

Support at University for Students with Additional Needs

At the University of Chester, we recognise that students who have additional needs may require reasonable adjustments in order to facilitate them attending and succeeding at university. Whether you have a diagnosis of a Specific Learning Difference, mental health difficulties, social communication difficulties, sensory impairments, long term conditions or mobility difficulties, all students are welcome at the University of Chester and will be supported. We have compiled the following guide for students to offer some key information about what to expect at university if this applies to you.

It is important to note that the term 'disability' is used in Higher Education, however, like many people, you might not think of yourselves as disabled but would still be eligible for some form of support. This may be due to unseen medical conditions such as chronic fatigue or diabetes or mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression. Therefore, it is important that you are aware of this if you have a medical condition, as otherwise it could mean you miss out on support you are entitled to.

Before Application

- **University Widening Participation activities and projects for target groups** – Every university will have their own team who works with schools and prospective students. They will also likely have some projects or events that they run exclusively for students with disabilities or additional needs. Seek them out to find out their eligibility criteria, and how your students can be involved.
- **SEN students' forum** – Websites such as The Student Room offer forums for students to access and discuss issues with other students. This may be a useful resource to gain student life insight and reassurance about what is available.
- **External support** – There are many charities and organisations who operate to support students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Many of them can be found in the [Further Information](#) section below.
- **Contact universities** – Once research for university has started, we would encourage you to contact the universities you intend to put down as your choices on UCAS. This is to open up a conversation to see what support is available. It might also help you decide about which institution would suit you best. You do not need to wait until you have made your application before making contact. All necessary details should be available on the institution's website.

During application

- **TICK THE BOX** – It's incredibly important that you tick the relevant boxes on their UCAS application regarding disability, regardless of the level impact it may have on you. This is simply to alert the universities chosen, to get in touch with you to ensure that all support measures are in place ahead of term starting. You can find out more about the importance of it [here](#) from our Disability and Inclusion Team.
- **Student Finance** – The student finance package which is available to all eligible students is separate to finance available for additional needs. Unlike the Student Finance Package, Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is **NOT** means tested. Each student is assessed on their needs. We would always encourage any student who has a physical or mental health

condition, or a specific learning difficulty to apply for DSA, in case they are eligible for support. Not all students will receive DSA, but universities have a wide range of support available too.

- **Application support** – At the University of Chester, we provide support for students with additional needs with their application support. This could be personalised advice for personal statements, a guided tour of the campus to familiarise students, and meeting support staff who would be working with them after they have enrolled. If you would like further information, you can get in touch with [Helen Cooper](#) by email.
- **Appointments** – If you tick the relevant box on UCAS to declare a disability, the relevant team at university will make contact to arrange an appointment to discuss needs and requirements which can be met by the institution. If DSA is applied for, then pending acceptable medical evidence, you will be asked to attend a Needs Assessment Centre. You can find out more about medical evidence and DSA in our [FAQs](#).
- **Transition Events** – There will be a range of events which are held to ensure students with additional needs feel adequately supported and ready to start university. For example, at the University of Chester, we offer students with complex social communication difficulties and social anxiety an early moving-in date where students can choose to move into university accommodation a day earlier than everyone else, to familiarise themselves with the campus when it is less busy. You can access the University of Chester [guide to starting university](#) for more information.

At university

- **Different at each** – Every institution has an obligation to offer support for students with disabilities. However, the approach to this, and how it is delivered is different at each university. For this reason, research is crucially important. This will help you understand what support you are likely to receive before you make your choices on UCAS. You could ask these questions at open days, via email or university websites, and it might help you decide which university is best for you.
- **Finance** – DSA can come in the form of financial benefits for students due to additional costs incurred due to their disability (e.g. printing costs, photocopying etc). However, it can also cover things such as costs for equipment or specialist software, travel-related costs, non-medical helpers. Please note that this support must be agreed within your Needs Assessment Report and signed off through Student Finance.
- **Software** – Institutionally, we have learning technologists who are responsible for the software that is available for students to be able to access their work. They will also be able to provide advice to you about what tools are available for those who do not receive DSA but still require support.
- **Accommodation** – If you require adjustments made to make your accommodation accessible, such as a flashing fire alarm, or a vibrating pillow for health and safety purposes, each individual's needs will be discussed in your appointment. There are many options available.
- **University contact** – There is likely to be a team who specialise in disability support at each institution. In addition to this at the University of Chester, we also have staff who have designated responsibilities for specific areas. For example, we have a member of staff who is the contact for students with Autistic Spectrum Conditions; Mental Health specialists; and a member of staff responsible for care-experienced students too. We would encourage you to find out who they are as soon as you arrive, if not before (they will be able to contact you ahead of your arrival if you have ticked the relevant box on UCAS). You may never want to

engage with that member of staff, but it's useful to know that they are there if and when you feel like you need support. [Further information](#) can be found on the dedicated pages on our website.

- **Not alone** – University can be a huge transition with many changes in usual routines, and for some people this can be overwhelming. This can be acutely felt by those with Special Educational Needs, and so it's important for you to know that you are never alone at university. The Disability & Inclusion and Wellbeing & Mental Health teams are there if and when a student needs them; Students' Union have reps who are able to sign-post to information; Residential teams offer support too, with Hall Wardens being on hand; Porters are also onsite 24/7 to monitor University accommodation, so there is always someone available.
- **Disclosure** – The University have a responsibility to ensure that we are meeting our legal obligation under the Equality Act 2010. In accordance with GDPR, when an applicant discloses a disability to the University, this information is then processed by Disability & Inclusion to initiate contact with the applicant. Disability & Inclusion will only provide the necessary information required to academic departments in order for students to access support, which will be in the form of an inclusion plan.

Further Information

There are lots of places you can find further information and resources which you might find useful. Some are aimed at advisers supporting students, and others you might like to share with your students. Here are just a few:

- [National Association of Disability Practitioners](#) – NADP is the Professional Association for disability and inclusivity practitioners in the further and higher education sector.
- [University Mental Health Advisers Network](#) – UMHAN are a national UK charity who are the largest network of mental health professionals working in education.
- [Student Minds](#) – Student Minds are a national mental health charity for students. They have produced guides for students that are really useful: '[Know Before You Go](#)' and '[Transition to University](#)'
- [Information on DSA](#) including eligibility and what's available is accessible ahead of application.
- [UCAS](#) – There is a designated section on UCAS for students with disabilities, which has a range of information, videos and useful links, as well as information about the application process.
- You can make direct contact with our Disability & Inclusion team by emailing disability@chester.ac.uk