

Podcast: Supporting Access to University for Young People with Additional Needs (Transcript for Part 2)

Alice: One thing I'd just like to mention, which is, there hasn't been very much support given to you from your current online learning provider.

Ikra: Oh, don't go into that!

Alice: We won't go into names but what's interesting is when you told me when you signed up to that course, you told them about your impairments, your visual impairment and your experience of mental health. And they said, well, you should be fine doing the course as long as you get your assignments in, it will be fine.

And I think what we're talking about with Laura here is that the very first talk at the beginning of a course is so important to be able to get really good information about what will be adapted, what will be done to make sure that things are accessible and how open the learning provider will be to thinking about your questions in the same way, as we've said.

Laura: Yeah, if anything, you are asking me about how you start to suss out where to look at choosing. I think reactions from people can be a really good indicator. So it might be that, like you said, with your current provider, the reaction potentially, wasn't quite what you've expected and that conversation maybe didn't go how you intended it to, whereas universities should be responding really positively.

There's a lot of things I can say about things to, you know, officially look out for; there's other kind of human things as well. I think you probably have a really good sense of anyway as we all do that. Sometimes gut feelings, it depends on how you feel about that can be really indicative of where you feel safe.

And I think I do feel for you Ikra because this year as well with COVID, there is less chance of being able to go on to campuses and be able to get a sense of you know, that community and that support, which it will be having to look at different ways to see how you can get those feelings about those places.

Ikra: The good thing is even, even if I try and I go and I go, and then I don't like it, I can transfer in my first two weeks.

Laura: Yeah.

Ikra: But it's making the right choice for yourself that's a bit hard because like, if you get all your five offers back, what do you do then?

Laura: Yeah, well, I guess first of all, it shows it's really good that you've obviously got them offers and having choices is a really good place to be. And obviously I won't be able to tell you what university to pick or what university is going to be, you know, the best. I think what I can offer you as information is a little bit about obviously what we can do our Staffs to support students with additional needs and what we tend to do.

So at Staffs, we do offer quite a lot. So once you've made an application, we will send out information about our disability services, it's almost like a different pack of resources. We do do a quiet transition day for those that have declared mental health. So through that, obviously, hopefully we'll be able to do that in person this year.

Alice: When does that happen, Laura?

Laura: It happens in August. So what that is, it's a two day transition day with a night overnight stay. So with that, you can have a parent or carer with you. And we go through a lot of like practical elements of being at university. So where the student support services are, what they can do, things from like cooking and where the launderette is.

We do a targeted parents and carer session as well, so they can ask any questions about support and what they can expect from university. So that's one thing that obviously Staffs university does and I'm speaking in regards to Staffs. So it's just, I'll give you this kind of information, it's something you can then look up yourself for any of the universes that you're looking up to, which might be beneficial.

We have also, I've developed a transition guide for starting university. So what that is, is something that students can have access to, which goes through a lot of the more kind of wellbeing support side to starting university. So the things that potentially universities don't advertise, what I mean by that is I think the university experience can be a little bit rose tinted glasses sometimes, which is absolutely fine because a university is not going to advertise some of the difficult aspects, but it's going through things like managing your expectations about support at university and what is on offer and what to look for. Generally speaking, it's a little bit about kind of managing, we've got an aspect on like loneliness and isolation 'cause I think sometimes, again, pre-

COVID, the pictures you see of university kind of people in big groups and, you know, and personally that wasn't my experience when I started university. And that was quite a difficult environment for me to be in. We go through all the things, kind of like, you know, cooking and budgeting and all the kinds of stuff that isn't as readily available I think when transitioning to university.

Alice: Ikra, what do you think about what Laura has said so far?

Ikra: That's so good. Huddersfield was my top offer and Leeds Trinity, I think I'm going to go with my gut feeling, whatever seems right.

Laura: Are you from that, I'm only saying this because I'm actually from Leeds, are you from near that area near Huddersfield and near Leeds?

Ikra: I live in Bradford.

Laura: Right. Yeah. So you're local.

Alice: And that's an interest I just want to add, certainly for two young people at Time to Talk, who've been in the same situation as you, Ikra, one of the big factors that they've wanted to have as a priority is being able to get home if they need to quite easily. So not too far from home, but not too near home either. It's just kind of interesting 'cause it's about being independent, isn't it? But at the same time, it's important to be able to feel that you can go home depending on your family situation. One of them was a young carer, so they particularly wanted to be able to get back to support their parents.