ADV∧NCING
∧CCESS

24 leading universities
working together with
schools and colleges

Supporting students
with disabilities

This guide is to help teachers and advisers to best support
students with disabilities and health conditions in their
journey to a leading university.

Between 2010 and 2017 the proportion of students who self-reported a disability increased
from 8.1% to 13.2%[1]. By working together, universities, schools and colleges can ensure that
every disabled student receives the information, guidance and support they need.

Supporting disabled applicants to choose a university

> Encourage applicants to take part in open days at all of their UCAS choices if at all possible. This will give them the opportunity to explore the campus, view accommodation and discuss any accessibility requirements with disability advisers

> Prospective applicants should find out the accommodation policy at the universities they are looking to apply to. At many universities, disabled students are permitted to stay in university accommodation for the duration of their studies

> Disabled students shouldn't hesitate to contact a university's disability advisers to discuss any required support before making an application. Contact details are usually available on university websites

Supporting disabled students to make a UCAS application

> Details of disabilities can be provided optionally on the UCAS application. Applicants can select a disability category and also provide details of additional support needs

> Some applicants choose not to disclose their disability and this is a personal choice. However when students do disclose, this enables universities to best provide appropriate support for students once they begin their studies

> Disabled applicants are protected by the Disability Discrimination Act (2001) and the Equality Act (2010) and it is unlawful for a university to treat an applicant less favourably because of their disabilit

> It's never too late to disclose a disability and a student may contact a university further down the line to disclose a disability even if it hasn't been included on the UCAS application

> **UCAS** state that personal statements and interviews can provide ideal opportunities for applicants to talk about their disability in a positive way. Teachers must obtain the permission of applicants first before discussing a disability in a reference

Supporting applicants with mental health challenges

> Some applicants who are experiencing mental health problems such as anxiety or depression may disclose this as a disability on the UCAS application. You may have to support applicants who are unsure as to whether or not they should disclose their mental health problem as a disability

> An applicant with a mental health condition is more likely to identify as disabled if their condition has persisted for a long time and has a significant negative impact on their daily life

> There is a useful definition of disability on the **GOV.UK website** which refers to impairments which have a substantial and long term negative effect on one's ability to do normal daily activities. This is not the only definition of disability, although it is the one which is used in the 2010 Equality Act

> Applicants who are uncertain may be best to make a disclosure – this will give applicants the opportunity to find out more about support from which they may benefit

> Students who incur additional costs because of a mental health problem may be entitled to Disabled Students' Allowance

Supporting disabled applicants to access financial support

> Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is available to support students who may incur additional costs because of a mental health problem, long term illness or other disability. Anyone whose ability to study is affected by disability can apply, including those with learning difficulties such as dyslexia and ADHD

> DSA does not have to be paid back and is provided in addition to all other financial support

> DSA can be used to support the costs of specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, extra travel costs and other disability-related costs

> Your students can start to apply for DSA earlier on in the year before they have officially been accepted at a university. This will mean there is less work for the applicant to do in the summer

> DSA applicants are likely to be asked to undertake a needs assessment at an assessment centre. After this, a written report is produced to list the support the applicant will require and judgements will be made about the value of DSA payments

> English students should apply online via their student finance account. Applicants in Wales should apply to Student Finance Wales, those in Scotland should apply to the Student Awards Agency for Scotland and those in Northern Ireland should apply to their regional Education Authority

What support will be available once students begin university?

> All universities have teams of disability advisers whose job is to ensure that every disabled student can appropriately access the university's services. Disability advisers may contact students who have disclosed a disability to discuss support, but students themselves can also make contact at any time

> Many Students' Unions also have a dedicated Disabled Students' Officer and will provide details of support available on the Union's website

> Many universities have specialist mental health advisers as well as counselling services

> The Office for Students (which is England's Higher Education regulator) has set universities the target of ensuring that there is no difference in degree outcomes between disabled and non-disabled students. Some universities may explain how they aim to achieve this in their Access and Participation Plan – these are available to read on the **Office for Students' website**

Useful links:

> **UCAS – Support for disabled students**

> **Into HE – a Higher Education guide from Disability Rights UK**

> **Student Minds – the UK's student mental health charity**

> **Advancing Access video case study - Gemma**

> **Advancing Access video case study - Matt**

[1] Office for Students (2020) **https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/new-independent-commission-aims-to-boost-support-for-disabled-students/**