Lance: My name is Lance Rickman and I’m a Disability Support Adviser for the Open University.

Question: If I have a mental health condition, should I tell the University?

Lance: It’s very important if you have a mental health condition to tell the University. Mental Health is as important as physical health to your studies and can affect them more. Once the university is aware that you have any kind of health condition then they can make sure you receive the best support available.

Question: How do I let the University know about a mental health condition?

Lance: You can let us know about a mental health condition by completing a disability support form. This contains some basic information but has lots of free entries so you can put whatever information you want in your own words to help us understand your condition. This is normally an online form but you can request a paper copy if you need one. And if you have any problems filling it out you can also contact an advisor who will help you on the phone.

Question: What happens to the information I submit?

Lance: The info you supply is used by a disability support advisor to complete, to write a profile that becomes a permanent part of your record they may call you and have a conversation on the phone to clarify some details to suggest possible strategies. The profile will then be used by support staff, by people from exams or residential schools but mainly by your tutors and it will also contain some tips and hints as to how to best support people with particular conditions or individual students.

Question: Do I have to submit details every time I register for a new module?

Lance: You don’t have to submit this again every time you register for a new module because it has become a permanent part of your record. Any adjustments or requests will carry forward for the time you study with the University although you can make any amendments or edit it as your condition might change for instance in the future.

Question: What kind of adjustments can be made?

Lance: The main purpose of the form and any conversation is to decide on what sort of support will be most effective. And, we can supply lots of different formats, special equipment etc… However, the most useful adjustment is usually that around arrangements for face to face tutorials, for day schools, exams, residential schools etc… and for your ongoing support from your tutor while you’re studying.

Question: Is this the same as Disabled Students’ Allowance?
Lance: The disability support form for the Open University is separate to the Disabled Students Allowance, DSA, which is a government funded support for students who are studying who have disabilities. It’s very important not to get these confused, occasionally there is confusion about this. If you think you may be eligible for DSA we encourage you to apply of course, but do remember with mental health or physical health problems you should always submit both of them as early as possible.

Question: When should I declare a condition to the University?

Lance: You should declare a condition to the university as soon as you register really for study. You want to do it as early as possible because obviously you want any changes and adjustments and additional support to be in place by the time you begin your studies, particularly if it involves producing extra materials or any kind of facilities to be in place.