



We're here  
for young  
wheelchair  
users



# The A-Z of going to university

Written for young wheelchair  
users by young wheelchair users

# Whizz Kidz

**Whizz Kidz is the UK's leading charity for young wheelchair users.**

Our vision is a society in which every young wheelchair user is mobile, enabled and included. We aim to empower young wheelchair users by providing the wheelchairs, equipment, support and confidence-building experiences they need, and campaigning for a more inclusive society.

## Youth Board

We are the Youth Board and we're a group of young wheelchair users, who are proud to each represent a different area of the UK. We meet up several times a year, in person or online, and our job is to make sure our voices, and young people from our areas, are at the heart of every decision Whizz Kidz makes. We're passionate about raising awareness about the issues that affect us every day and we campaign to make a real difference for all young wheelchair users.



## University A-Z

Education is one of our manifesto pledges, it's an area we want to see changes happen. We designed a survey for young wheelchair users to hear about their experiences of education and work. Based on that feedback, and some of our own experiences, we have produced this guide full of tips and things to think about when going to university. We want other young wheelchair users to know you are not alone, and we hope this guide supports you in your journey to and through university.



# Contents

Whizz Kidz	3		
Whizz Youth Board	3		
University A-Z	3		
<u>Applications</u>	4	<u>Navigate</u>	12
<u>Base</u>	4	<u>Open days</u>	12
<u>Campus</u>	4	<u>Pooches</u>	13
<u>Disability Support Allowance</u>	5	<u>Queasy</u>	13
<u>Equality Act</u>	6	<u>Reasonable adjustments</u>	14
<u>Finances</u>	7	<u>Support</u>	14
<u>Geek out</u>	8	<u>Transport</u>	15
Disabled Students <u>Helpline</u>	8	<u>UCAS</u>	17
<u>Independence</u>	9	<u>Voice</u>	17
<u>Joining in</u>	9	<u>Wheelchair skills</u>	18
<u>Kin</u>	10	<u>eXperience</u>	18
<u>Look after yourself</u>	10	<u>Yours</u>	19
<u>Making your move</u>	11	<u>Zebras</u>	19

## Applications

Before you apply – research, research, research! Check out the websites of the universities you like and go along to open days to make sure it will meet your needs. Speak to the Disability Officer, any current students there on the day, lecturers and look around the university accommodation. Choosing a university is a big decision and it's got to be right for you, so don't be afraid to ask about anything you would need.



## Base

Check out your base! AKA your university accommodation. Your first day at university is an exciting time but make sure you set aside some time to make sure your accommodation has everything you need and any adjustments or adaptations that were agreed with the university have been made. Does the emergency red cord work? Give it a try! Once you've settled in and everything is how you need it add some personality! Display your favourite photos, organise your wardrobe and make it your own.

## Campus

Get to know your campus. Look at any maps you can find of the campus and work out the best way for you to get to lectures and around the campus. It's worth checking out if the universities you're thinking of applying to are on the AccessAble website. If they are then you get to have a look at the access guides for the university accommodation and find out more about their buildings and services.

[www.accessable.co.uk/inspire-me/heading-to-uni](http://www.accessable.co.uk/inspire-me/heading-to-uni)





## Disability Support Allowance

Disabled Students' Allowance (or DSA as people call it) is financial support to cover study-related costs you have because of a disability.

You can apply for this and student finance. It's not based on your household income but on your specific needs and you don't need a confirmed university place to apply.

The money can be used for specialist equipment, a notetaker, BSL interpreter and lots of other things that will help you in university. You apply for DSA through Student Finance as part of your application.

Apply for DSA as soon as possible, you can apply the same time as your student finance and before you've made your final choice of where you want to go to university. During busy times, it can take up to 12 weeks to process your application.

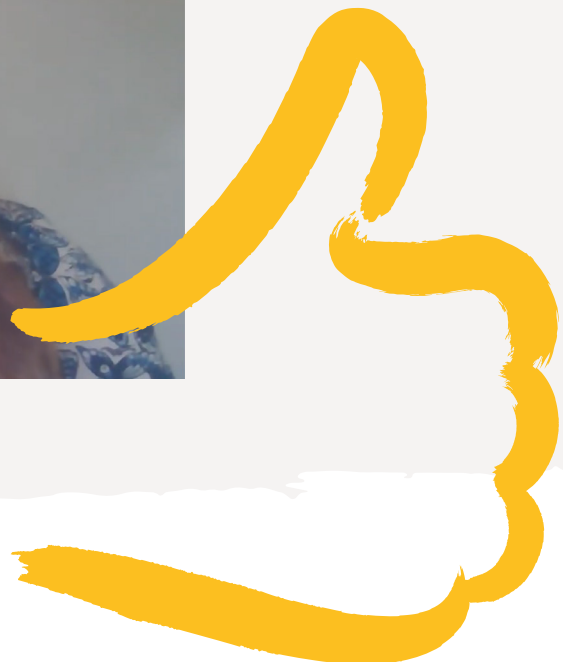
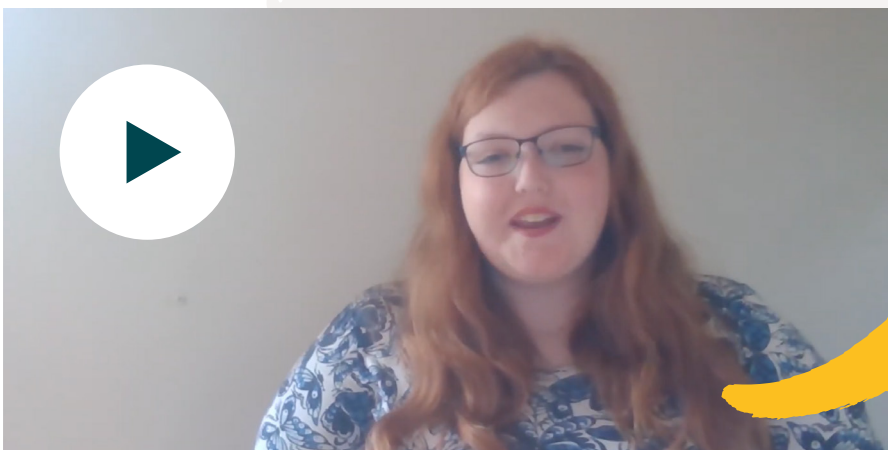
Find out more about DSA and applying on Diversity and Ability's website:

[diversityandability.com/find-your-way/1-apply](https://diversityandability.com/find-your-way/1-apply)



Have a look on the Whizz Kidz website and watch Sophie's experience of applying for DSA, her top tips, and what she used her allowance for:

[www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/higher-education](https://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/higher-education)





## Equality Act

The Equality Act came into force in 2010. The Act provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. These are called protected characteristics.

Higher education (HE) institutions (Universities) have legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010, which means that they cannot discriminate against, harass or victimise you if you are a student. This includes all students whether full-time, part-time, undergraduate, postgraduate, e-learners, international students as well as prospective students when applying to the institution.

This means that universities must make reasonable adjustments to ensure that you can use the education and other facilities and services provided as far as is reasonable to the same standard as non-disabled students. They should also tell you why they may not be able to offer adjustments. If they don't then ask, it will help you find other things to do or appeal the decision.

Universities will have a Disability Officer, make sure you get to know them! They will help go through any reasonable adjustments and support you will need going to university. If your university doesn't meet your needs outlined in your needs assessment or do not provide what was agreed, then speak to your Disability Support Officer.

If your university still doesn't provide what you need you can complain, check your university's website for their complaint's procedures. Scope's Reasonable adjustments in FE webpage has more information.

[www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/reasonable-adjustments-college-university](http://www.scope.org.uk/advice-and-support/reasonable-adjustments-college-university)

# Finances

Get some cash! Student loans can help with course fees and living costs while you study, and DSA can cover extra costs and support. Your student income does not affect disability benefits like Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or Disability Living Allowance (DLA). Make sure you tell student finance about your benefits as some may entitle you to a special support element.

To apply for student finance, you have to apply to the country you live in (not the country where your university will be) so if you live in Wales but will study in England you have to apply to Student Finance Wales. The links below will take you to the student finance page you need.

Student Finance England:

[www.gov.uk/get-undergraduate-student-loan](https://www.gov.uk/get-undergraduate-student-loan)



Student Award Agency Scotland:

[www.saas.gov.uk/](https://www.saas.gov.uk/)



Student Finance Wales:

[www.studentfinancewales.co.uk](https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk)



Once you've got your cash set some time aside to do some budgeting. It may not sound like the most fun job but taking some time to look at what money you have coming in and what money is going out will help make sure you're not living on cold beans for the last few weeks of university! And bear in mind that claiming back expenses can take time, so factor this in.

Visit Save the Student's website for advice on what to think about when calculating your incomings and your outgoings:

[www.savethestudent.org/money/student-budgeting/student-budgeting.html#tools](https://www.savethestudent.org/money/student-budgeting/student-budgeting.html#tools)





## Geek out

Good organisation is the key to good study. When you start university, you'll have different assignments for different courses and so organising your work and your time will help you focus, stay on track and feel less stressed. This can be simple things, keeping a diary or having a wall calendar will make sure you know what you need to do and when your deadlines are. Have a look online and try some different ways to get organised and find what works for you.

A good place to start is at Save the Student's How to be more organised in 6 easy steps.:

[www.savethestudent.org/extra-guides/how-to-be-organised-in-6-easy-steps.html](http://www.savethestudent.org/extra-guides/how-to-be-organised-in-6-easy-steps.html)



## Disabled Students Helpline

if you are studying in England the Disabled Students Helpline offers information and advice to disabled students, apprentices and trainees by phone and email on a range of topics including:

- applying to college, university and apprenticeships
- telling people about your disability
- financial assistance
- adjustments for disabled students and apprentices

Visit their website for more information:

[www.disabilityrightsuk.org/disabled-students-helpline](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/disabled-students-helpline)





## Independence

University will probably be the first time you've been away from home. Because of your disability, university might be the first time you'll have to think about being more independent because you may have had family or carer support that sorted a lot of things out for you. Don't worry!

Start with the basics! Learn to cook some of your favourite meals (or at least cook meals that will keep you alive), practice good hygiene, keep on top of cleaning your room and find out where the local supermarket is. Remember, you can get deliveries from supermarkets, but some campuses may not have a drop off or collection point.

It's also good to think about budgeting your money and getting transport sorted (such as getting a rail or bus card, a list of accessible taxis etc...). If you get stuck then ask someone for support.

And don't be too hard on yourself, as with everything else at university these are skills that you'll learn as you're on your university journey.

Check out the Snowball app for finding restaurants, shops, attractions (and more) based on how accessible they are.

<https://company.snowball.community/>

**Snowball**  
A rolling review of accessibility

## Joining in

Going to university isn't all about the academics. Check out what clubs and societies your university has and get involved. Contact the Student Union and find out what's going on and when. Also do some research on what groups may be on offer in the local area as well as what the nightlife offers. Chat to people and have a look on

social media to see if there's anything you would enjoy and if places are accessible. You can see accessibility of some venues on the AccessAble website. But if a place you want to go to isn't on there get in touch and ask about accessibility:

[www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)





## Kin

Going to university is a massive change and can be overwhelming. For most people it's the first time they've lived away from home and the idea of that can make you feel nervous and excited! Try and take something with you that reminds of you of home, it will be a comfort when you need it. And no matter how full your social calendar gets make some time to touch base and keep in contact with family and friends.

## Look after yourself

Being at university can mean you're really busy and so it's easy to lose focus on looking after yourself. Remember to take rest breaks when you need them, eat well (or at the very least eat) and look after your wellbeing.

Check out Invacare's 5 top health tips:

[www.passionatepeople.invacare.eu.com/five-health-tips-every-wheelchair-user-should-know](http://www.passionatepeople.invacare.eu.com/five-health-tips-every-wheelchair-user-should-know)



Visit the NHS guidance on fitness advice for wheelchair users:

[www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-guidelines/wheelchair-users-fitness-advice](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/exercise-guidelines/wheelchair-users-fitness-advice)



Also check out Adapt to Perform's website:

[adapttoperform.co.uk](http://adapttoperform.co.uk)



Check out Student Minds, a UK mental health charity for students:

[www.studentminds.org.uk](http://www.studentminds.org.uk)





## Making your move

As a disabled student, there's more to think about when moving to university. As well as clothing, bathroom products, hairdryers, stationary, kitchen utensils, you'll also need to think about what else you will need.

So write down your disability packing list! You may think you will remember everything you need but write it down. Start writing your packing list as soon as you know you are going to university and put it on your desk, wall, fridge, wherever you will see it, because you will definitely be adding things to that list.

Start with equipment and any assistive aids you use and then think about other things you use on a day-to-day basis. Your future university self won't thank you for forgetting your wheelchair charger!

Contact your university as soon as possible to see what they can offer and get as much information about the accessible accommodation as possible.

Taking photos of the accommodation will also help you refer to it later when thinking about what you need.

Think about what equipment you will need at home and at university, you could double up or look at how you can transport your equipment. And remember that your equipment needs may change, if you are moving from your bathroom at home to a wet room in university, what will you need?

If you require personal care, this will not be arranged through the university. You will need to ensure your care package is in place and funded through your local authority.

Before you make your move remember to register at the university GP and get important medication stockpiled just in case.

When it comes to moving in day, ask if you can move in a day or two before everyone else so you can settle in. You can make sure you have everything you need, and all adjustments have been made.



## Navigate

Get to know the university's local area, check out what's near and what's available. Where are the shops? Where are the bars? Where's the bus stop, train station?

Look at maps of the campus and local area and think about what the best routes for you will be. Request an accessible campus map, check out local companies and do your own research.

Are there good transport links to campus, student housing areas, the city centre and other places you might visit? Is transport accessible for you? If not, will your DSA be enough to cover taxis to and from university?

It sounds like a lot to take in but don't stress about it. You've planned journeys before and this will be no different, and if you're stuck or something doesn't make sense then contact your university and ask.



## Open days

Sign up to open days! You can get a lot more from attending an open day than you can online. Also ask if they offer accessible open days and make it explicit that you need to view the accessible accommodation.

If it helps make a list of what you want to ask. Start with more general questions such as the course, university life and the local area and then add more specific questions relevant for you, it could be distances between buildings on campus, if there are accessible lockers on campus, local transport links or locations you can plug your wheelchair charger in if you need to, and does it need to be pat tested?

Get a look at the accessible accommodation that is available, it's really important that you know what to expect, if it will work for you and if there are any adjustments that you will need.

Speak to the Disability Support Officer and get to know them. Talk through what your needs are and what you think you will need when you get to university.







## Pooches

If you have an assistance dog, make sure you let your university know as soon as you can. This will let them organise anything they need on their end.

Prior to letting your university know you have an assistance dog, make sure all your dog's documents are up to date and that you have electronic copies ready to send when requested.

We know some young wheelchair users have been caught out on moving day because they didn't have the paperwork the university expected!

Visit the Equality and Human Rights Commission to find out more:

[www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/assistance-dogs-guide-all-businesses](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/assistance-dogs-guide-all-businesses)



## Queasy

Starting University is a really exciting time, but it can also feel overwhelming and a bit scary. This is completely normal, so talk about any worries you may have with your friends, family and university. Find out what wellbeing services your university offers and check if there are drop-in wellbeing sessions available.

If you're feeling nervous just remember you are not alone. Visit Mind's Student Mental Health Hub where they cover worries about making new friends, missing home and resources to help:

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/student-life](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/student-life)





## Reasonable adjustments

Universities must try to remove barriers you may have because of a disability. This is called a Reasonable Adjustment and these adjustments help make sure you get the same access to education as everyone else.

Any reasonable adjustments you may need will be unique to you, you know your needs and so when you've visited the university of your choice get in contact with the Disability Support Officer and start talking to them about what you will need.

Examples of reasonable adjustments could be software, accessible textbooks, classrooms and spaces or particular travel arrangements. Whatever you need, speak up and let them know!

The Disability Officer can advocate for you. Not everyone reads individual support plans so email and check they are aware of your needs. So, if you need extra time in exams email and check beforehand to make sure your lecturer knows.

## Support

Get to know the people at university – the admissions team, support staff, lecturers, tutors and exam officers. Every university has a Disability Officer, who may not be disabled, get in touch and start to get to know them.

There may be Facebook groups for your university, your specific course or accommodation and may even be a disability group for your university, so have a look and get talking to current and prospective students.

Watch the Complete University's Guide talk about making the most of the support network at university:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlirhCNCH9M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlirhCNCH9M)



## Transport

We don't have to tell you that transport is definitely something you need to think about. When you're looking into the local area make sure you look at transport links, check their accessibility and make sure they will meet your needs. And remember, you may need to use multiple modes of transport so make sure they work well together.

Talk to the University's Disability Officer and other students to get a real feel for the local transport links. We know a student who found the local transport links were accessible but when they got to university the local bus services stopped early, and the university shuttle bus, which took students into town for nights out, wasn't accessible!

If you use a mobility scooter then you will need to make sure you can take it on public transport and have the paperwork to do so. Check out Independent Living page to find out more:

[www.independentliving.co.uk/advice/can-your-scooter-go-on-public-transport/](http://www.independentliving.co.uk/advice/can-your-scooter-go-on-public-transport/)



As with most things your transport needs will be unique to you and where you will be studying, so find out what will work for you and what you need to put in place to make things more accessible or easier.

Have a look at Whizz Kidz website which includes a video from Finley about all things transport at university and beyond:

[www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/higher-education](http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/higher-education)

Find out how to apply for a Disabled Person's bus pass in your



local area and remember to check when you can use it, some places restrict use before 9:30am. Also take some time to get to know the bus timetable layouts, they may be different to what you are used to at home. And some bus companies offer public transport training, so check your local university company's website:

[www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-disabled-bus-pass)



Find out how to apply for a Disabled Person's Freedom Pass if you live in a London Borough:

[www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/services/freedom-pass/disabled-persons-freedom-pass/apply](http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/services/freedom-pass/disabled-persons-freedom-pass/apply)



Find out how to apply for a Disabled Person's Railcard:

[www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk](http://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk)



Find out about the Motability Car Scheme:

[www.motability.co.uk](http://www.motability.co.uk)



And find out more about Motability's driving lesson scheme:

[www.motability.org.uk/charitable-grants/access-to-mobility-grant-programmes/driving-lessons](http://www.motability.org.uk/charitable-grants/access-to-mobility-grant-programmes/driving-lessons)



Find out about the M6 Toll Exemption Card:

[www.m6toll.co.uk/pricing/#exemptions](http://www.m6toll.co.uk/pricing/#exemptions)





## UCAS

Once you've decided what course you want to do and what university you want to go to, get your application in to UCAS.

Your application will ask you about any help you will need and providing the information at this stage will let the university get anything you need ready. UCAS offers help to apply, so if you are unsure about anything get in touch with them, they will offer the most relevant help and advice.

Check out this information page on the UCAS website which has a guide to applications for disabled students:

[www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-University/  
individual-needs/disabled-students#the-ucas-application](http://www.ucas.com/undergraduate/applying-University/individual-needs/disabled-students#the-ucas-application)



## Voice

University is a great time to find your voice! No question is stupid and if you want to know something that would help you then ask. If something isn't working for you then tell someone. If you're finding a course or assignment difficult, tell someone. If there's an issue with your accommodation or it's not meeting your needs, then tell someone. You need an extension on your coursework? Ask!

University is the first time you may be experiencing things on your own so it's really important you speak up. This can seem scary but once you've done it once it only becomes easier and easier! And remember, you are not alone, whether it's the wellbeing team, your friends, your course rep, the pastoral care team or disability officer, there are lots of people to help get you heard!

## Wheelchair skills

Because you're going to be more independent it's a good time to brush up on your wheelchair skills and maintenance. There are loads of videos on YouTube showing wheelchair skills so have a look for what you need.

Whizz Kidz also has wheelchair skills videos on our website and ask us if you need wheelchair skills training:

[www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/wheelchair-skills](http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/wheelchair-skills)

Whizz Kidz also has some videos about wheelchair maintenance and taking care of your wheelchair:

[www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/wheelchair-maintenance](http://www.whizz-kidz.org.uk/discover/topic/wheelchair-maintenance)



## eXperience

Experience it! There's a lot of stereotypes about university students. University students are usually shown as having lots of parties, lots of takeaways, minimal money, last-minute cramming when there's an essay due etc... Don't feel you have to do these things and don't worry if you don't or can't do these things.

Do whatever will make your university experience exceptional for you! If you want to spend most of your time in the library learning, do it, if you want to join the clubs and societies on campus then do it, if you want to get out there and meet as many people as possible then do it! If you want to do a bit of everything, then do it!

Accept that your university experience will be different to that of your non-disabled peers and make the most of it – take opportunities!





## Yours

Your university journey is yours! From deciding to go to university to actually going to university. There are lots of people that will 'suggest' what you may need, some people do this because they know you and care about you and some people do it because they're making assumptions about you. But everyone is different, and everyone's needs are different, focus on what you need and not just what people think you need.

You're the one that will be living the university life so make your journey yours!

## Zebras

Okay, so finding a word beginning with Z was hard! But a zebra is a good image of what we want you to take away. You, your needs and your university journey is not black and white.

You are unique and your university experience should be tailored how you want it. It won't always be plain sailing and unexpected things may happen (good and bad) but make sure you make your journey yours!

Remember, nothing is black and white (apart from zebras).





**We're here  
for young  
wheelchair  
users**

If you want to get in touch with Youth Board or Whizz Kidz about this guide or any other way you feel we can support young wheelchair users, please contact us.

### **Youth Board**

[kidzboard@whizz-kidz.org.uk](mailto:kidzboard@whizz-kidz.org.uk)

### **Whizz Kidz**

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020 7233 6600



[facebook.com/Whizzkidz](https://facebook.com/Whizzkidz)



[instagram.com/whizzkidzuk](https://instagram.com/whizzkidzuk)



[twitter.com/whizzkidz](https://twitter.com/whizzkidz)



[linkedin.com/company/whizz-kidz](https://linkedin.com/company/whizz-kidz)

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