

# 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

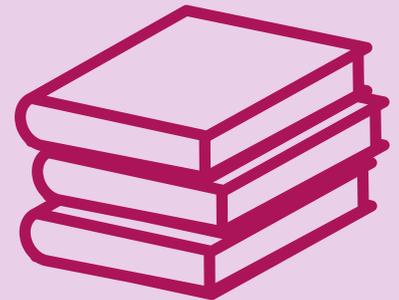


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# Is this guide for me?

- Are you at school or college and thinking about higher education?
- Do you have a medical condition, special educational need, an impairment or 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.



## Financial support

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

**Financial support, known as Disabled Students' Allowance (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/impairment.**

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.

DSA is available to students on designated higher education courses who ordinarily reside in the UK. If you are not eligible for DSA, for example you are studying an apprenticeship course, then you may be entitled to apply for additional learning support. Contact the higher education institutions disability team for more information.

### What can the funding be used for?

#### **DSA can help pay for costs like:**

- Specialist equipment and assistive software, such as note taking software to record lectures and ergonomic equipment
- Support workers, such as one-to-one specialist study skills tutors, specialist mentors or sign language interpreters
- Support for extra disability related travel costs to and from higher education

"I would advise students to seek out help with anything regarding their studies and not to go it alone. It is ok to ask for the help and not to be shy going forward in their studying. Be proud of your achievements and take one step at a time will help. Do not criticise yourselves for not achieving things but trying again will improve things in the long run." - Angela (Barnsley College University Centre)

## All you need to know about DSA...

### Am I eligible to apply for DSA?

**All full-time undergraduate and postgraduate students who ordinarily reside in the UK, including distance learners, are eligible to apply for DSA.**

Part-time students are eligible for DSA 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 DSA.



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

You can apply for DSA at any time during your course, but ideally before you start higher education. As soon as student finance applications are open you can apply for DSA. 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 DSA. Applying early will maximise the chances of support being in place from the outset of your course.

**“Students with a disability like me who are pondering/ contemplating whether to go into higher education, the advice I would give is not to worry about being supported as there is a variety of support available to enable you to succeed. The benefits/importance brought by disclosing to the institution will ensure that the institution can put support in place best to support you.”** - Cameron (Sheffield Hallam University)

## How do I apply for DSA?

To apply for DSA 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 DSA? What is a needs assessment and how do I book one?**

Once you have applied for DSA 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 a national assessment centre identified by Student Finance England, either in person or an online appointment. These are based around the country and your funding body will advise you how to locate your nearest one.

**“My biggest concern about studying at higher education was that I have lots of medical conditions and am constantly in pain and classed as disabled. I thought I wouldn't be able to cope with the amount of stress with the course assignments, but I had lots of support from the Disability and Dyslexia Service at my institution. Higher education has given me the chance to study a subject which I am interested in and built my self-confidence and independence.”** - Claire (Barnsley College University 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 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 DSA 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 DSA 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 kind of support might I receive on my course?

**Higher education institutions will look at how they can remove potential barriers to your learning. 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. It is recommended you contact the institution to find out more about the support they offer:

- Support in your classes
- Support to manage your workload and assessments
- Support with getting around
- Fieldwork, placements, and 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.

# What do I need to do?



## Information to help you make an informed choice

### **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. If it is difficult to visit, most higher education institutions offer a virtual tour.

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

You can have contact with someone from the disabled student support team 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.

**“Higher education has changed me drastically. From becoming a more self-sufficient and independent individual, to learning when to ask for help. I am registered blind, and as a student with a disability I feel as though it is incredibly important to know when to ask for help and when to push myself to be independent. I overcame the self-doubt as I was initially unsure as to whether I would be able to stay away from my family and familiar area. However, my determination to live by myself pushed me through and as I loved academic learning, especially law, this pushed me to move to university and aim higher.” - Sana (University of Sheffield)**

## **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 - 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' Allowance (DSA)?
- 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 impairment, 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 DSA. You can find out more at:

<https://www.sasc.org.uk>

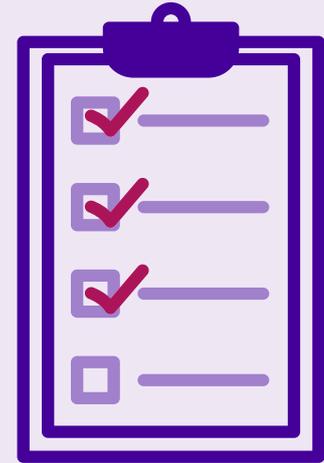
If you have any other disability you will need an up to date letter from a GP, consultant or psychiatrist which contains a diagnosis of your disability, confirms the duration of the symptoms and identifies the impact upon your studies.

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 DSA 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 receive a wide array of support from extra time in exams and individual examination space to more involved disability support. I have a learning support plan which details key areas I may struggle with and advise staff on how to support me in those areas. My autism study skills mentor helps me approach university work through the lens of techniques that may work better for me than neurotypical students, whereas my specialist mentor supports me with planning my week-to-week university schedule. I receive financial support from the DSA to pay for specialist equipment, software, and mentoring.” - Jamie (University of Sheffield)**

# 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**

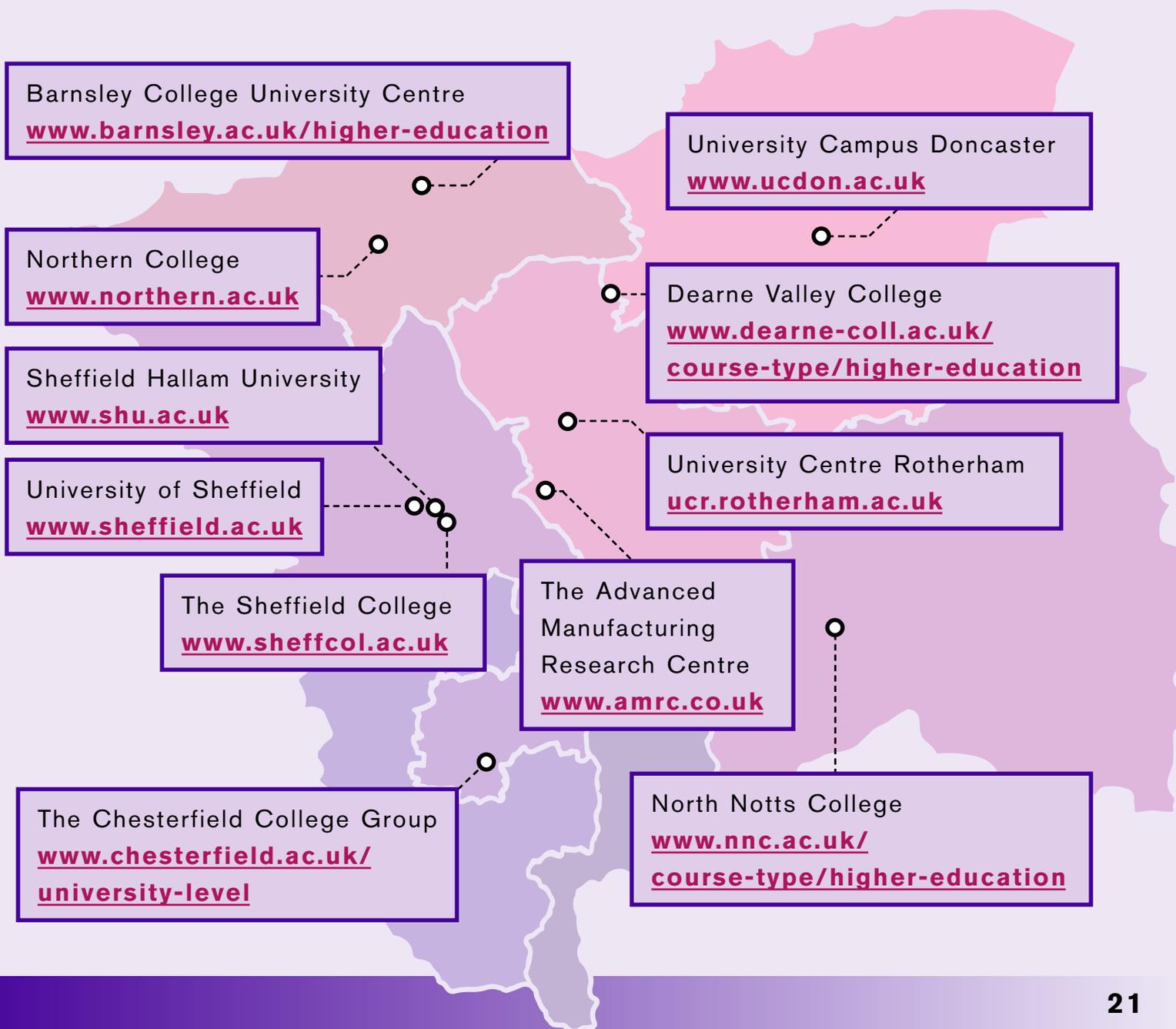
- Apply for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)
- Receive your permission letter to book a study needs assessment
- Book a study needs assessment
- Following the assessment receive a recommendation report from a needs assessor
- Receive entitlement letter from funding body
- Contact the disability services 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.

# Local higher education providers

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.



# The Higher Education Progression Partnership (Hepp) works across South Yorkshire.

Our mission is to increase and widen participation of our region's learners in higher education.

 [www.hepp.ac.uk](http://www.hepp.ac.uk)

 [@hepp\\_hq](https://www.instagram.com/hepp_hq)

 [/company/hepp-hq](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hepp-hq)

 [/HeppOnline](https://www.facebook.com/HeppOnline)

 [@hepp\\_hq](https://www.youtube.com/@hepp_hq)

Thanks to our case study students and Barnsley College University Centre, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Sheffield for their help in putting together this resource.

**Sheffield  
Hallam  
University**



**University of  
Sheffield**