

Preparing for university



ARTHRITIS CARE

*Empowering
people with arthritis.*

Preparing to go to university can be an exciting time, but it can also mean facing a number of tough decisions and some stressful moments along the way. Living with arthritis can add further challenges. During this process, one of the most difficult things you will have to deal with is making decisions about what and where you want to study. The key to managing this successfully is thoroughly researching all available options so that you can make an informed decision.

Choosing a course

Before you do anything else you need to decide which course you want to study. For some people, this will be a straightforward process. Others may face uncertainty about the right course to take. If are uncertain, there are a number of things you need to consider to help you reach a final decision.

Type of qualification

There are a huge range of qualifications available for students entering higher education. Many people study degrees, such as a bachelor of science (BSc) or a bachelor of arts (BA), but there are numerous other options. These include a foundation degree, a higher national certificate (HNC), higher national diploma (HND) or a higher education diploma.

Teaching style

Once you have decided the type of qualification you would like to study, you should think about whether you would rather do a vocational course (such as nursing or engineering) or an academic course (such as history or chemistry). Would you be more comfortable doing a degree that led straight into a career or does your chosen career not require any specific degree? You should consider which teaching methods suit you best. Different courses place different emphasis on exams, essays, group work and practical work. You should also think about how your arthritis affects you and how it might impact on your chosen course. For example, nursing and engineering may require a lot of physical energy. Is this something you would be comfortable doing?

Part-time, full-time or distance learning

You also need to think about how your studies would fit around your other commitments and priorities. For instance, if your arthritis meant that you often felt fatigued, would you be able to study full-time or would part time study be a more practical option? Similarly, are you able to relocate to start your studies or would a distance learning course be more suitable?

If after considering all these issues you are still struggling to come to a decision, there are a wide range of people you can turn to for further

support. You can speak to the careers adviser at your school or college, or, if you live in England, you can speak to a Connexions adviser in your area. You can use online tools, such as the Stamford Test, to find a course that matches your interests and ambitions. For a more general discussion on how your arthritis might affect you while at university you can also contact The Source, Arthritis Care's confidential and free helpline for young people on 0808 808 2000 or email TheSource@arthritiscare.org.uk



Information about the courses available to you can be found in a number of places. Your first point of reference should be undergraduate prospectuses from individual universities. These give details of all the courses available at that institution. Prospectuses can be ordered or downloaded from university or college websites. They can also be collected from higher education fairs. These are held in cities across the UK from March to July, and are an excellent opportunity to pick up information and ask questions. Careers libraries are also a good place to source information, as they often keep course directories. An invaluable resource is the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) website www.ucas.ac.uk

You can search for information on higher education (HE) courses at universities and colleges across the UK. Information on foundation degrees can be found at www.foundationdegree.org.uk

Choosing a university

Once you have decided what you want to study you can now begin to think about where you want to study. A good way to go about this is to make a list of all the institutions that offer your course and pick out the universities that best meet your other priorities. To decide which university you want to study at you should consider a range of issues.

The reputation of the university

Before deciding on a particular university it is worthwhile having a look at objective accounts about the university's performance. You should consider what academic support is available at the institution, how good the facilities are and what its academic reputation is. There are various ways of obtaining this information. Take a look at the teaching quality information (TQI) www.unistats.com website. It provides access to up-to-date information about the quality of higher education institutions and the results of the national student survey. You can also visit the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education website www.qua.ac.uk and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website www.hefce.ac.uk for further information. League tables, from newspapers such as the *Times Higher Education Supplement* and *The Guardian*, can give a good indication of an institution's academic standing.

Location and size

When making any decision you should also consider the size and location of a university or college. Are you planning to live close to home or do you want to live somewhere completely new? Are you undergoing any treatment that would require you to stay close to a particular hospital? Would a quieter, smaller campus meet your needs better than a busier larger campus? Are there good transport links to the campus? If you have a Blue Badge, are there plenty of available spaces near your lectures? To get an idea about what student life is like at a particular institution you should contact their students' union. They will be able to let you know what current students think about the university or college.



Accessibility and services for disabled students

It is worthwhile considering how your arthritis might affect you while you are at university and doing some research into how well a particular institution will be able to support you. Consider whether the campus, accommodation and local area are accessible. You might need extra support during exam time or need help taking notes in lectures. Is the university able to provide this?

A good starting point for this information is the *Disabled Students' Guide to University*. It has an A-Z list of institutions, case studies of students' experiences and useful information about getting the support you need. Once you have narrowed down a few options you can then begin to focus on individual institutions. Every HE institution should have a disability statement that details what support it offers disabled students. You should request a copy of this when you order a prospectus. University websites should also contain details of the support available.

For more in-depth personal information you should contact the university's disability advisor or learning coordinator. They should be able to answer any queries you might have. Contact details for the disability advisor or learning coordinator for your chosen universities are available on the Skill website www.skill.org.uk You could also talk to department heads or lead tutors about what support is given in their subject area. It is important to remember you are under no obligation to tell a university or college about your disability, but they will be able to provide you with support if you do.

An invaluable way of seeing firsthand the accessibility of the campus and the support available to you is to make a visit to the university campus. This can be done on either an open day or an informal visit. Open days usually take place in the spring or autumn, and details of the day can be found on the institution's website. Informal visits can be made at any time, although it is best to visit during the term.

Before you make your final decision you could contact other disabled students or graduates. If you ask in advance there may be an opportunity to speak to disabled students during an open day or an informal visit. You might also consider having a look at Arthritis Care's online discussion

forum www.arthritiscare.org.uk/GetInvolved/Discussionforum
Here you can chat to other people who have arthritis about their experiences of university life.



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The application process

Applying to a university can be a complicated process. The way in which you apply will depend on which institution you wish to attend and type of course you want to take.

Full-time courses

For most full-time courses you will need to apply through the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS). Be aware, however, that a minority of full-time courses will require you to apply directly to a university or college or to a different admissions service. For instance, the Conservatoires Admission Service (CUKAS) deals with applications for practice based music courses at UK conservatoires. Contact UCAS to find out whom you should apply to.

Applying through UCAS

If your course choices require you to apply through UCAS you will need to complete the application process online at the UCAS website. Paper forms are no longer accepted. If you do not have access to a computer you should contact UCAS to discuss your options.

Most application forms will ask if you have a disability and for details of your support needs. You may feel worried that you will face discrimination if you tell the university about your arthritis. It is up to you what you write on the form but it is worth bearing in mind that if the university knows about your arthritis, and how it affects you, they should be able to provide the necessary support. You should also remember that you have a number of rights under the Disability Discrimination Act (Part 4). For more information about your rights under the DDA you should contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com (the Equality Commission In Northern Ireland: www.equalityni.org)

UCAS accepts applications for most courses from September until mid January in the academic year before the start of your course. However, deadlines for applications and application procedures do vary between courses and institutions. For example, the deadlines for applications to Oxford and Cambridge and for medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine/science are usually in mid-October. Deadlines for some art and design courses are in March. For this reason, it is always best to check the UCAS website to find out how to apply for your particular courses.

Interview

Once UCAS has received your application it will pass it on to the universities or colleges on your list. Depending on the courses and institutions you have chosen, you may get called for an interview. If your arthritis means that you will have extra needs at your interview,

let the university know before you attend. Not all courses request an interview so you may find you get a response just from the information that was on your UCAS application.

Receiving offers

The reply that you get from a university or college will be: a conditional offer, an unconditional offer or a rejection. A conditional offer means that you will have to achieve certain grades or points in the UCAS tariff before your place is confirmed. If you receive an unconditional offer, your place will already be secure.

Replying to offers

Once you have received responses from all your chosen universities and colleges, you will have to decide which of the institutions you would most like to attend. Out of the offers you receive you should select one first choice (a firm acceptance) and one back-up (an insurance acceptance). You need to decline all other offers. Make sure that you reply by any deadlines set by the institutions.

UCAS Extra

If you decline all the offers made to you, or you do not receive any offers, you may be eligible for UCAS Extra. This allows you to apply to further universities and colleges. The Extra process runs from mid-March until June and UCAS will let you know whether you are eligible for it or not.

Results day

If your results were not what you had expected, try not to panic. The first thing you need to do is get in contact with your first choice institution. Even if your results are not quite what you were asked for you may still be accepted on to the course. If your first choice is unable to offer you a place you should then contact your insurance choice.

It may happen that there are no places available at your first and insurance choice. At this point, you may feel disappointed and frustrated that your plans are no longer possible. During this time you should talk to your friends, family, or careers adviser at your school about your options. You can also contact The Source, Arthritis Care's helpline for young people on 0808 808 2000 or email TheSource@arthritiscare.org.uk

Clearing

If you did not receive any offers and were unable to find a place through UCAS Extra, applied after the original UCAS application deadline or did not get the results you expected, you will have the option of applying for a place through clearing. Tens of thousands of students go through clearing every year. Course vacancies are released on the day of the A level results and are advertised on the UCAS website and in the national press.



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Other options

You may decide that clearing is not for you. If this is the case, one option available to you is to retake your exams and apply again next year. Alternatively, you might decide that university is not the path you want to take, or something you might consider in a few years time. If this is how you feel, speak to a careers advisor about the options available to you.

**Other routes – part-time, flexible courses**

If you want to take a part-time, flexible learning higher education course then you will need to apply directly to the institution running the course. Their course prospectuses or websites should give information on how to apply for these courses. You can also apply for part-time courses on the Hotcourses website www.hotcourses.com

The deadline for applications will depend on the particular institution so it is important that you start researching courses as soon as possible.

Further information**Useful websites****Aim Higher**

www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Provides information on all aspects of higher education.

Arthritis Care discussion forum

www.arthritiscare.org.uk/GetInvolved/Discussionforum

Chat to other people who have arthritis about their experiences of university.

Directgov

www.direct.gov.uk

Produced by the Central Office of Information, Directgov provides information from all government departments. The site contains a range of information on higher and further education, including topics such as applying through UCAS, support for disabled students and applying for financial support.

Hotcourses

www.hotcourses.com

Search for courses across the UK.

Open days

www.opendays.com

The university and college open day directory.

Useful publications

Into Higher Education (produced by Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities)

A guide for disabled people planning to apply to higher education. It includes advice about applications, getting support, grants and benefits and includes profiles written by disabled students about their university experiences.

The Disabled Students' Guide to University

A guide for disabled students who are considering applying to university or college. The guide lists institutions in an A-Z format and provides information such as who to contact, available services, accommodation and the accessibility of the local area.

The Times Good University Guide

This guide presents a wealth of information, facts and figures about universities across the country that aids you in making an informed choice about which university to go to.

Useful organisations

Connexions

Helpline: 08080 013 219 (8am to 2am 7 days)

Textphone: 08000 968 336

www.connexions-direct.com

Provides support, advice and information to 13 – 19 year olds (up to 25 for young people who have learning difficulties or disabilities), living in England.

NUS (National Union of Students)

2nd Floor, Centro 3

Mandela Street

London NW1 0DU

Tel: 0871 221 8221

Email: nusuk@nus.org.uk

www.nusonline.org.uk

NUS Scotland

29 Forth Street

Edinburgh EH1 3LE

Tel: 0131 556 6598

Email: mail@nus-scotland.org.uk

www.nusonline.co.uk/scotland

NUS – USI (Union of Students in Northern Ireland)

2nd Floor

42 Dublin Road

Belfast BT2 7BY

Tel: 028 9024 4641

Email: info@nistudents.org

www.nistudents.org



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NUS Wales

13 Lambourne Crescent
Cardiff Business Park
Llanishen CF14 5GF
Tel: 029 2068 0070
Email: office@nus-wales.org.uk
www.nusonline.co.uk/wales

**Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities**

Head Office
Chapter House
18-20 Crucifix Lane
London SE1 3JW
Tel: 020 7450 0620
Email: skill@skill.org.uk
Information Service Tel: 0800 328 5050
Email: info@skill.org.uk
www.skill.org.uk

An independent charity that promotes opportunities for people with any kind of disability post-16 education, training and employment. Produces a range of information booklets including: Applying To Higher Education: Guidance For Disabled People and Funding For Disabled Students In Higher Education.

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)

Customer Service Unit:
UCAS
PO Box 28
Cheltenham GL52 3LZ
Tel: 0870 112 2211 (Mon – Fri 08.30 – 18.00)
Email: enquires@ucas.ac.uk
Switchboard: 01242 222 444 (Mon – Fri 09.00 – 17.00)
www.ucas.ac.uk

Created: July 2008

Note

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Arthritis Care

Arthritis Care is the UK's largest voluntary organisation working with and for all people with arthritis.

Our publications are just one of the many services Arthritis Care provides. These include a confidential helpline, self-management and awareness training, information for people with arthritis and health professionals, and local activity and support. We also campaign locally and nationally to help change attitudes and laws and to ensure people with arthritis have access to the treatments and services they need and deserve.

Contact us

For confidential information and support, contact the Arthritis Care Helpline

Freephone: 0808 800 4050

10am-4pm (weekdays)

Email: Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk

For information about Arthritis Care and the services we offer, contact us at: www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care UK office and England regional services:

Tel: 020 7380 6500

Central England email: CentralEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk

North England email: NorthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk

South England email: SouthEngland@arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care in Northern Ireland

Tel: 028 9078 2940

Email: NIreland@arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care in Scotland

Tel: 0141 954 7776

Email: Scotland@arthritiscare.org.uk

Arthritis Care in Wales

Tel: 01239 711883

Email: Wales@arthritiscare.org.uk

