

Advice for disabled learners applying for higher education

Start your research early! There are over 100 universities and many more colleges where you can study for a higher education qualification. Not all of these will offer the courses you are interested in, so that will cut down the list a little. A good place to start this research is the Universities and Colleges Applications Service (UCAS) website, which has a course search section [<http://www.ucas.co.uk/search/index.html>].

As it says on the UCAS site, “All universities and colleges are concerned to offer the widest possible access to students with special needs, so do seek advice from those which interest you.”

On the UCAS application form, there is a section to fill in about your disability. Many disabled students leave it blank in case it disadvantages their application. However, if you do not fill it in, the university or college won't be able to check how suitable the environment or programme is for you.

Most applicants leave final decisions about exactly which institutions to apply to until the last minute, but you will need to be well ahead of the game. You will need to contact all the colleges you are interested in to check what support is available, how accessible the buildings are, what facilities are available, how accessible the accommodation is, and so on. If you have a full-time personal helper, can they be appropriately accommodated

as well? If you already have specialist equipment, is it compatible with the university equipment? (You may have an adapted PC keyboard for example, but the university may use Macs.)

Many universities have old buildings, which were not designed with access in mind, and are all but impossible to adapt adequately. The main campus buildings may be fine, but is your course in other buildings? Sometimes specialist provision may be at some distance from the main campus, or the university may operate on several sites, and you may have to consider travel arrangements between sites, as well as from home to the university.

You will also need to check out the courses you are interested in. If there are work placements, will these be accessible? Will the way the course is taught and assessed be adapted to suit your needs? Are there specific demands which might preclude you applying for some courses? (Some nursing and occupational therapy courses may require a certain level of upper body strength, for example.)

It is also advisable to visit the ones you are most interested in, so that you can check them out for yourself; not just the university or college, but the town as well.

Additional funding for disabled students

The Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is available for any disabled student applying for full time or part time courses in Higher Education.

The DSA helps pay for extra costs in attending a course arising as a direct result of a disability. The DSA can help with the cost of a non-medical personal helper (such as a note taker), major items of specialist equipment (like a laptop or dictaphone), travel and other course related

costs (such as Braille paper or tapes), or to top up the other two allowances.

How Much?

Full time undergraduate students can receive

- Specialist equipment allowance of up to £5,030 for the whole of the course.
- Non Medical Helpers allowance of up to £20,000 for full-time students, and up to £15,000 for part-time
- General disabled students allowance of up to £1,680 a year.

If you are an Open University or distance learning student, or applying for a NHS Bursary Scheme, you may be entitled to the DSA as well.

Please refer to 'Bridging the Gap: a guide to the DSA in Higher Education'. This can be ordered by calling 0800 731 9133

How do you apply?

From September 2008, Student Finance England will process DSA applications.

There will be a specialist team, based at the Darlington HQ, handling and processing all new applications for, and enquiries about DSAs. Students will be given a named contact at the Darlington HQ in order to direct any enquiries they have about their application.

Whilst the application for general student finance will be online in various formats, from September 2008 the [DSA application form](#) itself will only be available online as a PDF document until September 2009.

Don't forget to include all the information required. If this is not complete, delays can be expected.

What happens next?

DSA Assessments will continue to operate as they do now. Once you have been assessed as eligible by Student Finance England, they will then ask for you to have a DSA assessment of need. This will determine the level of financial support you require.

The assessment will be undertaken at an approved access centre. There are a number of these around the country, and your circumstances will determine which centre you will attend.

Apply as soon as you can before the course starts. However, you may apply at any stage of your course.

Payments will be made either directly into your bank account, to you personally, or to a supplier of equipment or services.

All equipment bought with your DSA is and will stay your property unless you abandon your course, when Student Finance England may have to recover some or all of your DSA.

Sources of advice and information for disabled learners

SKILL:-The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities.

Chapter House.

18-20 Crucifix Lane,

London

SE1 3JW

Information and Guidance Free Phone: 0800 328 5050

Minicom: 0800 068 2422

Fax: 020 7450 0650

Email: skill@skill.org.uk

Website: www.skill.org.uk

Student Finance England

Phone: 0845 607 7577

Minicom: 0845 604 4434

Office hours: weekdays - 08.00 to 20.00, weekends -

09.00 to 17.30

Website: www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk

The British Dyslexia Association

98 London Road,

Reading,

Berkshire

RG1 5AU

Phone: 0118 966 2677

Website: <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

[Information for students](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/Information%20for%20students)

Dyslexia Action

Park House,

Wick Road,

Egham,

Surrey

TW20 0HH

Phone: 01784 222300

Website: <http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/>

Dyspraxia Foundation

8 West Alley,

Hitchin,

Herts, SG5 1EG.

Helpline: 01462 454 986 (10 am - 1 pm) Mon - Fri

Website: <http://www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk/>

Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB)

105 Judd Street,

London

WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0845 766 9999

Website: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/>

[Information for students](#)

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

19-23 Featherstone Street.

London,

EC1Y 8SL

Phone: 020 7296 8000

Website: www.rnid.org.uk

Disability Rights Commission (DCR)

Freepost MID 02164.

Stratford-upon-Avon

CV37 9HY

Phone: 08457 622 633

Website: www.drc-gb.org

TechDis

TechDis supports the further and higher education community in all aspects of technology to support learners with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

Website: www.techdis.ac.uk