writing this into a Learning Support Plan or an Individual Learning Plan.
- Helping you talk to your lecturers and other university staff about the support you need.
- Talking you through applying for Disabled Students' Allowance if you haven't already.
- Signpost you to other help outside the university.

Mental Health Services

All universities should have trained Mental Health Advisors. These are trained professionals who are able to offer information, advice and guidance on any mental health concern. They will support you throughout university to get the help you need, whether at university or through external agencies. There are also trained counsellors at most universities that will be able to offer appointments.

Student Minds are a mental health charity that are active throughout the UK. They work with staff and students to improve mental health at universities. You can also volunteer for them. You can find out more about them at www.studentminds.org.uk



Wellbeing Support

General wellbeing services can be found at most universities. They offer general advice and guidance on anything affecting your studies and can refer you to specialist staff within Student Services for more targeted support.

Many wellbeing staff organise projects, programmes and events focused on enhancing your wellbeing. These are held throughout the year and they focus on different aspects of university life, for example, to relieve exam stress there may be wellbeing activities you can access throughout the exam period.

Study Support

Study support or study skills are available to every student. They include things like academic writing, referencing and research skills. If you have a specific learning difference, there are trained staff who can give you any support you might need. If you suspect you might have a specific learning difference, such as dyslexia, they can also help you access a diagnostic assessment. This might also be offered as part of Disability Services.

The study support team can also help you access any assistive technology you might need during your time at university. This could include things like accessible desks, ergonomic chairs, speech to text software, screen readers or coloured overlays for computer screens.

Library services can also provide books in different formats, for example, in large print, in CD form for use with screen readers or in braille. You can also purchase assistive software for your personal computer with your DSA money. Your university will be able to advise you about recommended software, screen readers or coloured overlays for computer screens.

Welfare Support

Welfare means the health, happiness and safety of students. Welfare teams often focus on medical and safety concerns. If you have any concerns, ask your university to explain how they address health and safety.

Remember - all universities will have people trained in First Aid, as well as Mental Health First Aid. Universities give you doctors' surgery information in your first week so that you can sign up with a doctor if you have moved away from home. Some universities have a doctors' surgery attached to them or on campus, whilst others will recommend signing up to local services. If you need help filling out forms, Student Services Staff can help.

All universities will have security teams looking after the safety of students and staff on campus. There will always be a direct number to call if you have any safety concerns whilst at university.

If you've got any questions about support for disabled students at university, what to expect when you get to university or how to narrow down your choices, you can chat to our friendly team online at:

www.higherhorizons.co.uk/ask



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