



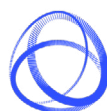
The Guide

Support available for disabled students at University

Including neurodivergence and those with mental health conditions

KMPF
KENT & MEDWAY
PROGRESSION
FEDERATION

University of
Kent



Canterbury
Christ Church
University



UNIVERSITY OF
GREENWICH

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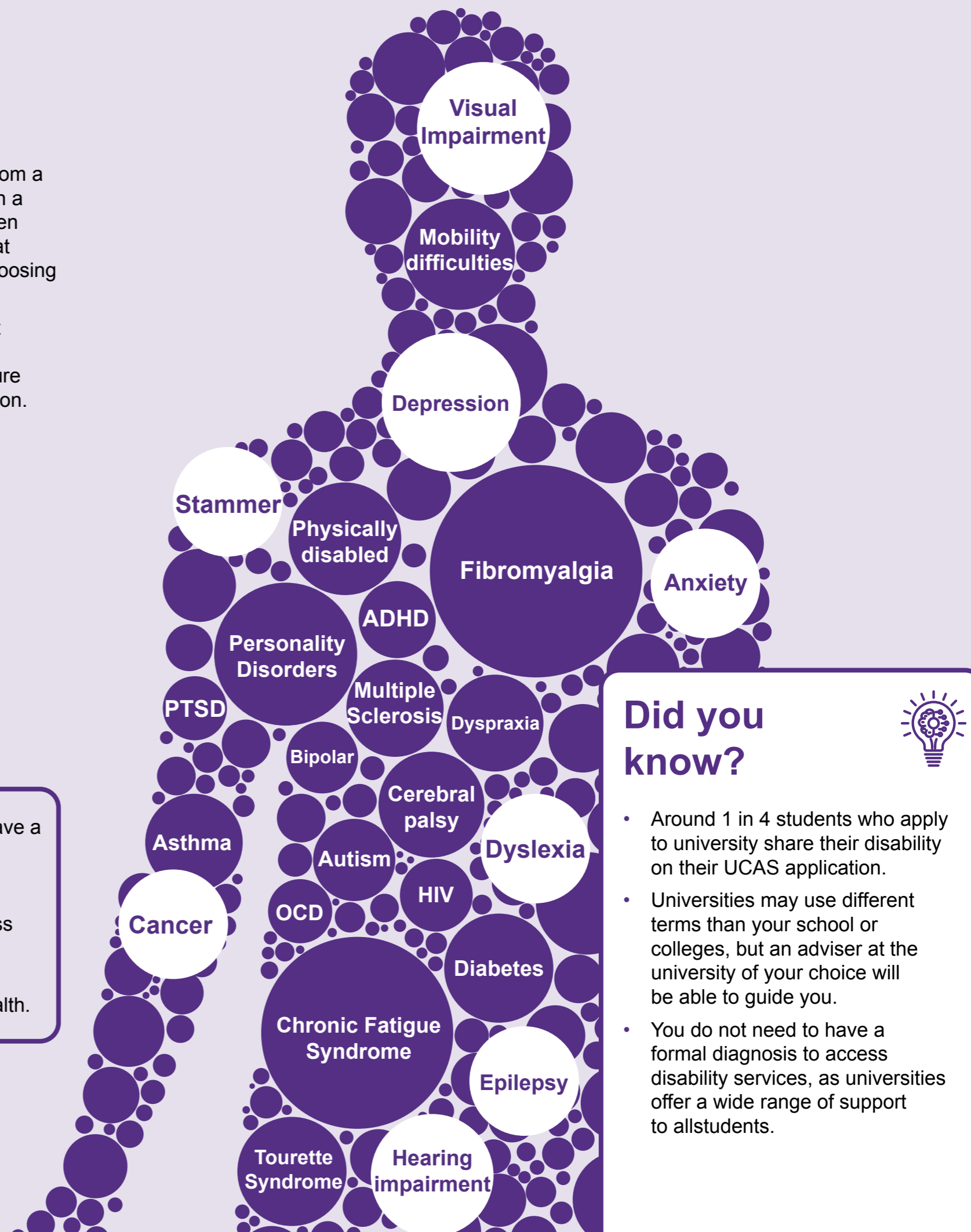
Introduction

University is accessible to people from a wide range of backgrounds and with a variety of needs. This guide has been created to help you understand what support is available to you when choosing and attending your university.

There is key information throughout The Guide, and links that take you directly to relevant websites to ensure you have the most current information.

You may not consider yourself to have a disability, but according to the Equality Act 2010 a disability is a long-term (12 months or more) physical or mental impairment/illness that affects your everyday life.

This also covers a range of specific learning differences and mental health.



Did you know?



- Around 1 in 4 students who apply to university share their disability on their UCAS application.
- Universities may use different terms than your school or colleges, but an adviser at the university of your choice will be able to guide you.
- You do not need to have a formal diagnosis to access disability services, as universities offer a wide range of support to all students.

Applying

UCAS

UCAS manages applications to Higher Education. Its website has lots of information to help you, not only about university but also about other pathways such as apprenticeships.

Applicants UCAS Guide

Discover everything you need to know about the application process, including research, the application itself, and your next steps.

- Before you apply
- Applying to university
- After applying



[Visit the UCAS pages about the application process](#)

Register for a UCAS Account

You can create a FREE* UCAS account and access the tools to help explore your options, answer questions you may have and things to consider.

[Sign into UCAS](#)


Find Information for Individual Support Needs

UCAS Tools available to help you


Open Day & UCAS Discovery Event Search


The Personal Statement Builder


Universities, Courses and Apprenticeship Search

*You will only need to pay a fee once you decide to apply to university. If you have been in receipt of free school meals in the last 6 years, you may be eligible to have your application fee waived.

[Find out more about the FSM fee waiver](#)

UCAS and Disabled Student Support

Higher Education is an inclusive environment where support can be provided to help you study. UCAS has worked with expert organisations to create specific pages to help you.

[Access the student individual needs pages](#)

Did you know?



UCAS also has a [virtual work experience platform](#) where you can complete modules and build your Personal Statement.


Researching your options and considering support needs


Making the transition to Higher Education

UCAS Adviser toolkit to support disabled students

Sharing your disability or condition in a UCAS Application


Practicalities including accommodation, looking after your mental health, wellbeing and financial support

Speaking to a disability advisor or student support team

Did you know?



Being disabled shouldn't limit your job or study choice. **Apprenticeships**, where you work and study at the same time, can be a great route for your chosen career. Find out about [support for neurodiverse students taking apprenticeships](#).

Student Finance



Applying for student finance can be confusing, but there are two main types of student loans. There may be other funding available in the form of bursaries, scholarships and grants such as Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

Tuition Fee Loan:

You can apply for a Tuition Fee Loan to pay your fees.

Tuition Fee Loans are available to UK students and cover the complete cost of tuition fees. Most students won't have to pay for tuition fees up front, and the loan is paid directly to the college or university where you study.

How much you can get depends on:

- How much your university or college charges
- Whether you're studying at a publicly or privately funded university or college
- When you started your course



Apply for your funding as early as possible to avoid delays.

[Apply for student finance](#)

It is important that you include the income of those you live with to ensure you get the maximum Student Finance England (SFE) award you are entitled to.

[Check what household income details are needed](#)

Maintenance Loans:

You could also get a 'living cost loan', also known as your Maintenance Loan. This loan helps cover your everyday expenses while at university. How much you get depends on factors like where you live, where you study, and how much income you have (either you or your parents, depending on your circumstances).

[Find out more about undergraduate loan payments](#)

Repaying your loans:

What you pay back is based on what you earn, so it's more like a tax. If you stop earning or earn less, your repayments will be calculated accordingly. **Your student loan doesn't have any impact on your credit rating and does not appear on your credit file.**

Extra Funding that you might be eligible for:

Different universities offer a range of extra funding options that will help with any shortfall and given that scholarships, bursaries, and grants don't have to be repaid, these can make a huge difference to your student budget.

Scholarship:

one-off annual or termly payment, based on achievement or excellence in academics, sports or music.

Bursary:

one-off annual or termly payment, based on low household income, background or personal circumstances.

Grant:

one-off annual payment for specific purposes, based on background or personal circumstances.

[See more information about student finance](#)

Did you know?



Of those who told UCAS they had applied for a scholarship or bursary, over 75% were successful!



Applying for DSA

DSA is a UK funding scheme that provides equipment and support for disabled students in Higher Education. With medical evidence, you can access funding for specialist support and equipment.

Ok, let's get started!

1

Check Eligibility for DSA:

Not eligible for DSA support? Contact your university support service to discuss what support they can provide you during your studies. DSA opens in March.



3

Apply:

If you're a full-time undergraduate with student finance, sign in to your account to start your DSA application, complete the form, and send your evidence to your funding body. Part-time or self-funding and postgraduate students must reapply each year.

5

Assessment:

You'll have a phone, video or in-person chat with a friendly Needs Assessor. With you, they will agree what support they think you will need.

7

Approval:

Your funding body will email you a Letter of Entitlement (DSA2), confirming your support and approved suppliers. This will also be sent to your University.

2

Prepare:

Before you apply you will need evidence of your disability or condition. This could be a letter from your doctor; a recognised medical or health practitioner or a diagnostic report if you have a specific learning difference.

4

Book:

Book your **needs assessment** appointment once your funding body confirms that you are eligible.

6

Report:

After your assessment, you will receive a report about your needs. This will be shared with your funding body and your university.

8

Support:

Your Letter of Entitlement explains how to access your support, such as assistive technology or one-to-one help. Please contact the suppliers to arrange this. Your support lasts until you finish or leave your course. If your needs change, please contact your university.

All done!

Visit the [DSA website](#)

University Support and Tips for Applying

To make the most of the support available at university, you can:

Share your disability on your UCAS application

This information is only shared with your chosen universities so that they can arrange the appropriate support before your course starts. Sharing your disability will not affect your chances of being offered a place.

Register with the Support Service at your prospective university(s)

Register with your university's support services. Doing this early helps avoid delays. Each university may use a different name for their services, but you can find details on each university's website. Most of these services are available during the summer before your course begins.

Arrange any personal care or ongoing medical or mental health care needs with local services

There's no need to wait until you have a confirmed place, this can be done at the same time as applying to university and means it's more likely to be in place when you start your course.

Register with a local GP

The university will be able to provide you with information about local GPs.

Top tips:

If you are unsure what support you need or what is available, speak to a university adviser. They can help you explore your options and tailor support to your individual needs.



Apply early to ensure you have everything in place before you start.

What do most universities offer?

- Free, confidential counselling service
- A support team that arranges adjustment plans and wellbeing support
- Study skills support, and assessment adjustments
- Orientation and transition events to help you settle in
- Mental Health support
- Advice and guidance, including screenings for some disabilities
- Help connecting with external specialists, such as diagnostic assessors, needs assessors, and non-medical help providers
- Adapted accommodation
- Year-round access to support services (except during a short closure at Christmas)



I used to be terrified of reaching out for support. But asking for help doesn't make you 'less than' - it's how you claim your right to thrive in a world that's not built with us in mind. We deserve a level playing field, whether that's at university or in life more generally. It might take some time, but once you feel ready to reach out, know that your needs are valid and your voice matters."

Jessica Tuominen, Disabled Students Liberation Chair, STAART Ambassador.

[Hear more from Jessica in the One in Five Podcast](#)



Did you know?



Your circumstances may change. Even if you have not needed help before, it is always available. You can access support at any stage and it is never too late to reach out.

The One in Five Podcast

The One in Five is a university support podcast created by disabled students, for disabled students who are considering university. Listen to their experiences and top tips. You can access this through [UniTasterDays](#) website and [Spotify](#).



Terminology Guide

The language used in schools, colleges, and universities can differ, and that can sometimes create confusion about what support is available.

To help with this, the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP) has created a table highlighting key differences in terminology between school/college and university.

School names	University names	Notes
Special Education Needs & Disabilities (SEND)	Disability Disabled	The term 'disability' is broad and considers any physical, mental or sensory impairment which has a significant impact on daily life. Daily activities might include taking notes, writing, researching, reading large amounts of text and moving between multiple locations.
Additional Needs		
SEND Department Additional Learning Support (ALS) Learning Support Team	Disability Services Disability Team Student Support Student Services Wellbeing / Wellbeing Services	The name given to the service or team that supports disabled students varies depending on the university, but most will contain the word 'disability', 'wellbeing' or 'support' in their title. Use a search engine to search for the name of the university plus the word 'disability' or contact Student Services at the university to ask for details.
Special Educational Needs (& Disabilities Coordinator) (SENCo or SENDCo)	Disability Advisor Disability Coordinator Disability Officer Wellbeing Advisor	The equivalent of a SENDCo at university is usually someone who works in Disability Services or Student Support Services. Their title can vary, but will usually contain the word 'disability', 'wellbeing' or 'inclusion', and 'advisor' or 'adviser', 'coordinator' or 'officer'.
Learning Support Coordinator	Inclusion Advisor	
Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) Statement of Needs Pupil Passport	Needs Assessment Report Reasonable Adjustments Plan Support Summary Sheet Individual Learning Plan	The equivalent of an EHCP or Statement at university is called different things at different universities. Most universities will have some method of sharing information about support and adjustment with other colleagues, often with the word 'support', 'reasonable adjustments' or 'plan' in the title. If applying for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), a Needs Assessment Report forms part of the application process.

Taken from the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP) [Disability at University terminology guide](#).



**Canterbury
Christ Church
University**

Canterbury Christ Church University

“ We are here to ensure you have the tools you need to succeed because your achievement is at the heart of what we do”.

Georgina Hamilton-Hopkins,
Head of Support and Access

Canterbury Christ Church University is a multi-site university in the centre of Canterbury, with additional campuses in Medway and Tunbridge Wells. Named number one in the UK for Graduate employment in 2023.

We provide funding towards DSA computer grants, free screening and access to funding when seeking a diagnosis. We offer an early induction programme to students who share a disability.

[Contact us
for support](#)



Student Stories

Alice | Canterbury Christ Church University



I always wanted to go to university; it seemed like the best route to get me into the type of work I want to do. I went to a lot of open events and eventually chose Canterbury Christ Church University.

I found out about the support on offer at the open event. The university's Student Wellbeing Service told me about Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), learning support plans, adapted accommodation, and other support specific to my needs. The Service also has drop-ins daily, so any time I needed information or advice, I knew where to go.

My advice to anyone in school or college would be to build strong links with your teachers. They're going to be the ones helping you with your statement and providing your reference, so it's important they know you well.

My biggest fear about going to university, which I think is the same for a lot of people, was making friends. It turned out I had nothing to worry about with meeting people and making new friends at university! I've made friends for life here.

Another worry for me was how I was going to get around. For me, finding my way means finding the lifts, but it was all absolutely fine.

Every building I've needed to use has been fully accessible. My lecturers have also been supportive. I have a learning support plan. This means I can get extensions if I'm feeling over-tired towards the end of term, and I get extra time for in-person exams. For outings and trips, we talk about any potential access issues, and lectures are always recorded.

On a personal level, my biggest challenge has been coming to terms with my disability. I'm learning to accept the fact that there are going to be things that I find difficult, but that's okay, and it doesn't need to be anything I worry about. The important people in my life know me for me. They know that if I am wobbling more, that's okay! They're the people I need to surround myself with.

My biggest piece of advice for prospective students is to be yourself! If someone doesn't understand or accept your disability, that's their problem. If you embrace your disability, you can get the support you need. I've learned to own my disability and accept that it's a part of me, and that's a good thing!

University of Kent

University of Kent

“It’s better to have the support in place and not need it, than need it and not have it.”

Helen Childs,
Head of Disability, SpLD and Neurodiversity

The University of Kent is based in Canterbury and Medway. The Canterbury campus is surrounded by beautiful woodlands and overlooks the city, which is in walking distance and well connected by buses.

We can meet students before they arrive, and we contact all students prior to starting their course to arrange their meeting with an Adviser.

The University of Kent has on campus University Medical Centre, Nursing Services and pharmacy. Students at Kent can make use of Kent Community Oasis Garden which is a tranquil space to visit and volunteer. We are committed to creating a supportive environment for all.

We offer orientation and transition events specifically for autistic students.

[Contact us for support](#)



Student Stories

Zara | University of Kent



For a long time, university wasn’t even an option for me. With all the challenges I had faced with my mental health and self-confidence, I never thought I could do it. However, I knew that the career I wanted to pursue would need a degree, so I took the first step to go to an open day.

I chose to study at the University of Kent for a multitude of reasons, the main one being that they had an array of support available for my needs. I struggle with anxiety, so I was nervous about how much support would be available in higher education. Learning that Kent had a wellbeing service was a huge deciding factor for me. Another reason for choosing Kent was that it is close to home, as moving away to university would have been too anxiety-inducing for me.

My biggest fear about going to university was simply that I wouldn’t be able to do it and that I would fail. I faced challenges during my time at university, both personally and academically, but I have received so much support and guidance. I know that when I am struggling, there are people here to support me.

Most of the challenges I have faced have been directly linked to my mental health.

The best way I have found to overcome and manage the challenges is to be open about what is going on. I let lecturers, seminar leaders, and the wellbeing service know about my needs. This means that if there are ever times when I may need support or to apply for an extension, everyone involved will be aware, and steps can be taken to ensure support is available.

The best thing about university has been seeing the person I have grown into. I love learning, of course, but I have realised that the opportunities available at university, such as my ambassador work and overcoming academic challenges, have really enabled me to grow and develop into somebody I never thought I would be.

I have faced so many of my fears and, in doing so, have been able to grow in confidence. I have also met and worked with so many people who have pushed me to be the best person I can be, and for that, I am so grateful! My main piece of advice to others is to reach out! Higher education is challenging, and it is more than okay to admit that you would like some support. Trust me when I say, there is no shame in asking for help.



University of Greenwich

“Inclusive practice benefits every student.”

Gwen Thomas,
Disability and Dyslexia Coordinator

The University of Greenwich is based in London and has three main campuses: the historic Greenwich Maritime site, the modern Avery Hill campus, and a third at the historic dockyard in Medway.

To support transition, we work closely with STAART, the disability and diversity-focused initiative at our university. Our welcome events include quiet times for those who require it, and members of the Wellbeing Service are available during these events. We also have an orientation support programme which includes familiarisation with the campus and settling in.



[Disabled and Dyslexia Support](#)

[Visit the STAART website](#)

What does STAART Offer?

STAART is a peer support initiative at the University of Greenwich for disabled students aged 16 and over. It offers impartial information and guidance to both prospective and current students. STAART aims to prepare disabled students for the realities of university and foster a community and sense of belonging that will enable them to thrive at university.

For post-16 future disabled students and current disabled students at the University of Greenwich:

- Free online sessions on key topics for disabled students, their families, and education professionals
- Monthly bulletin with updates and advice
- STAART ART Prize Competitions

Current disabled students at the University of Greenwich:

- Closed WhatsApp group chat
- Meetups and events
- STAART peer mentoring
- Paid work as STAART Ambassadors through the Student Ambassador Scheme

How to join?

Anyone aged 16 or above is welcome to join. We do not ask for any formal evidence of diagnoses. You can also follow the STAART community on social media.

Any questions? Please email staart@greenwich.ac.uk

STAART



UNIVERSITY of GREENWICH

Student Stories

Zoe | University of Greenwich



I always knew I wanted to pursue a career in the science field. However, I didn't decide to study nutrition until college, when my dad had surgery and had to make significant dietary and life-style changes. This led me to want to help people understand and implement nutrition for their benefit.

I was still unsure of the commitment a degree would require, but I went to an open event at the University of Greenwich. It was a year or two later, after working in the NHS, that I decided I was ready for university. A key factor for me in choosing Greenwich was the location. I have a child, so I didn't want to uproot my family. I also had a good feeling from the open event and from meeting Melanie Thorley, who manages STAART. Melanie explained to me all the support that was available to me and directed me to the wellbeing team to access it. It was only in the final year of my undergraduate degree that I was diagnosed with dyslexia and dyspraxia.

STAART has been a brilliant system that I could go to for advice and support. I've received wellbeing counselling, support from other STAART members, and it was through STAART that I was recommended an assessment for learning difficulties.

Once I was diagnosed, I met with the wellbeing team again and we went through my assessment report, discussing what support the university could offer. Now that I've applied for DSA, I have been able to get several aides, including a specialist chair for my hypermobility, a special desk with a height adjuster, a specialist mouse, keyboard, and headset, plus a laptop with software to support with reading and writing. I also have a dyslexia tutor whom I meet with to look at my work, which is especially useful now I'm on a master's course and there are no exams, it's all graded on coursework.

My advice to others would be to go to universities and see them for yourself. Don't just base your decision on what you've heard from others or the statistics. Go to open events – do you feel welcome? Find out everything you want to know and what matters to you, then make your decision based on that.

I'd also say to tick the box on your application form to share that you are disabled; it'll make sure you get your support in place quicker than waiting until you've enrolled. Some people worry that sharing their disability will affect their application. This really isn't the case – it is illegal for universities to discriminate based on a disability. You just have to choose the one that's right for you.



Michelle Butterworth from Unifrog offers her top tips when attending open days.

Open days and university events are one of the best ways to get a feel for a university. To get the most out of yours, research the university before you go, plan your day, and prepare some questions.



Before you go

After you register your interest for an open day, you'll usually receive some information from the university. Use the timetables and maps to make a schedule for the day – sometimes, more than one event will happen at the same time, so this will help you to make sure you don't miss anything important.

If you think a busy open day will be challenging for you, speak with the admissions team to see if they can organise a one-to-one tour before the day.



On the day

Once you're there, note down any answers to your questions, explore as much of the campus as possible, and take photos – this will help you to make a final decision on whether to study there.

If you feel confident doing so, it's also worth trying to get there by public transport. This will help you to see first-hand if there will be suitable transport options for you. It might be a good idea to attend a university open day with someone who knows you well, as they can help you with questions and making decisions.

Did you know?

To find out when a university is holding an open day, you can go directly to the university website or use the UCAS Open Day and Events tracker.



Prepare some questions

Next, prepare some questions to ask staff and students. Here are a few to get you started.

About the university

- How many students study here? What's the proportion of students with disabilities or SEND?
- Where do you rank for graduate prospects/quality of teaching/student experience?

About the course

- How much flexibility is there for me to choose my own modules?
- How many hours of contact time will I receive each week?
- Are there any opportunities to study abroad?
- Are there any opportunities to do an internship or work placement?
- How will the subject be assessed (for example, coursework or written tests)?
- What are the career prospects after finishing this course and what have previous students gone on to achieve?

About applying

- What do admissions tutors look for in applications?
- Are any subjects or qualifications favoured in applications?
- What's the university policy on gap years and deferred entry?

About accessibility

- If I live on campus, who will I be able to speak to nearby for support?
- If I live on campus, are there accessible options for accommodation? (for example, a ground floor room, lower kitchen cupboards, or special equipment)
- What are the disabled parking options?
- When I arrive at the university, how will I be supported in finding my way around the campus (this might be most useful if you have a physical disability or sensory impairment)?
- Are there any resources or technology that will assist me with my learning?
- When I take an exam, will adjustments be made to make sure I can achieve the best possible mark?
- Does the university offer any bursaries or financial support exclusively for students with disabilities?
- Does the university offer any special admissions programmes, like summer schools or taster days, for students with disabilities?
- Are students with disabilities represented by the Students' Union?
- Are there any ambassador roles I can take on?



What next

If your school uses Unifrog, use our Know-how library to learn more about choosing and applying for university. We have guides and videos on open days, sharing a disability, reasonable adjustments, financial aid, and settling into university with a disability or impairment, plus loads more!

Useful Websites

There is a wealth of information and guidance online. Here are just a few websites you could visit for further information:

www.disabilityrightsuk.org

Disability Rights UK is a charity run by and for disabled people. They work to influence regional and national change regarding the various factors affecting disabled people.

www.gov.uk

This is the central site for all government services (such as benefits) and information. Search 'Disabled students' on the homepage to see information specific to those with disabilities e.g. DSA.

www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk

The National Careers Service provide careers information, advice and guidance, and can help you to make decisions on learning, training and work at all stages in your career.

www.snowdontrust.org

Snowdon Trust is a charity that provides grants to physically disabled and sensory impaired students studying in the UK. Visit their website to find out about grants and scholarships they offer.

www.ucas.com

More than just the site you use to apply for university, the UCAS website is your 'one stop shop' for all information about applying to university.

www.unitasterdays.com

UniTasterDays.com is an award winning source of university events for schools and colleges. This free online resource helps students and parents looking to book places on events directly.

KMPF: The Kent & Medway Progression Federation (KMPF) is a collaborative partnership of local universities, colleges, schools, and community organisations. Collectively, KMPF aims to increase the participation of underrepresented students in higher education through outreach, advocacy, and research.

SEND PP: The Special Educational Needs and Disability Progression Partnership (SEND PP) is a collaboration of professionals and disabled student ambassadors in Kent and Medway who are committed to improving post-16 /18 education and career opportunities for disabled students.

The Guide: has been created by a core group of the SEND PP which includes KMPF, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Kent, and the University of Greenwich. A digital version of The Guide is available online at kmpf.org/project/send-pp/.

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