



Transitioning from College to University for Young People with SEND

RANi Need to Know Guides | Transition Phases Advisory sheet 4

Updated: April 2025

Transitioning to university is an exciting but significant step. For young people with SEND, it can also present new challenges, such as increased independence, changes in support structures, and navigating a more adult environment. With the right preparation and understanding of available support, this transition can be both successful and empowering.

Key Differences Between College and University

Area	College (FE)	University (HE)
Support Framework	Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)	Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and internal support services
Legal Duties	Children and Families Act 2014	Equality Act 2010
Responsibility	Local authority-led provision	Student-led disclosure and access to support
Parental Involvement	Parents often central to support	Students are legally adults; universities engage with them directly (unless consent given)

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Planning the Transition – Key Steps

1. Start Early – Ideally in Year 13 or first year of college

- Discuss university as a potential goal at **EHCP annual reviews**.
- Include **Preparing for Adulthood** outcomes in the EHCP.
- Explore whether the EHCP is still needed or will cease at 18/19.

2. Explore University Options

- Consider the student's **interests, strengths, and support needs**.
- Look at university open days with a **SEND lens**.
- Ask about:
 - Accessibility of campus and accommodation
 - Disabled Students' Support teams
 - Mental health services
 - Specific learning support (e.g. for dyslexia, autism, ADHD)

3. Apply for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

- DSA is **not means-tested** and can fund:
 - Specialist equipment
 - Non-medical helper support (e.g., note-takers, mentors)
 - Travel support
 - Extra printing costs or software

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Apply early – ideally **in Year 13**, once your university choices are clear.

Apply via:

www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas

4. Contact University Disability Support Services

- Most universities have a **Disability or Inclusion Team**.
- Contact them **as soon as you accept a place** (ideally before).
- Share your:
 - DSA assessment
 - School/college support history
 - Diagnosis or needs evidence
- Discuss **reasonable adjustments** such as:
 - Extra time in exams
 - Lecture recording permissions
 - Quiet accommodation options

5. Transition Planning Support from College

- The **final EHCP review** should include:
 - Discussion of post-college support needs
 - Whether an EHCP is still necessary (they usually end at 19, but not always)
 - Information about how university differs from school/college
- Colleges should help with:

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- Preparing documentation for university
- Referrals to advocacy or social care transition teams
- Independent living skills

6. Prepare for Greater Independence

Help your young person develop skills like:

- Managing finances (e.g. budgeting, student banking)
- Self-advocacy and asking for help
- Time management and planning
- Cooking and personal care
- Using public transport confidently

7. Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Find out about:
 - University counselling services
 - Peer support or SEND student groups
 - How to register with a new GP
- Ensure they have strategies and **a support network** in place before moving.

What Happens to the EHCP?

- **EHCPs do not continue** into higher education (university).

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- They can continue **until age 25 only** if:
 - The young person remains in **further education or training** (not higher education).
- If the young person **needs ongoing social care**, a **transition assessment** under the Care Act 2014 should be carried out by the local authority.

Top Tip: Ensure that key learning, health, or social care needs are clearly documented before the EHCP ceases — this evidence can help with university support planning.

Reasonable Adjustments in University

Universities must make **reasonable adjustments** to avoid disability discrimination. These may include:

- Accessible rooms and buildings
- Alternative formats for materials (e.g. large print, audio)
- Adjustments to coursework deadlines
- Specialist support staff
- Alternative exam arrangements

These are **not automatic** — the student must share evidence of their disability or need.

Key Conversations to Have Before Starting University

- ✓ What support worked well at school/college?
- ✓ What challenges do you anticipate at university?
- ✓ What support will you need — academically, socially, practically?

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- ✓ What strategies do you already use that can help you succeed?
 - ✓ What would help you feel more confident or comfortable?
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Helpful Resources

- **UCAS: Disabled Students** – www.ucas.com
 - **Disability Rights UK** – student helpline and guides
 - **Disabled Students' Allowance** – gov.uk/dsas
 - **National Autistic Society** – resources for university students
 - **Young Minds** – for mental health support
 - **Student Minds** – student mental health charity
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Summary Checklist

✓ Task

✓ Done

Research universities and their support services

Attend open days with SEND support lens

Start applying for DSA

Contact university disability service

Gather all documentation (e.g., assessments)

Practice independent living and travel

Make a mental health/wellbeing plan

Confirm accommodation and adjustments

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Support and Resources

- **RANi** – Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **Local Offer** - Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **SENDIASS** – Local impartial information and advice service for parents and young people www.iasmanchester.org
- **IPSEA** – Independent Provider of Special Education Advice: www.ipsea.org.uk
- **Contact** – A national charity supporting families with disabled children: www.contact.org.uk

Remember:

Always keep a copy of all correspondence you send, along with proof of postage or delivery. If you send documents by post, we recommend using a **signed-for** service. If sending by email, request a **read receipt** if possible.

Get in Touch

If you need more information or have a question, we're here to help.

Email us: info@rani.org.uk

Please include:

- Your name
- Your child's name
- Your child's date of birth
- Your query

Or, if you prefer, you can fill out our online **contact form** and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

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