This section introduces the options for study in higher education, explains the application process, outlines the various grants and sources of funding available and also the support that disabled students can access.

By the end of this section you will:

- Understand the higher education options for disabled students
- Understand how disability support works in higher education
- Have built up a bank of disability contacts in higher education institutions
- Understand the different grants and loans available
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HIGHER EDUCATION FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

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6.1 What is higher education?

Higher education (HE) is any course which leads to a qualification which is higher than A level. For most people this means a first degree or diploma (undergraduate study) but there are many qualifications available.

**Undergraduate degrees**

| Bachelors degrees | BA, BSc, BEd, BEng, BMus, BDS, MBBS, LLB  
|                   | Also BMed at some Scottish HEIs |
| Undergraduate Masters degrees usually in Science or Engineering | MA in Scotland  
|                   | MEng, MSci, MPharm, MPhys |
| Diplomas of Higher Education or job-related courses | DipHE  
|                   | Diploma in Nursing |
| Foundation degrees – work-focused qualifications available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland | FdA, FdSc, FdEng |
| National Vocational Qualifications linked with a degree | NVQ 4 or 5 |
| Higher National Diplomas or Higher National Certificates – often more work-related than other undergraduate qualifications | HND  
|                   | HNC |

**Postgraduate degrees**

| Masters degrees | MSc, MA, MEd, MPhil |
| Doctorates | PhD and DPhil |
| Postgraduate Certificate in Education | PGCE |

6.2 Undergraduate courses

How to apply

The application process depends on the course. Students apply on the relevant application form either through a central admissions body (such as UCAS) or directly to the higher education institution (HEI). If students are waiting for exam results, they will be offered a place conditional on receiving certain results. Otherwise, they will be offered an unconditional place. Some courses will also require an interview. Disabled people may need to inform the institution of any particular arrangements for interview.
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For the different types of courses available, apply through the:

- **Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)** for most first degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE), Higher National Diplomas (HND) and full-time foundation degrees.
- **Centralised Applications to nursing and midwifery Training Clearing House (CATCH)** in Scotland for diplomas or degrees in Nursing or Midwifery in Scotland.
- **Institution directly** for some higher education courses in further education colleges, for some courses starting in February, for part-time foundation degrees and for Open HEI courses.

**UCAS**
Most UCAS applications are now made online using UCAS Apply. Applicants can practise their applications as much as they like, as changes can be made at any stage and will be automatically saved. Applicants can then track their progress online.

Most HEIs have a deadline of 15 January, but for Medicine, Veterinary Medicine/Science or Dentistry, or for applications to Oxford or Cambridge, the deadline is 15 October (students cannot apply to both Oxford and Cambridge in the same application year). Late applications will still be processed but it is up to HEIs how they deal with them. Students have a better chance of getting an offer if they submit their application on time.

The UCAS application allows people to choose up to five courses at different or the same institution(s). If they are applying for Medicine, Veterinary Medicine/Science or Dentistry they have four choices but may make one further choice for a different degree subject. If their application to all five institutions is unsuccessful, UCAS will give them an extra choice.

The UCAS application provides an opportunity to disclose a disability and state what a person’s support needs are. There is a list of disability categories to select from. UCAS Apply has a drop-down menu. The paper form asks applicants to insert a code number or letter.

The current categories are:
0 None
1 You have a specific learning difficulty (for example dyslexia)
2 You are blind or partially sighted
3 You are D/deaf or hard of hearing
4 You use a wheelchair or have mobility difficulties
5 You have an autistic spectrum disorder/Asperger’s syndrome
6 You have mental health difficulties
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7 You have a disability that cannot be seen
8 You have two or more of the above
9 You have a disability that is not listed above

These categories are under review and may change.
If the institution is genuinely unable to meet a disabled student’s needs and their application is rejected because of this, UCAS will allow them to substitute this choice for another one.

Applicants who do not have any offers or who have declined all their offers may be able to use UCAS Extra, which allows applicants to make additional choices from March until June. From July to September, institutions publish the places that are still available on their courses (called Clearing). If someone has no offers or has not obtained the necessary results, they will receive a Clearing entry form automatically. If someone needs complex adjustments, it may be difficult to set up the appropriate support in the short time between Clearing and the start of term.

Action: research
Visit the UCAS website and find out more about how to apply to some courses in HE (www.ucas.com).

6.3 Financial support for full-time undergraduates

Students are assessed by their local authority (LA) in England and Wales, by the Education and Library Board (ELB) in Northern Ireland and by the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) for eligibility for student support. This assessment looks at their household income and determines how much they will pay towards their fees (Scottish students exempt – see below), how much loan they are entitled to and what other financial support, if any, they may receive.

New students from England starting 2009/10 will apply online for financial support to Student Finance England and not from their local authority. They will be able to do this from September 2008 onwards, at the same time as applying to UCAS. Visit www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk for more details.

Tuition fees for academic year 2008/09

Universities and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland charge up to £3145 a year for courses. Only students from Scotland who want to study in Scotland do not have to pay tuition fees. Students from other parts of the UK studying in Scotland must
pay tuition fees of around £1735 a year (or £2760 for medical courses), but can apply for tuition-fee loans to cover all or part of their fees.

For students who started their course before September 2006, tuition fees remain fixed at a maximum of £1255, and grants of up to £1255 are still available depending on household income.

Help with tuition fee costs

Student loans

Students can apply for a student loan if they are:

- from the UK, and
- under 60 years of age.

They only start to pay back the loan once they start earning £15,000 per year.

There are two parts to the loan.

Part 1

All students can apply and are entitled to 75% of the maximum figure.

Part 2

This depends on an assessment of eligibility. The higher a student’s household income, the less they can apply for. The amount of loan they receive also varies according to where they live and study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>Maximum loan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New students not living with their parents</td>
<td>£6475 if studying in London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>£4625 if studying outside London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New students living at home with their parents</td>
<td>£3580</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students can receive extra weekly loan payments if their course lasts longer than a specific amount of time. If they study abroad for at least eight weeks as part of their course, they can apply for an overseas rate of loan.
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Maintenance grant
Grants of up to £2835 (£3335 in Northern Ireland) are available, depending on household income.

Disabled students should be made aware of the Special Support Grant, which is an alternative to the maintenance grant for students who are eligible for means-tested benefits such as income support. It will be disregarded in the assessment of entitlement to those benefits.

Institutional bursaries
Universities and colleges must provide extra bursaries to students who receive the full maintenance grant (or special support grant) if their tuition fees are more than £2835. Bursary packages vary, but should be worth at least £310 a year.

Part-time work
Many students work part-time to supplement their incomes. They may work in any number of places including the students’ union, local restaurants, shops and call centres. Students should talk to the careers office or students’ union in their institution, as they may be able to help them find a part-time job.

6.4 Financial support for part-time undergraduates

Tuition Fees
Part-time students also pay tuition fees but these are set by each institution. Fees may be waived if:

• they or their family have a low income, or
• they receive certain benefits, such as Income Support, Families’ Tax Credit or Housing Benefit, or
• their family’s sole income is welfare benefits.

They should apply directly to the institution for more information.

Part-time grants and loans
Part-time students on courses involving at least half the hours (50%) of a full-time course may be able to apply for means-tested grants towards fees and course expenses such as books and travel. For 2008/09 entry, the maximum fee grant is £1180 and the maximum course grant is £255 per year.

Part-time students can also apply for a career development loan or a bank loan but they are not eligible for a student loan.
Other sources of support for full and part-time students

- **Access to Learning Fund**
  Each institution administers these funds, which are available to support full-time and part-time students experiencing financial hardship. Priority is given to:
  - part-time students
  - mature students
  - disabled students
  - final year students
  - care leavers.

- **Adult Dependants’ Grant**
  Students may receive this additional allowance if they are studying full-time and have adult dependants. This can include their wife or husband or civil partner and other adult family members. The allowance is calculated by taking into account the income of their dependants as well as their own income. They will receive this from the Student Loans Company along with their loan.

- **Childcare Grant**
  Full-time students who have dependent children in registered or approved childcare are eligible to apply. They will receive this from the Student Loans Company along with their loan.

- **Parents’ Learning Allowance**
  This allowance is to help full-time students, who have dependent children, with course-related costs. How much funding they may receive depends on their income and that of their dependants, including their wife or husband or civil partner. These are only available to students who receive the Childcare Grant or whose dependant’s income is below a certain amount. This is paid by the Student Loans Company along with their loan.

### 6.5 Postgraduate courses

**How to apply**
Prospective students should apply to the HEI directly for most postgraduate courses. The exceptions to this are:
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- **PGCE courses** – apply through the Graduate Teacher Training Registry (GTTR)
- **Masters in Social Work** – apply through UCAS

Students should check the closing dates as they are different for each institution. If the application form for the course does not ask about disability, applicants may wish to write to the institution to explain their needs and find out what arrangements can be made.

**Funding**
- **Research Councils**
  Government-funded bodies offer a small number of limited and extremely competitive awards to postgraduate students. Students should contact the appropriate Research Council for their area of study to find out how to apply for these awards.

- **Fees**
  There is no financial support towards tuition fees for most postgraduate courses, unless the student is being funded by a Research Council. There are extra financial support schemes for people to train in teaching. Prospective students should contact the relevant awarding authority for details, or see Skill’s publication *Into Teaching*.

- **Loans**
  There are no specific student loans for postgraduate study, with the exception of PGCE courses. Students may be eligible for a Career Development Loan.

- **Access to Learning Funds**
  Each institution has an Access to Learning Fund for students experiencing financial hardship.

- **Sponsorship**
  Students can approach companies for sponsorship. Prospects Postgraduate Funding Guide and computer databases such as Funderfinder can assist with the search.

6.6 Disability-related support and funding

HEIs are covered by the Disability Discrimination Act (see **Section 2: The DDA**), which means it is unlawful for them to discriminate against all disabled students, prospective students, applicants, etc. Most institutions have a named member of staff responsible for ensuring that the needs of disabled learners are met. This person may be called the Disability Officer or Disability Coordinator.
Action: contacts

Refer to Skill’s publication *Into HE* to find out the contact details of the people with responsibility for disabled students in your local HEIs. You can use Skill’s Into HE searchable database as a starting point.

(www.skill.org.uk/into_hefe/index.asp?thetype=HE)

If students need specific equipment or support, they may be eligible for Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs).

**Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs)**

Both full and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students can apply for DSAs to help pay for study-related costs that they have because of their disability. The amount they receive is not means-tested and will not pay for costs they would have regardless of whether or not they were a student.

There are four allowances.

- **Specialist equipment allowance**: for computers, tape recorders and other equipment. In 2008/09, the maximum amount is £5030 (for full-time and part-time students) for the whole course.

- **Non-medical helpers’ allowance**: for note takers, mobility enablers, sign language interpreters, readers and other non-medical helpers. In 2008/09, the maximum amount is £20,000 (£15,000 on a pro-rata basis for part-time students) per year.

- **General allowance**: for extra books, photocopying, computer disks, or can be used to top up the specialist equipment and non-medical helper allowances. In 2008/09, the maximum amount is £1680 (£1260 on a pro-rata basis for part-time students) per year.

- **Travel allowance**: to finance extra travel costs incurred due to disability. Not all travel costs will be paid but, for example, if the student needs a taxi to get to the campus while most other students use public transport, they will receive the difference between the two fares. There is no maximum amount limit.

However, for postgraduate students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland the maximum amount is £10,000 per year for all four allowances. Support previously received from DSAs for undergraduate courses may be taken into account, especially when considering specialist equipment, including IT support.
In Scotland and for PGCE courses only, DSAs are available at the same amounts as for undergraduate courses.

If students are funded through a Research Council, they can apply for DSAs from the Research Council itself. DSAs from Research Councils are normally at undergraduate rates.

Eligibility for DSAs
When a student has been assessed by their LA as eligible for student support, they may also be eligible to apply for DSAs if they are on a designated course (most HE courses and many foundation degrees are designated). Check with the DfES or awarding body if you are unsure if the course is ‘designated’.

Students can apply for DSAs for part-time study as long as they do not exceed twice the time period normally required to complete full-time study for the course. Open and distance learners may also be entitled to support as long as the course meets eligibility conditions.

DSAs are not available for international students, including EU students.

Applying for DSAs
Applications should be made to the students’ awarding authority. In most cases this will be the local authority (LA).

New students from England starting 2009/10 will apply for DSAs from Student Finance England, from September 2008 onwards, at the same time as applying to UCAS.

If the student will be studying on an NHS-funded course, they need to apply for the DSAs along with their NHS Bursary. They should contact the NHS Student Grants Unit or speak with the institution they will be attending for more information.

Students will need to provide evidence of their disability, which can come from a doctor or, if a dyslexia diagnosis is needed, an educational psychologist, specialist teacher or other qualified professional.

Students will then have an assessment of their study needs. This will not be an assessment of their disability, but an assessment of what they need to study effectively. Their awarding authority should provide information about this assessment.
DSAs – managing the money
The awarding authority may offer to pay DSAs in different ways:

- Students receive the money and pay for the support themselves. This is often the case for students who need to do extra photocopying or who use the DSAs to pay for taxi fares.

- The awarding authority pays for the support directly. This is usually the way specialist equipment is paid for, with the awarding authority paying the supplier.

- The institution administers the money to pay for the support after receiving the money from the awarding authority. Non-medical help is often organised in this way.

DSAs only cover disability-related study costs and not disability-related living costs. Skill’s publication, Personal Assistance for Disabled Students in Higher Education provides information for students about the different options for personal assistance with daily living and with study-related assistance, where to go for help and advice and where to get funding. Skill also produces an information booklet called Applying for Disabled Students’ Allowances.

Activity: publications
Download Skill’s publication Applying for Disabled Students’ Allowances available at www.skill.org.uk/uploads/he_dsa.doc

Activity: case studies
After reading the information about opportunities and support in higher education, look at the case studies below. There are questions at the end of each case study to prompt you to think about what advice and information would have been appropriate.

There are suggested answers on page 113 to give you some pointers.

Sally

Sally is dyslexic and also has epilepsy. She wishes to go on to study English and Journalism at HEI and the courses that she applies to study also include one or two short work placements.
One of the HEIs she applies to asks her to undertake an interview and an extra English language test. This is not normally needed with her level of predicted grades, but the HEI says that as she has dyslexia, they want to determine whether she could cope with the increased pressure of a degree. The tutor who interviews Sally also says that they are concerned about the health and safety implications of Sally’s epilepsy, particularly when she is on placement.

Sally comes to you to discuss these things and also to ask about how she would train as a journalist and whether her dyslexia would affect this.

**Was the HEI reasonable in its admissions procedure?**

**What support might Sally need at HEI and where might the funding for this support come from?**

**Do you think there would be difficulty on placement? Is this covered by the DDA?**

**What would you advise Sally about her aspirations?**

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**Jermain**

Jermain is applying to study psychology at HEI. He has mental health difficulties, but is wary of disclosing this in his UCAS application because he doesn’t think it will affect his studies and is concerned that disclosing might jeopardise his place. He is also really worried about everyone on his course finding out, if he were to disclose, and treating him differently.

Jermain doesn’t currently receive any formal support at college, although his tutors are aware of his mental health condition and are very supportive, giving him extra time to complete assignments if he is experiencing difficulties, and allowing him to turn up a little late for early classes as his medication makes him drowsy in the mornings.

Jermain says that he won’t need any support at HEI as his condition is well managed and all he might require is a bit of flexibility. He does mention in passing that it would be useful to have some sort of mentor, but doesn’t think that would be a possibility.

**What would you advise Jermain about disclosure?**

**What are his options for disclosing?**
Would Jermain’s mental health needs be kept confidential?

What support might Jermain need at HEI?

How would this be put in place?

Would mentoring be a possibility? Where would funding for this come from?

Answers to case studies

Sally

Was the HEI reasonable in its admissions procedure?
No, if usually a student would not be required to take an English language test then Sally was treated unfairly on the basis of her disability. If all students were asked to take an English test, that would be OK, but if it is especially for people with dyslexia, the policy is discriminatory.

This is different to asking students with dyslexia to be assessed for their learning needs.

What support might Sally need at HEI and where might the funding for this support come from?
This would depend upon how her dyslexia and her epilepsy affect her, for example, is her epilepsy controlled with medication? It will also depend upon the style of delivery and the content of the course. Some options are a note taker, a tape recorder and extra time in exams and assignments. If Sally is a UK student, Disabled Students’ Allowances should cover the cost of human support and equipment.

Do you think there would be difficulty on placement? Is this covered by the DDA?
Work placements are covered by the DDA and any potential health and safety concerns should be correctly assessed. Issues arising from epilepsy could include:

- Is her epilepsy controlled?
- When was her last seizure?
- Are there any specific triggers that could be avoided?

What would you advise Sally about her aspirations?
Sally needs to be aware of her own abilities and limitations and how to minimise their impact. She should ask herself, what do I want to do? How will I achieve this? And is this a realistic plan? She needs to properly investigate the requirements of each profession, eg for journalism there may be requirements to do court reporting, for which electronic note takers are not allowed.

Jermain

What would you advise Jermain re disclosure?
It is up to Jermain what he says and how much detail he gives, however, disclosing would ensure that his HEI is aware of his need for flexibility and has the appropriate training. Therefore it is normally wise to disclose his disability as soon as he feels able.

HEIs are much larger than FE colleges and though he believes he does not need support at HEI he may not realise just how much support he already receives at college.

What are his options for disclosing?
Jermain does not have to disclose his disability in the UCAS application, he can disclose at any time, for example he may want to tell the disability coordinator at the HEI.

Would Jermain’s mental health needs be kept confidential?
HEIs have a duty not to use the information to treat Jermain less favourably compared to non-disabled students. Nor can they give out information to other people such as other students. Who receives information about his mental health will be agreed with Jermain before they are informed.

What support might Jermain need at HEI?
To get the most appropriate support to meet the needs of his disability and the demands of his course, Jermain will need to have an assessment. Some of the options for the type of support he may need are the continuation of flexibility, a mentor and a note taker for his morning lectures which he may find difficult to concentrate in.

As mentioned above, Jermain may not realise how much support he is currently receiving in college, in terms of flexibility and understanding.

How would this be put in place?
The HEI disability coordinator will meet and discuss Jermain’s needs with him.
Would mentoring be a possibility? Where would funding for this come from? Students with disabilities can claim Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs) which is made up of three parts including a part for human support. Mentoring could be possible using this funding.