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## **Students with disabilities need earlier support to enter higher education**

Applicants with disabilities need earlier support to transition to higher education in the UK, according to a report by UCAS in partnership with Pearson, the leading digital media learning company, and the Disabled Students Commission.

UCAS is calling for the journey of disabled students to higher education and apprenticeships to be made easier and earlier through the extension of Adjustment Passports, which currently cover the transition from higher education into employment, plus earlier engagement with university and student support, including the Disabled Students' Allowance.

The recommendations come in the UCAS report *Next Steps: What is the experience of disabled students in education?* published on 1st July 2022.

The report includes:

- detailed analysis of the record number of applications (83,220) made by people with disabilities between September 2020 and the start of the academic year in Autumn 2021
- the results of a survey of almost 5,000 UK people who applied to UCAS by its January 2022 deadline and shared details of a disability on their application

The survey revealed only 17% say they have access to inclusive extra-curricular activities at school or college. However, there is real excitement about progressing to higher education, with 44% expecting the social aspect of life at university or college to be 'good' or 'excellent'.

Yet despite this optimism about life in higher education, UCAS' analysis of its data from the previous cycle shows students with disabilities are 28% more likely to defer.

The deferral rate for disabled applicants rose from the pre-pandemic 7% in 2019 to 8.2% in 2021 (compared to a 6.4% deferral rate for non-disabled applicants in 2021).

The steepest increase was seen for those with social, behavioural or communication impairments (for example, an autistic spectrum condition), making them 11% more likely to defer than non-disabled applicants.

The report shows that early engagement is key. Not only are these students more likely to defer, but 56% researched available support before applying, with these students commonly looking at the general and educational support available, and facilities and physical adjustments on campus.

**Clare Marchant, Chief Executive of UCAS**, said: ‘We ask for this voluntary information about disabilities on our application forms to help our applicants flag up early any important conversations they may wish to have about their needs with their university or college choices.

‘What our survey of current applicants shows is optimism that life in higher education will be socially richer than it has been at school. However, our analysis of the last cycle of applicants with disabilities shows that some are deferring and delaying the experience.

‘A key takeaway from our research is that students need earlier support to avoid deferring and so we are recommending the extension of Adjustment Passports, which currently only cover the transition from higher education into employment, to make it easier for students to progress to university, college or an apprenticeship, meaning more students can take that next step along with their peers.,

‘More than a half of the applicants surveyed (56%) said they researched support for disabled students before starting their applications, and said an institution’s reputation for equality, diversity, and inclusion was of particular importance. UCAS already works closely with institutions to help them share this information but will be doing even more to make it available to help applicants with their research, earlier.’

Reacting to the UCAS report, **Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work Chloe Smith MP** said: ‘Disabled students deserve the same opportunities to succeed and reach their full potential as everyone else.

‘Our Adjustment Passports have been well received by disabled students, providing them with the confidence and certainty they need to enter the world of work and we have had promising feedback from the universities involved in the pilots.

‘Over the coming months we will be considering next steps for the passport, building on what we’ve learnt so far and I look forward to following the progress of the students and gaining an understanding of the difference it makes to their transition into work.’

The foreword to the UCAS report was written by **Professor Geoff Layer, Chair of the Disabled Students Commission**. He said, ‘This is a ground-breaking report which provides a rich analysis of the accessibility of higher education for disabled students

and most importantly it differentiates on the basis of the barriers that students face. I welcome it on behalf of the Disabled Students Commission as it adds further weight to our arguments that we as a sector need to reflect on some of our approaches.'

**Sharon Hague, Managing Director of Pearson** which has partnered with UCAS in producing the report, said: 'This study highlights the importance of taking a wide, long term and holistic approach to enabling access to high quality education for all, no matter what their needs might be. We welcome the recommendations of the report which provides an important roadmap for positive and meaningful change.'

For the full report with data files visit [\*Next Steps: What is the experience of disabled students in education?\*](#)

For more information contact UCAS Press Office at [communications@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:communications@ucas.ac.uk)  
[@ucas\\_corporate](mailto:@ucas_corporate) 07881 029025

**ENDS**

### **Notes for editors**

#### Methodology

As part of the UCAS application form, applicants are asked to share if they have a disability. Anonymised data taken from the UCAS application is used to analyse the intersectionality of disability with other applicant characteristics.

The survey of 30 questions was sent out in February 2022 to a sample of UK applicants who had applied during the 2022 cycle and opted to share an impairment or condition in their UCAS application. In total, 4,905 applicants responded – representing 6% of all applicants who had applied by the January 2022 deadline who shared a disability.

#### About UCAS

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent charity, and the UK's shared admissions service for higher education.

Our services support young people making post-18 choices, as well as mature learners, by providing information, advice, and guidance to inspire and facilitate educational progression to university, college, or a degree apprenticeship.

We manage almost three million applications, from around 700,000 people each year, for full-time undergraduate courses at over 380 universities and colleges across the UK.

We also provide a wide range of research, consultancy and advisory services to schools, colleges, careers services, professional bodies, and employers, including apprenticeships.

We're a successful and fast-growing organisation, which helps hundreds of thousands of people every year. We're committed to delivering a first-class service to all our customers — they're at the heart of everything we do.

### About Pearson

At Pearson, our purpose is simple: to add life to a lifetime of learning. We believe that every learning opportunity is a chance for a personal breakthrough. That's why our c.20,000 Pearson employees are committed to creating vibrant and enriching learning experiences designed for real-life impact. We are the world's leading digital media learning company, serving customers in nearly 200 countries with digital content, assessments, qualifications, and data. For us, learning isn't just what we do. It's who we are. Visit us at [pearsonplc.com](https://www.pearsonplc.com)