A GUIDE FOR DISABLED LEARNERS CONSIDERING HIGHER EDUCATION
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IS THIS BOOKLET FOR ME?

• Are you at school or college and thinking about higher education?
• Do you have a disability, medical condition or special educational needs?
• Are you unsure about whether you would get any help with your studies and what support is out there?
• If the answer is yes then this booklet is definitely for you!

Going to university or college to get a higher education qualification can open up many more career opportunities to you. It’s a big decision to make, so knowing what support is out there can help you to feel confident about your future.

Lots of students have impairments that can make it tougher for them to do study-related tasks. This might be things like sitting exams, attending classes, reading, planning and writing assignments or taking notes.

If this sounds familiar to you then don’t worry as there is plenty of help available to make higher education possible for you. Every university and college has a specific team of people who are there to support you.

The university or college you choose will make sure you are supported in the best way possible for you. Their team of advisers will put any changes needed in place, so you can succeed at your studies.

This booklet will tell you about the support you’ll get to help you achieve your goals, what you need to ask and how to make sure you get all the support you are entitled to.

We are HEre for you!
WHAT HELP IS AVAILABLE?

Can I get extra financial help for my disability if I go into higher education?

Financial support is available to every eligible disabled student to ensure you can study (no matter where you choose to go). In most cases this money will not come to you, it will go directly to the suppliers of your support. Often higher education providers will offer their own range of additional bursaries and financial support options so it is worth checking to see if you are eligible for any other specific funds.

What are Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs)?

DSA is a fund to help pay for any additional study costs that students incur in higher education because of their disability. They are not means tested which means that what you receive is based on what you need, not on your household income.

DSAs can help pay for costs like

• equipment and assistive software, such as a digital recorder to record lectures

• support workers such as specialist study skills tutors, mentors or sign language interpreters
What disabilities and conditions are included?
The help and support available covers lots of different disabilities and conditions that last for a year or more, for example

- attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- autism and Asperger syndrome
- deafness and hearing impairment
- medical conditions – like epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome
- mental health difficulties
- physical difficulties – such as wheelchair users, back pain
- specific learning difficulties – dyslexia, dyspraxia
- visual impairment

What kind of support might I receive?
Support recommendations are based on your individual disability-related needs, your course and what your institution can offer. Below are a few examples.

Support in your classes
- copies of lecture notes and handouts in advance and/or in alternative formats
- support workers (such as note takers or sign language interpreters) so you have an accurate record of what is covered in lectures
- the loan of digital recorders to record sessions
- support worker assistance in practical sessions (for example in labs) to ensure that you can work effectively and safely
Support managing your workload

• one to one mentor support sessions to help with organisation and prioritisation
• computing equipment
• mind mapping software to help plan your work
• scanning and proofreading software to help with reading
• stickers to put onto pieces of assessed written work to inform markers that you have difficulties with written communication
• arranging alternative methods of assessment where the standard method of assessment may disadvantage you

Support in your exams

• smaller rooms
• fewer students, or exams on your own
• alternative methods of assessment
• extra time
• use of a computer and assistive software
• rest or nutrition breaks
• permission to use specialist ergonomic equipment
• exam papers in alternative formats such as braille or large print
• more appropriate language used in exam questions (generally for students who are deaf or hard of hearing or for those with an autism spectrum condition such as Asperger syndrome)
Support in getting around

- personal assistants
- parking spaces
- taxis in some cases

Fieldwork, placements and years abroad

Departments will need to take into account your specific support requirements when allocating placements, arranging field trips and organising years abroad.

These are only examples of what support might be provided. To explore everything that is available, the best thing to do is to have a full assessment of your needs.

“Before I started, I was worried that with my hearing impairment I might struggle to follow the teaching and to keep up with the pace of the course. The support I get is assistive technology, note takers and extra time for assignments and exams when required. The university worked with me to identify when and how I required the support. This gave me the confidence I needed to achieve and succeed with my course.” Wellington

Watch Wellington’s story at www.heppco.org
Can I meet with someone before I start the course to sort my support out?

You can meet with a Disability Adviser at your institution before you begin your course to start setting up your support. They will know what’s available for you and can set this up so it’s a really good idea to contact them early.

Is it important to visit before I start a course?

Yes, attending an open day gives you an opportunity to visit your chosen department, talk about your course and experience the facilities and support available. Anyone considering higher education should visit their potential choices to help them decide if it’s the course and place for them. Open days are also a useful way of helping you to anticipate any extra support needs you may have.

What is a learning contract/learning support plan?

This is the document that institutions use to record details of your condition, the support you are entitled to and what adjustments they need to put in place for you. This document will be shared with staff who need to know about it – such as course tutors, lecturers, faculty support staff, examination staff and library staff. This is so that they can ensure the recommendations are implemented.
**SUGGESTED TIMELINE**

**Before you apply for university**
- start researching what support is available for your condition/disability
- go to open days to visit possible institutions to find out what specific support they can offer

**After you have applied to higher education**
- go to open days if you have not already been
- meet or speak to Disability Advisers
- collect evidence of your disability or specific learning difficulty

**Prior to starting your course (ideally from February/March)**
- apply for Disabled Students’ Allowances
- receive your permission letter to book a study needs assessment
- book your assessment
- full assessment and recommendation report received
- entitlement letter received from funding body
- contact the disability service to arrange for them to set up your support

**September/October**
Start your course!
OPEN DAYS

We would encourage everyone to visit each university or college that they are considering going to. Wherever you choose you will be there for a few years so it is really important that you make the right decision for you.

Open days are a fantastic opportunity to visit the university or college, speak to staff and current students, look around the facilities, tour some student accommodation and see the town/city as well.

Students on the course will be able to talk to you about their experiences, how they have found the workload, the support they have received and any difficulties they have faced.

Don’t forget to let the institution know in advance if you need any assistance on the day of your visit.

Questions to ask at open days

In addition to finding out about the course and the provider, here are some useful questions to ask about the specific additional support available for students with a disability.

Support

- Is there a university or college health service on campus or do students register with a local GP?
- How accessible are other support services such as counselling and financial support?
- Can someone help me apply for Disabled Student’s Allowances (DSAs)?
- What other support is available?
Buildings and facilities

- Are all the key facilities fully accessible? (are there wheelchair ramps, accessible lifts, toilets and stair lifts?)
- Buildings you might use include halls of residence, kitchen and laundry facilities, cafés and restaurants, the students’ union, the library, sports facilities, lecture theatres and various departmental rooms.

- What’s the lighting like?
- Are there clear signs around the campus and on buildings?
- Are there car parking spaces and can I get a permit?
- Is there a campus minibus?
- What is the public transport like?
- Is there any accessible student accommodation?

Studying and exams

- How will my individual study and exam needs be met?
- What alternative methods of assessment will be available?
- How will my needs be communicated to lecturers and other staff?
- Will the support that I need be put in place quickly?
- How has the university/college supported other students with a similar impairment to me?

You may find it helpful to take a copy of this checklist of disability related questions with you when you visit.
“Throughout my life I have struggled with anxiety. Things that other people just take in their stride could send me into meltdown and crisis mode. I was worried that university workload and assessments would be a cause of massive anxiety.

The support I have means I am allowed to take alternative assessments so that I don’t have to sit exams. Finding that my grades no longer have to suffer as a result of a medical condition that I cannot control has completely changed my life.” Megan

Watch Megan’s story at www.heppco.org

THE TECHNICAL STUFF

What evidence do I need?

To access support in higher education you need to provide evidence of your disability. This varies depending on the nature of your disability.

If you have a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, you’ll need a full Educational Psychologist’s report conducted after the age of 16.

The PATOSS* website provides extensive information on what constitutes acceptable evidence of a SpLD in order for students to qualify for DSAs.

https://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/SupportAdvice/DisabledStudentAllowances

If you have any other disability you will need an up-to-date letter from a GP, consultant or psychiatrist which contains a diagnosis of your disability, confirms the duration of the symptoms and identifies the impact upon your studies.

* The Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties
Am I eligible to apply for DSAs?

All full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students, including distance learners, are eligible to apply for DSAs.

Part-time students are eligible for DSAs as long as they’re studying a course which is at least 25% of the full-time equivalent each year. International students are not eligible for DSAs.

When can I apply? Is there a cut-off date?

You can apply for DSAs at any time during your course but it’s preferable to apply before you start. As soon as student finance applications are open, you can apply for DSA – so if your course starts in September, this will usually be late February or early March.

You do not have to have a confirmed place at any institution to apply for DSA.

Applying early will maximise the chances of support being in place from the outset of your course.

How do I apply for DSAs?

To apply for DSAs you will need to apply through the funding authority/organisation that is providing your student loan, bursary or scholarship (usually Student Finance England). You need to complete the application form on the funding authority’s website and return it to them with the required evidence for each condition you would like support for.

If you are unsure about how to apply, you can ask a Disability Adviser at your chosen higher education institution.
What happens after I have applied for DSAs? What is a needs assessment and how do I book one?

Once you have applied for DSAs, your funding authority will write to you giving you permission to book a study needs assessment. This is a confidential appointment with an assessor to discuss the effects of your disability on your studies. You’ll discuss options for support to suit your individual needs and where appropriate, equipment and software are recommended.

You need to attend your study needs assessment at an accredited Assessment Centre. There are Assessment Centres around the country, and you can consult the DSA-QAG website in order to locate the one nearest to you.

www.dsa-qag.org.uk

What happens after I have attended my study needs assessment?

After the assessment a report will be written detailing the discussion you’ve had and the support that’s been recommended. Copies of this document will be sent to you, your funding body and also (with your permission) to the Disability Adviser at the institution you are likely to be attending. Your funding body will consider the recommendations and send you an entitlement letter confirming what they are willing to pay for.

Once you have received this letter you’ll then need to take an active role in getting your support. You should contact your institution to check that they’ve got a copy of your report and are arranging the support recommended.
Do I need to apply for DSAs each year?

If you are a full-time student undertaking an undergraduate degree and in receipt of a student loan or bursary you will not need to apply for DSAs each year.

If you are studying part time, are self funded or are completing a postgraduate course you will need to reapply each academic year.

Can I use DSA funding for help with fees/funding?

No. Your DSA funding is to pay for any additional support that you may need because of your disability. You do not receive this allowance yourself – it goes directly to pay for the individual support you need whether it is equipment and software or one to one support workers.

“I have depression, arthritis and anxiety which means I experience tiredness, self-doubt and some stiffness. My support includes regular mentor meetings and items to make study more comfortable for me.

If you need help in your learning, it’s there. The support is initiated by applying for your DSA and contacting the disability service at your institution. You will not get anything unless you ask. I’m so grateful for all the people who’ve helped me. I know that no matter how my conditions present themselves, I will not be left to flounder and wonder how to progress.” Alan

Watch Alan’s story at www.heppco.org
DISCLOSURE AND CONFIDENTIALITY – BEING COMFORTABLE ABOUT SHARING YOUR INFORMATION

It is important to share information about your disability or diagnosis with your chosen university or college, so that they can explore how best to support you on the course.

You do not have to disclose any information that you don’t want to, but the more information you share about how your condition might affect your studies, the more they can have in place for you from the very start!

You will find that the disability team will respond positively and sensitively to any information that you do share, and if you link up with them in the early stages of your application you will feel more comfortable and confident about your transition into higher education from the outset.

Will the disability team know about me and my support needs before I arrive?

Only if you have shared your information with them! There is no automatic transfer of information from your school or college to your chosen higher education institution, so it is important that you make direct contact with them and get to know the disability team as soon as possible. This will encourage you to engage in an open and honest discussion about your condition and how you feel it might affect your studies. Remember – they will tailor your support strategies around the information that you provide.
Will my information be confidential?

Yes – your disability team will work strictly within the level of consent that you give. But it is important to bear in mind that some aspects of your support may be limited if you don’t agree to them sharing information about the likely impact of your condition on your studies with your tutors.

Can my parents get involved with explaining what I need?

In the months leading up to the start of your higher education studies, most disability teams will be happy for a family member to come with you to explore the support available to you. However once you actually begin your course you are of course an adult – so all contact, in normal circumstances, will be with you only. During your studies you may wish to share any emails and advice sent to you, with members of your family, but that remains at your discretion.

How do I let the tutors know about my disability and what I might need?

Provided you have given consent for this, your disability team will liaise with your tutors, even before you start, to provide the adjustments and flexibility you need in each aspect of your studies. Your experience will then be automatically tailored to you, without any need for you to explain this yourself to each of your tutors. If your needs change in any way during your studies, your Disability Adviser will ensure that tutors adjust your study strategies to take account of that change.
You may need or prefer to live at home to study and travel for your higher education. For students in the Sheffield City Region here are the details of the places you can study within daily travelling distance.

Map key of Sheffield City Region

**Higher education**

1. University Campus Barnsley  
   www.barnsley.ac.uk/ucb
2. University Centre Doncaster  
   www.don.ac.uk
3. Sheffield Hallam University  
   www.shu.ac.uk
4. The University of Sheffield  
   www.shef.ac.uk

**Further education**

5. Northern College  
   www.northern.ac.uk
6. Barnsley College  
   www.barnsley.ac.uk
7. Doncaster College  
   www.don.ac.uk

**Both**

8. Chesterfield College  
   www.chesterfield.ac.uk
9. Dearne Valley College  
   www.dearne-coll.ac.uk
10. North Nottinghamshire College  
    www.nnc.ac.uk
11. Rotherham College  
    www.rotherham.ac.uk
12. Sheffield College  
    www.sheffcol.ac.uk
CONCLUSION

There is a wide range of support available to ensure that you can fulfil your true potential and succeed in higher education. The main thing to remember is to ask and ask as early as possible.

“I only got diagnosed with dyslexia in my second year of university, but I have received lots of support since that point and have found university a lot easier since then. So I would encourage everyone to find out what support they might be entitled to. It has made me feel like I am on a level playing field with everyone else.” Anna

Watch Anna’s story at www.heppco.org