



PLANNING FOR LIFE AFTER 16

Education - higher education

Introduction

Higher education is much less exclusive than it used to be, and some young people with a history of speech and language difficulties do well enough at school or college to consider going on to higher education. The entry criteria for higher education vary, depending on the course and university (or college) under consideration, but usually consist of an appropriate level 3 qualification (A levels or the equivalent). Adults who have completed an Access to HE course, or who have relevant work experience, may be exempted from the standard entry criteria altogether.

This factsheet focuses mainly on universities. If your son or daughter is studying, or planning to study, for a degree or equivalent qualification at a college rather than a university, you might also find it helpful to read the factsheets on *Colleges, Special Needs Support in Colleges and Education: Sources of Further Information*.

There is lots of general information available about going to university, and the links on the factsheet *Higher Education: Sources of Further Information* list a number of the more useful websites. This factsheet, though, concentrates on the specific issues relevant to young people with ongoing speech and language difficulties, in particular how the support systems work and what types of help they may be able to access.

Support for students with disabilities

Universities should all have a Disability Statement or Policy setting out how they support students with disabilities. This may well be published on their website. If not, you can ask for a copy.

All universities have Disability Services (though the exact name may vary) whose role is to provide information and support to students with a range of conditions. Do be aware, though, that, as in schools and colleges, services may vary in how much they know and what support they are able and willing to offer. If you can, try to visit in advance the Disability Services of any university your son or daughter is considering, to check that they would be able to provide the support he or she needs. It might be possible to do this during an Open Day, but not necessarily. It is advisable to phone beforehand to find out.

There is little awareness that speech and language impairments can affect adults and few university Disability Services will know much about them, though some might be familiar with the term 'dysphasia', which means 'poor speech and language' and is usually used to describe the difficulties some people have following a stroke or head injury. So be prepared to have to describe in some detail your son or daughter's difficulties, and what support he or she needs. Leaflets such as Afasic's *Creating Learning and Communication-Friendly Environments for Young People* might provide a useful introduction. You might also find that, depending on your son or daughter's learning profile, it is more helpful to describe his or her disability as a form of dyslexia, dyspraxia, or autistic spectrum disorder.

Although they vary in what they provide, university Disability Services can typically:

- › Arrange screening or diagnostic assessments for e.g. dyslexia or scotopic sensitivity (indicating that the student might benefit from using coloured overlays)

- › Provide access to specially equipped computers and other assistive technology
- › Ensure the student's department make appropriate adjustments, e.g. allowing extra time to process and answer questions in tutorials and exams.
- › Provide learning support tutorials covering things like organising your time and work, and planning an essay

Students who need more support than this should apply for the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). For more information about this, see the factsheet on *The Disabled Students' Allowance*.

Resolving Disputes

As most university students are over 18, they are considered to be adults and expected to manage any tricky situations themselves. If they are living away from home, there is in any case a limit to what you can do from a distance, so, while your son or daughter may well welcome support and advice over the phone, you can probably help them most by making sure they can deal with any disputes themselves.

The process for making complaints in universities is much the same as elsewhere:

- › First of all, try to resolve matters informally if at all possible
- › If this fails, make a formal complaint. All universities have complaints procedures explaining how to do this. They are usually available on their websites but you might have to type 'complaints' into the search box to find them. Some universities have standard complaint forms which can be completed and submitted online.
- › If you and your son or daughter are not satisfied with the outcome of the internal complaints process, it is possible to take your complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

Sources of help

Depending on the nature and severity of the complaint, any or all of the following may be able to help your son or daughter:

- › Their personal tutor
- › Their hall warden (if they have one)
- › Staff at the Disability Service
- › The Students' Union. Some have a disability officer. Failing that, try the welfare officer, or students' advice service.
- › The Equality and Human Rights Commission

For more information on any of these or any other related matters, see the factsheet *Higher Education: Sources of Further Information* or contact the **Afasic Helpline on 0300 666 9410 or 0207 490 9420.**