

Communicating with the university about your study needs



Your university may encourage you to 'disclose a disability' in order to access support for your specific study needs. Around one in five students disclose a disability at some point in their studies.

Why do universities use the word 'disability'?

Universities use the word 'disability' to cover a lot of things that you might not think of as a disability, such as dyslexia, depression and anxiety. They do this to make sure your study rights are legally protected under the Equality Act, which uses the term 'disability'. Universities often classify study needs using the following categories:

- **Mental health conditions** (e.g. depression, anxiety, PTSD or other conditions, with or without a formal diagnosis)
- **Specific Learning Difficulties** (e.g. dyslexia, dyscalculia or dyspraxia)
- **Fatigue and pain conditions** (e.g. fibromyalgia, arthritis, ME or MS)
- **Long term health conditions, sometimes referred to as 'unseen disabilities'** (e.g. diabetes, epilepsy, cancer)
- **Mobility impairment** (e.g. using a wheelchair, crutches or other support to move around)
- **Manual dexterity impairment** (difficulty with fine motor skills, e.g. carpal tunnel syndrome, repetitive strain injury)
- **Autism spectrum conditions** (e.g. Asperger's)
- **Blind/visual impairment, including colour-blindness** (anything not corrected by glasses)
- **Deaf/hearing impairment**
- **Speech impairment** (e.g. stutter or slurred speech)

Additional study requirements

There may be ways that we can support you to study. These are often called additional requirements; for example, you might need more time to read texts if you have dyslexia, you might need some flexibility around assignment deadlines if you experience depression, or you might need extra support from tutors or university staff if you have anxiety.

Reasonable adjustments

These are adjustments the university makes to, for example exams, tutorials or study materials which can give you the best chance at being successful with your studies. Examples include special equipment loans, extra time in exams, alternative activities and software (e.g. assistive technology). You might need to provide a doctor's note or a dyslexia assessment for some reasonable adjustments.

Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

This is government funding; students who disclose a disability can apply for it and it does not depend on your earnings. It supports students with paying for specialised equipment, mentors, study skills tutors and other human support, or travel. If you apply for a DSA you'll meet a needs assessor.

DSA Needs Assessment Meeting

A needs assessment is a collaborative meeting between the student and a needs assessor. The needs assessor will be experienced in support and equipment for students applying for DSA. The assessor will ask you questions about your unique circumstances and will consider with you, how these may impact you whilst studying. The assessor may demonstrate equipment or software that may be useful and will discuss with you any strategies that may help such as the support of non-medical help. The aim is to offer strategies that will minimise the chances of you being disadvantaged by disability, health conditions or specific learning difficulties when studying. The assessment is not a test of your academic ability or health.

What if I don't like these terms?

These terms are the words the universities usually use and may use in conversation with you. However, you might prefer to use different language to describe yourself and your study needs. If so, you should feel free to ask university staff to use the language you prefer. For example, if an adviser asks you if you have a disability, you could respond saying you have dyslexia, but you prefer the term 'additional study requirements' to 'disability'.

How can I find out more? Most universities have a student support or disability support team. If you haven't been asked about your study needs it might be worth getting in touch with them. Look for their details on the university website.

