

Preparing to move on to higher education can be an exciting time. It is about putting in place plans for meeting new people, furthering your studies and beginning a new stage in your life.

If you are young and live with arthritis, you will know that arthritis can be challenging and affect many different parts of your life. It may be daunting making decisions about life at university or college, such as what to study and where to live.

The key to managing this successfully is to thoroughly research all the options available to you, so that you can make an informed decision. This should ensure that your time in higher education is as enjoyable and rewarding as possible.

Choosing a course

Before you do anything else you need to decide which course you want to study. Consider a number of things before reaching 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 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 on the type of qualification you would like to attain, you should think about whether you want to do a vocational course (such as nursing or engineering) or an academic course (such as history or chemistry). You may be more comfortable studying for a degree that leads straight into a career, such as law or teaching or you may choose something else if your chosen career does not require a specific degree. Consider which teaching methods suit you best. Different courses place different emphasis on exams, essays, group work, work experience placements and practical work. 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. Visit Prospects for information about career choices at www.prospects.ac.uk

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 makes you feel tired and low on energy, part-time study might be a more suitable option. Distance learning courses are a good alternative if you would prefer not to move house and do not wish to go for opportunities available locally.

A wide range of people can give you support. You can speak to the careers adviser at your school or college. You can use online tools, such as the Stamford Test (for

the website, see section at the end of this factsheet), 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 or college 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 can be found in a number of places. Your first point of reference should be undergraduate prospectuses or websites of individual universities and colleges. 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, which 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: wwwucas.ac.uk

You can search for information on higher education (HE) courses at universities and colleges across the UK. Foundation degrees are degree-level qualifications that combine academic study with workplace learning. For more information, go to www.higherlearningatwork.org in Northern Ireland or www.direct.gov.uk in the rest of the UK.

Choosing a university or college

Once you have decided what you want to study you can now begin to think about where 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 ones that best meet your other priorities. To decide which university or college you want to study at you should consider a range of issues.

The reputation of the institution

Look at objective accounts on performance and consider what academic support is available at the institution, its academic reputation and the standard of the facilities. The teaching quality information (TQI) at www.unistats.com 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 at www.qaa.ac.uk and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website at www.hefce.ac.uk for further information. League tables in *The Times Higher Education Supplement* and *The Guardian* give a good indication of academic performance.

Location and size

The size and location of a university or college may affect the amount of travel you have to undertake to attend lectures or classes, as well as to travel from home at the beginning of each term. You might want to consider whether you need to stay near a

particular hospital for treatment, the availability of accommodation that suits your needs and the standard of transport (or Blue Badge parking spaces near your lectures).

If you are moving to a new area and need to find a different hospital and GP, ensure that you register early. This will mean that your medical notes will have arrived with your new health professionals and that you won't have any delays with getting repeat prescriptions.

Accessibility and services for disabled students

As well as ensuring that the campus, accommodation and local area are accessible, you might want to ensure that the university can provide extra support - such as during exam time or notetaking in lectures or classes.

Every HE institution should have a disability statement that details what support it offers disabled students - request a copy when you order a prospectus. University websites should also contain details of the support available.

For more in-depth personal information, contact the institution's disability adviser or learning co-ordinator, who should be able to answer any queries. Call the Disability Alliance's student helpline for details of the disability adviser or learning co-ordinator for your chosen institutions. You could also talk to department heads or lead tutors about what support is given to students in their department. 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.

The best way to assess campus accessibility and student support is to visit the campus - either on an open day or 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. Making an informal visit during term time will give you the best idea about student life.

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. Go to YouGo www.yougo.co.uk to talk to people who are already studying or ask other young people about their experiences of student life at www.arthritiscare.org.uk/Forums. Read about the experiences of young people with arthritis at university in Breakout - www.arthritiscare.org.uk/Breakout

The application process

Applying to university or college requires following the UCAS applications process. To complete your application successfully you need to follow the instructions on the UCAS website carefully.

Applying through UCAS

Most full-time courses require you to apply through UCAS. If this is the case 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. It is your choice whether you write about your arthritis on the UCAS form. Remember that the Equality Act (Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland) protects you against discrimination at university or college. To find out more about how you are protected, go to:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/EducationAndTraining

UCAS accepts applications for courses at different times of the year. Check the UCAS website to find out how to apply for your course/s. This should enable you to complete your university application in manageable chunks.

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 specific needs (such as a comfortable chair or step-free access) at your interview, let the university or college know beforehand. Not all courses request an interview so you may find you get a response just from the information you put on your UCAS application.

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 for courses with vacancies in other universities and colleges. The Extra process runs from the end of February until the end of June and UCAS will let you know whether you are eligible for it or not.

Results day

If the results for your A-levels (or equivalent) were not what you 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.

If you are not offered a place at your first and insurance choice, you might feel disappointed and frustrated that your plans are no longer possible. Talk to your friends, family, or careers adviser at your school about your options.

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 can apply 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.

Other options

If you think clearing is not for you, you can retake your exam/s and apply the following year. Alternatively, you might decide that higher education 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 adviser about the options available to you.

Part-time, flexible and distance learning 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 search and apply for part-time courses on the Hotcourses website: www.hotcourses.com

The Open University (details below) offers courses that allow students to study from home.

The deadline for applications will depend on the particular institution so start researching courses as soon as possible.

Fees and financial support

As a student you will have two main costs: tuition fees and living costs.

Tuition fees

Tuition fees are the amount universities or colleges will charge you each year to study. They vary depending on where you study and what you study. From September 2012 universities and colleges in the public sector in England can charge new full-time students up to £9,000 a year. Scottish universities will set their own fees for students from the rest of the UK from 2012-13. An upper limit of £9,000 will be introduced in time for the 2013-14 academic year. Full-time students studying their first higher education course can get a government loan for tuition fees.

Disabled Students' Allowances

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) provide extra financial help if you are disabled and want to study a higher education course.

DSAs are paid on top of the standard student finance package and do not have to be paid back. The amount you get depends on the type of extra help you need - not on your household income. Eligibility and the help available varies across the UK but in general DSAs can help pay for:

- specialist equipment you need for studying - for example, computer software
- non-medical helpers, such as a note-taker
- extra travel costs you have to pay because of your disability.

See 'Further information' to find out how to apply.

Further information

Aim Higher

www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Provides information on all aspects of higher education

Arthritis Care discussion forum

www.arthritiscare.org.uk/Forums

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

Careers Wales

www.careerswales.com

Helpline: 0800 100 900

For careers advice in Wales.

Directgov

www.direct.gov.uk

See the sections for 'Disabled people' and 'Young people' for information on applying for higher education through UCAS, financial support for disabled students and careers advice.

Disability Alliance

www.disabilityalliance.org

Student helpline: 0800 328 5050 (Tues: 11.30am-1.30pm, Thurs: 1.30pm-3.30pm)

Provides information on benefits and for disabled students.

Hotcourses

www.hotcourses.com

Search for courses across the UK.

My world of work

<http://myworldofwork.co.uk>

Careers advice in Scotland.

NI Direct

www.nidirect.gov.uk

See the sections for 'People with disabilities' and 'Young people' for information on applying for higher education through UCAS, financial support for disabled students and careers advice.

NUS (National Union of Students)

www.nus.org.uk

Tel: 0845 52 10 262

NUS Scotland

www.nus.org.uk/Scotland

Tel: 0131 556 6598

NUS - USI (Union of Students in Northern Ireland)

www.nistudents.org
Tel: 028 9024 4641

NUS Wales

www.nus.org.uk/wales
Tel: 02920 435390

Open days

www.opendays.com
The university and college open day directory.

Open University (OU)

www.open.ac.uk
A distance learning centre, focusing on part-time learning with a disability support centre.

Stamford Test

www.ucas.ac.uk/students/choosingcourses/choosingcourse/stamfordtest
This short questionnaire can help to match your interests and abilities to possible higher education subjects.

Student Awards Agency for Scotland

www.saas.gov.uk
For information about financial support for students in Scotland.

The Student Room

www.thestudentroom.co.uk
Student website with university guides written by students and a disabled students forum.

Student Finance ni

www.studentfinancenl.co.uk
For information about financial support for students in Northern Ireland.

Student Finance Wales

www.studentfinancewales.co.uk
For information about financial support for students in Wales.

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service)

www.ucas.ac.uk
0871 4680 468

Useful publications

Into Higher Education 2011 - available from October 2011 from Disability Alliance

www.disabilityalliance.org

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 Times Good University Guide

www.thetimes.co.uk

This guide presents a wealth of information about universities across the country to help you make an informed choice about which institution to choose.

Where can I get more information and support?

Arthritis Care is the UK's largest charity working with and for all people who have arthritis.

We are here to help you make positive choices through our information, website, self-management training, and professional helpline. Call the free helpline for confidential support on 0808 800 4050 (10am-4pm weekdays) or email: Helplines@arthritiscare.org.uk

You can find support from others with arthritis by joining our online discussion forums.

We rely on donations to fund our vital work in supporting people living with arthritis. If you would like to make a contribution, please phone us on 020 7380 6540 or you can donate online.

www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Our information is regularly reviewed. This factsheet will be reviewed in 2013. Please check our website for up-to-date information and reference sources or call 020 7380 6577.

Last reviewed in 2011

Note

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Arthritis Care is now a certified member of The Information Standard. This means that you can be confident that Arthritis Care is a reliable and trustworthy source of health and social care information.



Contact us

For confidential information and support about treatments, available care and adapting your life, 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**

You can also talk to other people who are living with arthritis, through the discussion forums on our website.

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: 029 2044 4155

Email: Wales@arthritiscare.org.uk