

Ready to Study?

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







Contents

Is this guide for me?	4
What help is available?	5
What do I need to do?	10
Next steps	14
Timeline	18



Is this guide for me?

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

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

Are you unsure about how to get help with your higher education studies and access support?

If the answer is yes then this guide is definitely for you!

Going to university or college to work towards 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 (e.g. 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.

Whichever university or college you choose will make sure you are supported in a way that best suits you. Their team of advisers will put any changes needed in place, so you can have the support to succeed at your studies.

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

What help 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 wide range of conditions for which support could be available. This can sometimes feel confusing. Many students are put off by the term 'disability' or do not think it applies to them. However, an excellent way of accessing support whilst studying in higher education is via Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs).

Examples of disabilities and conditions covered by Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

The help and support available through DSAs covers lots of different long term disabilities and conditions, for example:

- Autism and Asperger syndrome
- Deafness and hearing impairment
- Medical conditions (e.g. epilepsy, chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes, Crohn's disease)
- Mental health conditions
- Physical difficulties (e.g. requiring a wheelchair, fibromyalgia, arthritis)
- Specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)
- Visual impairment

This list is not exhaustive. If you're in any doubt please speak to the disability support teams at the higher education institutions you are interested in applying to.

Financial support

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

Financial support, known as Disabled Students' Allowances, 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 directly, but it will go to those who are supplying your support.

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 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

On course support

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:

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
- Support with assessments or exams
- Stickers to put onto pieces of assessed written work to inform markers that you have difficulties with 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 such as Asperger Syndrome)

Support with 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 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 and speak to your chosen higher education provider.

Sometimes higher education providers will also offer their own range of bursaries and financial support options so it is worth checking to see if you are eligible for any other specific support.



Case study

“ I received a lot of support throughout my entire time at Selby College and was diagnosed with dyslexia in my second year. Moving from Level 3 to Higher Education I was stressed out, but I knew that studying at Selby College would give me the best opportunity and the support I needed to succeed in the future. Applying for DSA is very easy and straightforward and asking for a bit of advice on how to apply never hurt. Thanks to the help I received I now feel more confident and I am not being held back by myself.

Emma, student at Selby College

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What do I need to do?

Information to help you
make an informed choice



What do I need to do?

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 meet 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.



Questions to ask at open days, visits and events

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 or health condition.

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 of 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?
- 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?
- 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 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 condition might affect your studies, the more your chosen higher education institution 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 to 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 – the 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/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. 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.

Next steps

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.

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.

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:

http://www.sasc.org.uk/SASC_Default.aspx?id=17

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.

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.

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 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. There are assessment centres around the country and you can find the one nearest to you at this website:

www.dsa-qag.org.uk/students/find-assessment-centre



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 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 they have got a copy of your report and are arranging the support recommended.

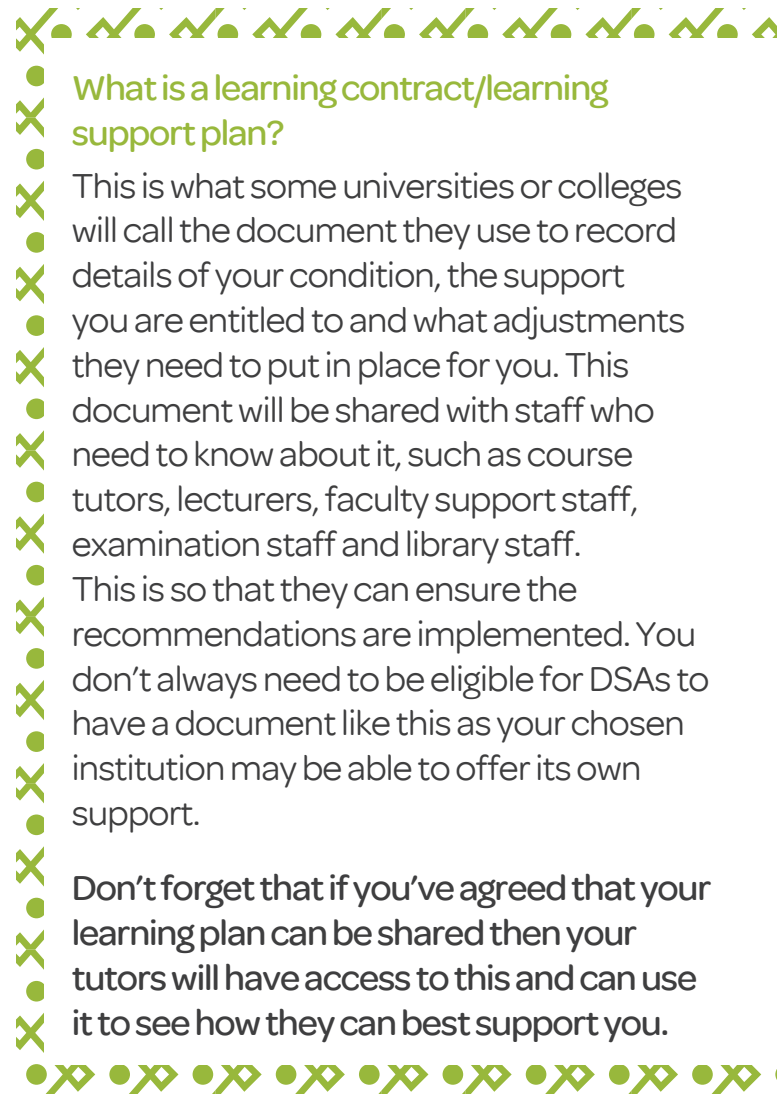


Do I need to apply for DSAs each year?



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.

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What is a learning contract/learning support plan?
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This is what some universities or colleges will call the document they 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.
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This is so that they can ensure the recommendations are implemented. You don't always need to be eligible for DSAs to have a document like this as your chosen institution may be able to offer its own support.
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Don't forget that if you've agreed that your learning plan can be shared then your tutors will have access to this and can use it to see how they can best support you.

Timeline

What you should do and when...

1

Before you apply

- Start researching what support is available for your condition/ 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
- Meet or speak to the disability services team at your chosen institutions
- Collect evidence of your disability or specific learning difficulty

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.

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In partnership with:

