

Podcast: Supporting Access to University for Young People with Additional Needs (Transcript for Part 3)

Ikra: I have another question.

Laura: Okay.

Ikra: How does DSA work (Disability Student Allowance)?

Laura: DSA works, so what it is, it is a government scheme, so that will work alongside, if you are applying for a student loan, so normally speaking, it is in conjunction with your student loan, how the application process works. So if you have ticked on your UCAS application about a declaration of a disability in due course, you will get information about applying for DSA.

So what that will mean is, once that comes through, the applications actually open in April. So a lot of students wait until say, September, to apply for DSA because they will go to the disability support services. When actually you can apply for that as early as April and start get the ball rolling, which will mean that any support you are entitled to, whether that be extra support for your visual impairment, so different, like note takers and some of the other technology, which obviously supports a visual impairment that we're likely to be in place for when you start in September or if not very soon, when you start in September. And instead of waiting until speaking the disability services, and then there's a little bit of a backlog, obviously in getting that support because that's what a lot of students do.

So my suggestion, especially from today would be to, you will get that information through, and that will be everything that you need to do a DSA application. What I would say is what you are well within your rights to do, is if you do have a university that you are think you are leaning towards, you can speak to their disability services before you start in September. If there is things that you need in order to to help with the application. I would suggest, definitely having, being able to go through that in say eight or when it opens, just to give you a little bit of that time, even if there are maybe some things that you aren't able to do when you start whatever university you choose in September, it will mean that that application is further underway.

Alice: I really liked your suggestion of going in April to make an application in order to have things ready for September. That makes complete sense.

Ikra, we had the question about sport. Do you want to ask Laura about that? That was an interesting question.

Ikra: What sports facilities do you offer for a disability student?

Laura: Okie dokie. So in relation to Staffs, obviously this is only what I can kind of comment on at the moment is, all our gym areas are wheelchair accessible, there's a lift in the gym with access to the floors of which we obviously have the gym. (The gym, isn't my strong point!)

We do have disabled changing toilets and we've got some specialist equipment such as an arm cycle machine, which is designed specifically for disabled students in mind. And the other thing to mention is sporting activities are created to be inclusive. So, the team expect staff to be on hand and to welcome all students along to all sessions.

So for any sport that's not accessible or if a student does have a really particular interest in a sport that isn't delivered, the university has built up a lot of partnerships over the past few years, and there's a lot of kind of local external providers that can offer those sports facilities. So then we can signpost to those facilities if there is something specific say sports wise, that that students wants to do, where maybe we don't have those exact facilities, we will then link in with those external partners that can, can offer potentially more than what we can.

Alice: What sports are you interested in?

Ikra: I like, I like football. I like cycling. I like boxing. I. I like cricket.

Laura: I would imagine at Ikra and again, I can't speak exactly, but I would say that with, especially the kind of sports activities, you've outlined that there definitely would be a way that you could join in with those facilities at Staffs, and they could be made suitable for your, for any of your needs that you think might need to be changed in regards to those activities.

Alice: But interesting, Laura, that you said this question was one that had made you realise there could perhaps be more publicity about that being accessible, the sport offer in the uni. So it could be in for the you're looking at information and actually they haven't thought to put enough

in about access. And maybe again, asking the questions is a good way to make sure you get that clear.

Laura: Definitely ask this question because I will now be taking this forward, especially to our sports officer, just to really talk about how, how we can improve this. You know, and I think at the moment, at this moment in time, it's definitely an important question to be asking, to really get a full understand because it doesn't seem like it's maybe something that says, I could be wrong, there could be universities that are really fantastic at advertising. And, but yeah, I think it's something that's, and it sounds like you've got a really keen interest in sport as well. So I think it's going to be, you know, again, it's obviously up to you, but quite important for you to kind of know what the services are there.

And it sounds like you've got a lot of interest in those activities. And again, I think it's really important to be able to read those. So I think the university that you choose definitely needs to have some kind of answer for, for support for you there. That that would be my suggestion.

Alice: And Ikra, you wanted to ask specifically about mental health support as well.

Ikra: Yeah, ok. What mental health support do you offer?

Laura: This is something that I'm probably working slightly more closer with. So as with the transitions guide that will get sent out to students when they declare a disability that will also have information on support for mental health. So once you start university, you will get an appointment with one of our wellbeing advisors to discuss, essentially I say assessment is just to look at the needs and what that mental health condition might be and what support can be put in place for you.

I am launching a liaison service for this year. So everybody that has either wrote in a personal statement, or declared on their UCAS about mental health. I am getting a university advisor to ring up that person and just get an overview of the support available because personally, I think that can be, especially within mental health support, you know, a lot of the names, the same. So a student guidance advisor or student wellbeing advisor, and actually just to really simplify who could do what and what they can help with.

Our university wellbeing advisors can signpost to external support. So whether it's needed that you might need a higher level of mental health support through mental health specialist services, we can do that.

We do a lot of support around registering with the GP as well in order to support you with any medication that you might need in regards to your mental health, to make sure that that's done prior to university.

I'm currently working on a wellbeing passport. So what that will be is, so what, what we're going to be doing is looking at creating a little document. However you want to kind of create that, something that maybe discloses a little bit about your mental health, which a lot of people with mental health conditions might struggle to kind of, they might have gone from different services and then have to repeat it all again at university, it can be quite stressful and can be quite difficult.

Um, so what we're doing is trying to make this wellbeing passport, which is a universal kind of copy for university. It's just to have a look at as a little bit of a prompt to what that person might have experienced, what they experience are, some of the support they've had in the past, so it's not as arduous to have to go through that. Because mental health can be a little bit more personal and can be a little bit more complex. So that's something that I'm working on. So hopefully that will improve.

Alice: That sounds really, really good. Ikra, what do you think of that? What do you think of the things Laura's said?

Ikra: The passport idea, I like. Every university should do that. Because it's like, you don't want to say it again and again.

Laura: And unfortunately, the reality is that even within mental health services, you might speak to a student guidance advisor, for example, then you might be passed on to a counselor. So even within that team, you might be finding yourself having to repeat yourself.

So I'm really trying to limit, I've been in that position myself and it can be quite frustrating to then, it's quite generally speaking, mental health can be quite emotive as well. So to be kind of putting yourself through that can be almost quite traumatic too. So I'm really trying to reduce the impacts of that and have an initiative that is recognised by universities or something students might give to them.

So, there is different things in support for mental health. And again, what we touched on before being really in the driver's seat of that support. A

lot of students ask me, so for example, with the course that you're doing at Ikra, a lot of students that are maybe doing a person focused course, or say nursing or midwifery or mental health or counseling, also have their extra worry about declaring their mental health because they think it's going to affect how they're seen on the course, whether it affects their ability to do the course. And actually, I'm really keen on debunking that myself, I have a mental health condition and I work in mental health, I have for a long time. And it was something that I face too. So I'm really keen on de-stigmatising that a little bit rarely that no nurse has got a mental health condition, no mental health practitioner has got a mental health condition - it's really just not the case.

Alice: What do you think about that, Ikra?

Ikra: I started off with thinking if I write it in my personal statement, will I be able to do the course because I have anxiety myself?

Laura: I think like anything sometimes as well, it just allows that support to be tailored to you, you know, for, for what you might need extra on that costume. Instead, I've known a lot of students that have got a mental health condition and they've kept it to themselves and they've ended up getting really stressed and really upset because they haven't been open and then a worried about them coming out with it all. And instead of, you know, it's, I know it's easy to say, but like you've done, Ikra, for, by kind of addressing that first of all and having those conversations people are then aware of ways in which you might act or react. So it's really good to know, especially for course, leaders or managers, for example, to know what, what can happen so they can safeguard you against start really.

Ikra: What support do you offer for someone who is visually impaired?

Laura: So we have got lots of different kinds of ways of supporting somebody who might be visually impaired. So support can take place in the form of a human support through note takers and mobility guide support. We also do have specialist equipment as well, such as a digital voice recorder, a specialist, laptop, and software. The names of these, for example, which my memory, one is called zoomtext and we've also got a note taking up as well. So generally speaking, this is funded by a DSA, if the student is eligible and the student will get an assessment for what support needs they need. Specifically for their visual impairment and make sure all types of appropriate support are kind of gone through with you and discussed and agreed.

So what, it might be more beneficial than others. You can also get a learning support statement as well, which is a document that makes lectures aware of any academic adjustments, such as any extra time or ability to negotiate. Assignment deadlines, for example, for that can be passed on to lectures to support you in that way. We've also got all the software and technology, so the library have got it, ClaroRead, and we've got accessible rooms. This all happens within one week of a request within the disability team. So there is quite a lot of different options to look up. It's then again, what, what that person would think will be the most beneficial for them. So that's, I know what we offer our Staffs.

Alice: Okay. Well, I just wanted to say thank you to you both because as you know, this is a really important, but also very difficult time for so many young people debating a) whether or not to even try to go to uni, and b) you know, once they decide where to start.

And I think what you've provided us with, Laura is a really great sort of, motivation, you know, energy to give it a go to start thinking about the questions it is possible. It's really important that it's something that young people with additional needs think about and don't feel that because they have disabilities or because they have mental health issues they're not going to be able to manage higher education. And I think that's the very sort of, it's really refreshing to hear you talk about it.

I don't know if you want to say anything on that note in terms of encouraging people to apply.

Laura: I would say that by being open and honest and really setting the scene of what your needs are, you can really then succeed and have a successful transition into university and, and really get those, if it is additional support that can, can help you throughout university. And I think it can be a really positive and empowering experience. Definitely ask those questions. Look at the support services, take the opportunities to be counted. Visit campuses says if it permits this year. Speak to other support students, you, a lot of the time you can request to speak to all the students about their experiences. So yeah, I definitely do a little bit of research if you can, about that and, yeah, I would definitely encourage everybody because the support is there and if it's not, then you can make it be there and be that person that starts that.

Alice: Thank you very much. That's fantastic. I real of note optimism there. Thank you so much.