HEre for you

A guide for students with a health condition, mental health condition, disability or specific learning difficulty who are considering higher education

A partnership of Sheffield Hallam University and The University of Sheffield
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Is this guide for me?

Are you at school or college and thinking about higher education?

Do you have a medical condition, special educational need or a disability?

Would you like to know whether there will be support to help you with your higher education studies and how to access this?

If the answer is yes, then this guide is definitely for you!
Going to university or college to study towards a degree or other 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 choices.

Lots of students have impairments that can make it more difficult to do study-related tasks (such as attending classes, reading, planning, taking notes, sitting exams or writing assignments). If this sounds familiar to you then don’t worry as there is plenty of help available to make higher education possible for you.

The university or college you choose will make sure you are supported in a way that best suits you. The disability service will put support in place to ensure you have the opportunity to make a success of your studies.

This guide will tell you about the support you could get to help you achieve your goals, including questions you need to ask and how to make sure you have access to the support that you need.

We are HEre for you!
What support is available?

This section covers some of the help that may be available to you during your higher education studies if you are eligible to receive support.

Schools, colleges and higher education institutions do not always use the same words to describe the reasons why a student might be eligible for support. This can sometimes feel confusing. Some students might be put off by the term ‘disability’ or do not think it applies to them.

Help and support is available for lots of students including those who have a

- Specific learning difficulty (dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- Long term health condition (including epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, Crohn’s disease)
- Autism spectrum condition (Autism and Asperger syndrome)
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Mental health conditions
- Physical impairment or mobility difficulty (including cerebral palsy, fibromyalgia, arthritis)
- Speech, language or communication difficulty

If you’re in any doubt about whether you can have support at university or college, please speak to the disability support teams at the higher education institutions you are interested in applying to.
What support is available?

Financial support

As a disabled student, can I get extra financial help if I go into higher education?

Financial support, known as Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSA), is available to every eligible disabled student to ensure you can study (no matter where you choose to study). DSA funding is to help pay for any additional study costs that students incur in higher education because of their disability.

What you receive is based on what you need. It is not means-tested (based on your household income) and you won’t need to pay back your DSA funding when you’ve completed your course. In most cases this money will not come to you directly, but it will go to those who are supplying your support.

DSAs are available to students on designated higher education courses who are ordinarily resident in the UK. If you are not eligible for DSAs, for example you are an apprentice, then you may be entitled to apply for additional learning support. Contact the university disability team for more information.

What can the funding be used for?

DSAs can help pay for costs like:

- Equipment and assistive software, such as a digital recorder to record lectures or a computer with specialist software
- Support workers, such as specialist study skills tutors, mentors or sign language interpreters
- Extra travel costs to and from university
What support is available?

What kind of support might I receive on my course?

Higher education institutions will look to assess your specific needs rather than assess your disability. Any support recommendations will be tailored to you and your needs, your course and what your institution can offer.

Here are some examples of the support available (from your institution and with DSA funding):

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 to manage your workload and assessments

- 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
- Support with assessments or exams
- Stickers to put onto pieces of assessed written work to inform markers that you have a disability which can affect aspects of your written communication
- Arrangement of alternative methods of assessment where the standard method of assessment may disadvantage you
- Smaller rooms to sit exams in
- Sitting exams with fewer students, or possibly on your own
- Extra time during exams
- Use of a computer or 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)

“I’ve been given a chair and footrest to allow me to work without it being painful, but the advice and support from staff is also useful.” - Boris
What support is available?

Support with getting around

- Personal assistants
- Parking permits
- Taxis (in some cases)

Fieldwork, placements and years abroad

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

These are 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 as part of your DSA assessment and speak to your chosen higher education provider to set up university support.

Sometimes higher education providers will also offer their own range of bursaries and financial support options, so it’s worth checking to see if you are eligible for any other specific support.
Is it important to visit higher education institutions before I start a course?

Yes, attending an open day or event on campus 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 and events are also a useful way of helping you to anticipate any extra support needs you may have.

Can I meet with someone before I start the course to organise my support?

You can have contact with a Disability Adviser at your institution before you begin your course to start setting up your support.

They will know what is available for you and can set this up, so it’s a really good idea to contact them early.
Open days and campus visits

We would encourage everyone to visit each of their preferred university or college options so that their final choice is based on what is right for them.

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

Students currently studying your chosen 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.

“I’m visually impaired so I have a mobility instructor at the start of each academic year to identify how to get around. I also have a note taker in lectures, and receive the notes within 24 hours.”

- Martha
Questions to ask at open days, visits and events - a checklist

In addition to finding out about the course and the university or college, here are some useful questions to ask about the specific additional support available.

Support

☐ Is there a university or college health service on campus? Or do students need to register with a local GP?

☐ How accessible are other support services such as counselling and financial support?

☐ Can someone help me apply for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)?

☐ What other support is available?
Building 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, cafes and restaurants, the students’ union, the library, sports facilities, lecture theatres, seminar rooms and departmental offices.

☐ What is the lighting like in study spaces and teaching rooms?

☐ 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? Is it accessible to me?

☐ What is the local public transport like?

☐ Is there any accessible student accommodation?

Studying and exams

☐ How will my individual study and exam needs be met?

☐ Will alternative methods of assessment 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 or college supported other students with similar needs to me?

Take a copy of this checklist to any university or college visits to make sure you get all of your questions answered!
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 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 impairment might affect your studies, the more opportunity your higher education institution has to support you.

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 to higher education from the outset.

If you choose not to disclose at the application stage, you can still contact your chosen university or college to share information.

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 impairment 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 - the disability team will work strictly within the level of consent that you give. But it might not be possible to put in place all types of support without consent to share information with your tutors about the likely impact of your impairment on your studies.

Can my parents/carers 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 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 this remains at your discretion.

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

The disability team at your chosen higher education institution can liaise with your tutors if you give consent for this to happen. This could start even before your course begins, to provide the adjustments and flexibility you need in each aspect of your studies.

Sharing recommendations for support with your department means that your tutors will be able to automatically put support in place for you without the need for you to speak to everyone who is involved in your teaching. If your needs change in any way during your studies, contact your Disability Adviser who can ensure that tutors adjust your study strategies to take account of that change.
Next steps

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, or a report completed by a specialist teacher holding an SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate.

The SpLD Assessment Standards Committee website provides extensive information on what constitutes acceptable evidence of a SpLD in order for students to qualify for DSAs. You can find out more at:


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.

Alternatively, there are short proformas available through the Student Finance England website, which you can take along for completion by the GP/ NHS specialist. This might be more straight-forward than requesting a letter from your doctor.

Any higher education college or university Disability Service will be able to provide a copy of this form for you.
What is a learning contract / learning support plan?

Universities or colleges will produce a document to record details of your impairment and recommendations for how your academic department can support you on your course. This is sometimes called a learning contract or learning support plan. It will be shared with the staff who need to know about it, which may include course tutors, lecturers, faculty support staff, examination staff and library staff. This is so that they can ensure the recommendations are implemented. You don't need to be eligible for DSAs to have a document like this as your chosen institution will be able to offer its own support.

Don't forget that if you've agreed that your learning plan can be shared, then your tutor will have access to this, and they can use it to see how they can best support you.

“I can talk to my peer and study skills tutors about any issues I have without having to explain my disability, which helps. It can sometimes take me a while to process information, so they give me 25% extra time in exams. I can’t recommend disclosing your disability enough, so they can ensure they put the necessary support in place to make sure you succeed.” - Alex
All you need to know about DSA...

Am I eligible to apply for Disabled Students’ Allowances (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 is preferable to apply before you start. As soon as student finance applications are open you can apply for DSAs. If your course starts in September this will usually be by late February or early March.

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

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

"I have a learning contract which makes my lecturers aware of how my disability affects me so there’s no misunderstanding. It minimises the struggle – the uni definitely have your back." - Farah

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 (for example, Student Finance England). You can either apply online through your student finance account (where you apply for tuition fee and/or maintenance loans) or 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 the Disability Service 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 contact 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, recommended equipment and software.

You need to attend your study needs assessment at an accredited assessment centre. These are based around the country and your funding body will advise you how to locate your nearest one.

My dyslexia wasn’t diagnosed until I started my degree. I thought I wasn’t ready for higher education, but I just had a learning disability. My degree is the best thing I ever did!” - Megan
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 has 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 the support that will be put in place through your DSA.

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 they have 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 tuition fees?

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.
What to do and when

1. Before you apply
   • Start researching what support is available for your impairment/disability
   • Go to open days and campus visits at your chosen institutions to find out what specific support they can offer

2. After you apply
   • Go to open days if you have not already visited the institutions
   • Collect evidence of your disability or specific learning difficulty and send it to the disability service at your chosen institution
   • Meet or speak to the disability services team at your chosen institutions

3. Before you start your course
   
   **Ideally from February/March for a course starting in September**
   • Apply for Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs)
   • Receive your permission letter to book a study needs assessment
   • Book a study needs assessment
   • Following the assessment receive a recommendation report from a needs assessor
   • Receive entitlement letter from funding body
   • Contact the disability services team at your chosen institution to start arranging your support

Start your course!

There is a wide range of support available to ensure you can fulfil your true potential and succeed in higher education. The main thing is to remember to ask as early as possible.
You may need, or prefer, to live at home whilst you are studying. For students in the Sheffield City Region, here are the places within daily travelling distance that provide higher education.

- Barnsley College Higher Education [www.barnsley.ac.uk](http://www.barnsley.ac.uk)
- Doncaster College University Centre [www.don.ac.uk/universitycentre](http://www.don.ac.uk/universitycentre)
- Northern College [www.northern.ac.uk](http://www.northern.ac.uk)
- Sheffield Hallam University [www.shu.ac.uk](http://www.shu.ac.uk)
- The University of Sheffield [www.sheffield.ac.uk](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk)
- Dearne Valley College [www.dearne-coll.ac.uk](http://www.dearne-coll.ac.uk)
- National College for High Speed Rail Doncaster Campus [www.nchsr.ac.uk](http://www.nchsr.ac.uk)
- University Centre Rotherham [ucr.rotherham.ac.uk](http://ucr.rotherham.ac.uk)
- The Sheffield College [www.sheffcol.ac.uk](http://www.sheffcol.ac.uk)
- The Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre [www.amrc.co.uk](http://www.amrc.co.uk)
- North Notts College [www.nnc.ac.uk](http://www.nnc.ac.uk)
- Chesterfield College [www.chesterfield.ac.uk](http://www.chesterfield.ac.uk)
The Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp) works across the Sheffield City Region. Our mission is to ensure that every young person knows that higher education exists and could be an option for them.

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