Essex County Council
Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Higher Education

Information for families and young people with SEND



After Sixth Form or college, some young people choose to continue their education at university. Applying to university can feel like a big step, but researching options early and understanding the support available can help young people and families make informed decisions about the future.

Preparing for Adulthood: SEND Careers Advice Service
SEND Strategy and Innovation

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Step 1: Explore different universities

Every university is different. Visit websites, attend open days and find out about:

- courses and entry requirements
- support for students with SEND
- accommodation options
- travel and transport links
- opportunities for work experience, placements and employment
- student wellbeing and support services
- campus facilities and resources

Useful websites to help decide what and where to study include:



UCAS

This is the official university entrance website and includes a University course search facility plus comprehensive information on all aspects of university life.



The Uni Guide

A free and independent guide which provides information to help make informed choices.



The Complete University Guide

An independent website providing university rankings, course information, entry requirements, student satisfaction data and advice to help prospective students compare universities and courses.

University league tables can be a useful research tool, but they should be used alongside other sources of information such as university websites, open days, student support services and course content, as rankings are based on a range of measures and may not reflect the factors that are most important to an individual young person.

Step 1: Explore different universities (cont.)

Attending open days allows young people and families to explore campuses, speak to staff and students, and decide whether a university feels like the right fit.

University Open Days.com

This website lists university open days and contact information.

Other helpful websites include:

What Uni?

Discover Uni

Step 2: Think about the right course

When choosing a course, consider the young person's:

- strengths and interests
- future career goals
- support needs
- preferred learning style
- location and travel requirements

It may be helpful to also consider:

- course content and modules
- placement opportunities
- graduate outcomes
- assessment methods
- opportunities to study abroad or gain work experience

The right course for one young person may not be the right course for another. Taking time to research options can help ensure the chosen pathway supports future aspirations.

Step 2: Think about the right course (cont.)

Before applying, check the entry requirements for each course carefully. Universities may ask for specific qualifications, subjects, grades, or UCAS tariff points.

Entry requirements can vary significantly between courses and universities.

Consider:

- what qualifications are needed to apply?
- are there any required subjects?
- how many UCAS tariff points are needed?
- are there alternative entry routes or foundation year options?
- what happens if expected grades are not achieved?

Some universities make contextual offers, which may involve lower entry requirements for students who meet certain widening participation criteria.

Information on **contextual offers** can be found in **Section 7 of the Parents and Carers guide to post-16 opportunities**.

This website can help work out how many UCAS points your young person's post GCSE qualifications are worth:

UCAS Tariff Calculator

Understanding entry requirements early can help young people choose suitable courses and ensure they are working towards the qualifications needed for progression to higher education.



Step 3: Apply through UCAS

Most university applications are made and tracked through UCAS.

Before submitting applications, check that predicted grades and qualifications meet the university's entry requirements. Applications usually include:

- personal information
- education and qualifications
- written application questions (replacing the traditional personal statement)
- a reference from school or college
- course choices

It is important to check application deadlines and start planning early.

UCAS



Step 4: Explore support and apply for DSA

An Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) does not continue once a young person starts a university course as higher education falls outside the EHCP legal framework. This means the local authority is no longer responsible for arranging the support set out in the plan. However support is still available at university.

Most universities have Disability Support Teams or equivalent services that can help students access support and reasonable adjustments. Students are encouraged to contact these teams as early as possible. Depending on individual needs, universities may offer reasonable adjustments such as extra time in exams, lecture recordings, assistive technology, alternative formats for course materials, mentoring support, adjusted timetables or access to quiet study spaces. Adjustments vary between universities and are based on individual needs.

It is important to remember that university students are treated as adults. Universities will normally only share information with parents or carers if the student has given permission.

Disability Advisers are often available at Open Days and can explain the support available. Speaking to them before applying can help young people decide whether a university is the right fit for their individual needs.



Step 4: Explore support and apply for DSA (cont.)

Students with disabilities, health conditions or specific learning difficulties may be eligible for Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA). DSA supports study-related disability needs but does not provide personal care or everyday living support.

DSA can help fund:

- specialist equipment
- assistive technology
- study support
- additional disability-related study costs

DSA is not means-tested and does not need to be repaid. Students in England should normally apply through Student Finance England:

Help if you are disabled or have a health condition

Student Finance England

Although an EHCP ceases when a young person enters higher education, it remains a valuable source of evidence, and the information contained within can help with applications for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA).

Further information on support available can be found in **Section 7 of the Parents and Carers guide to post-16 opportunities**.



Step 5: Receive and respond to offers

After applying, universities will consider the application and may make:

- an **unconditional offer** - the university is offering a place on the course with no further requirements that need to be met before starting
- a **conditional offer** - the university is offering a place on the course subject to specific conditions being met, such as achieving certain grades or qualifications
- an unsuccessful application decision

If a young person receives multiple offers, they will usually need to select a firm choice and an insurance choice through UCAS.

Universities set deadlines for responding to offers, and **young people must accept or decline their offers through UCAS by the date given, otherwise the offers may be automatically declined.**

Clearing is a UCAS process that helps students find university places after results are released. It can be used if a young person has not received any offers, does not meet the conditions of their offer, declines their offers, or decides they would like to explore alternative courses or universities.

Many universities advertise available places through Clearing each year.

UCAS: What is Clearing?



Step 6: Plan accommodation and independent living

Many young people choose to live in university accommodation (sometimes called halls of residence) for their first year.

Families and young people should discuss accommodation requirements with university support staff as early as possible. When applying:

- be honest about support needs and preferences
- discuss any health, accessibility or wellbeing requirements
- consider room location, facilities and campus access
- think about whether shared or self-contained accommodation would best meet individual needs

Some young people may benefit from practising journeys before starting university. Travel Training can help young people develop the skills and confidence needed to travel safely and independently using public transport.

Information on Travel Training can be found in **Section 2 of the Parents and Carers guide to post-16 opportunities**.

Some universities may allow students to remain in halls of residence beyond their first year, while others only guarantee accommodation for new students. It is therefore a good idea to explore accommodation options for later years early, in case university-managed accommodation is not available after the first year.

If accommodation is allocated separately from the university application process, **it is important to apply by the deadlines given, as some accommodation options may be limited.**

Save the Student: Accommodation
This is a student-focused website offering practical advice on university accommodation, including costs, tenancy rights, budgeting, deposits, and finding suitable student housing.



Step 7: Arrange support for everyday life

Some students may be eligible for support from Adult Social Care to help them live and study independently whilst attending university.

Supported Living

This may be suitable for young people who need regular assistance with daily living skills and can include support with:

- cooking and meal preparation
- cleaning and household tasks
- shopping and budgeting
- managing appointments and medication
- personal care

Outreach Support

This is often more flexible and can provide support at home, in university accommodation, or in the community. Support may include:

- developing routines and organisational skills
- accessing community activities
- managing finances
- building confidence and independence
- support with travel and attending appointments

How to Access Support

If a young person has care and support needs, they can request a **Care Act Assessment from Adult Social Care** to look at how their disability or additional needs affect their ability to manage everyday life and determine what support may be available.

If support is agreed, Adult Social Care will work with the young person to develop a support plan. Support may be provided through Direct Payments, allowing the young person to arrange personalised support, such as employing a Personal Assistant.

If appropriate, request a Care Act Assessment as early as possible, to allow sufficient time for any support arrangements to be explored and put in place.



socialcaredirect@essex.gov.uk



Step 8: Prepare for university life & future employment

Most universities provide careers support throughout study and after graduation.

Support available may include:

- CV and cover letter advice
- job application support
- assessment centre preparation
- interview preparation and mock interviews
- postgraduate application support
- confidence building for recruitment processes

Students can often access support through:

- one-to-one appointments
- online appointments
- careers workshops and webinars
- drop-in sessions
- employer insight events
- former student (alumni) networking events

Building connections with careers services early can help students gain valuable experience and prepare for future employment.



Prospects Careers Advice
A website offering careers guidance, widely used by UK universities



Key questions to ask universities

Course

- Does this course match my young person's interests and future career goals?
- What modules and assessment methods are included?
- Are there placement, study abroad or work experience opportunities?
- What are the graduate outcomes?

SEND Support

- What support is available for students with disabilities or additional needs?
- How do students access support and reasonable adjustments?
- What assistive technology or study support is available?
- How does the university support Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) applications?

Accommodation and Independence

- What accommodation options are available?
- What support is available in halls of residence?
- How do you support students to develop independence?
- What support is available if a student is struggling to manage university life?

Employment and Careers

- What work experience, placement or internship opportunities are available?
- What careers support does the university offer?
- Do you have links with employers?
- How do you support students into graduate employment?

Wellbeing

- What wellbeing and mental health support is available?
- How do students access support services?
- What support is available during the transition to university?
- How do you help students settle into university life?

Travel and Student Life

- What transport links are available?
- Is accommodation located close to teaching facilities?
- What support is available for students who find travelling difficult?
- What opportunities are available to get involved in university life?

University application checklist

Before applying
□ Researched different universities
□ Attended an open day
□ Looked at course content and entry requirements
□ Considered support needs
□ Contacted the Disability or Learning Support Team
□ Discussed future goals/career aspirations
□ Reviewed predicted grades and UCAS entry requirements

During the application process
□ Registered with UCAS
□ Submitted UCAS application
□ Checked application deadlines
□ Shared information about disabilities or additional support needs
□ Prepared questions for universities
□ Tracked application progress through UCAS

Support and preparation
□ Contacted the Disability Support Team
□ Explored Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)
□ Gathered supporting evidence
□ Discussed reasonable adjustments and support needs
□ Identified any assistive technology needs
□ Requested a Care Act Assessment (if appropriate)

Student finance and funding
□ Applied for Student Finance
□ Explored DSA funding
□ Researched scholarships or bursaries
□ Understood accommodation costs
□ Planned a student budget

Accommodation and transition
□ Visited the campus
□ Researched accommodation options
□ Applied for accommodation (if required)
□ Planned travel to and from university
□ Explored Travel Training (if appropriate)
□ Practised travelling independently

Before starting university
□ Accepted firm and insurance choices
□ Completed enrolment
□ Confirmed start date
□ Accepted accommodation (if applicable)
□ Received timetable and induction information
□ Know who to contact for support
□ Attended welcome or transition events

Key messages

Researching universities, visiting open days and understanding the support available can help young people make informed decisions about higher education.

University is not the right pathway for everyone. The best choice is the one that supports your young person's goals, aspirations and future career plans.

Planning ahead, exploring support options and preparing for independent living can help make the transition to university more successful.

Other useful resources

In addition to UCAS information provided, the following websites and resources offer useful advice and guidance:

National Autistic Society – guidance on starting university

Disability Rights UK

NADP: Disability at University - a guide and glossary to "School vs University"

Head Up! - Mentoring scheme and advice on HE access for disabled and disadvantaged students

Other useful resources (cont.)

University: The Autistic Guide: Everything You Need to Survive and Thrive

Disability and the University: A Disabled Students' Manifesto

University and Chronic Illness: A Survival Guide



Student blogs and case studies – real-life experiences from disabled students

University Taster Days: The One in Five podcast - to support disabled students considering university

This document has been produced by the ECC Preparing for Adulthood: SEND Careers Advice Service.

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