

# Lucas

## MEng Electronic Engineering



ROYAL  
HOLLOWAY  
UNIVERSITY  
OF LONDON

My name is Lucas,

I'm going into my fourth year of MEng Electronic Engineering. I am part of various societies and am on a committee for one. One of my current jobs is working as a student ambassador. I also have Autism.

Autism or Autism Spectrum Disorder is a disability that affects how a person views and interacts with the world. It can cause problems with social skills and living independently. For me, autism causes me to have problems with communicating with my peers and taking care of myself. The university provides me support by giving me priority accommodation on campus if I need it and extra time during assessments.

This blog covers some aspects of university life that can be helpful for people who have Autism or maybe other disabilities. It is based on my own experience of university.



### Applying to university

Genetics was what I originally planned to apply for at uni. I chose to study Biology, Chemistry, Physics and Maths. After a term of these subjects, I realised that Biology was not a subject that I wished to take further, and I swapped this to English. After the first year I dropped English. I got a place at Royal Holloway to study their new course Electronic Engineering.

A friend of mine started studying Philosophy and Ethics, Sociology, Biology and Chemistry, wanting to study Psychology at university. During the summer of their first year of A-Levels, they had a health emergency and missed out on the exams. This meant that they had to retake Year 12. They took Maths instead of Politics and ended up a Physicist.

The journey to university is not always linear. You might have a precise plan for the next few years of your educational life and you may follow that plan completely. It's OK if that doesn't happen. The unexpected may be the correct path for you.

### Open Days

For me, open days were difficult to attend. They were usually overwhelming due to the crowds and all the events. I often found myself too exhausted to stay more than a few hours.

My advice is to schedule your visit as much as possible beforehand so that you know which events you need to attend and for how long. If there is a place for disability services, visit there first to enquire which are the quietest routes and whether they have any assistance for disabled students. This can also give you a good idea as to the support available for the university in general.

If you can't visit an open day, there may be an option for an online open day which can be done from home. Even if you take this route, it is advisable to visit the university in person still. This can often be done by arranging a tour or some universities allow you to walk around by yourself but without a guide.

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### The first few weeks

The first few weeks of University life are exhausting for everyone – especially people with disabilities. It's a completely new environment full of new people from many different places and even different countries. If you're living on campus, it might be the first time you've ever lived on your own. Just remember not to be too hard on yourself and take your time when adjusting.



At Royal Holloway, I was matched with a Student Helper in the first couple of weeks. She helped me by showing me around the university so I could find where my lectures were, how the laundry worked and took me around the Freshers' Fair. In my Second Year, I trained to be a Student Helper myself and I can say that they are more than happy to help so definitely accept this help if you are offered it.

### Disabled Students Allowance

After the first few weeks, I continued to have support from the DDS (Disabled Student Services). One of the things they can help with is the application to the DSA (Disabled Students Allowance). The process should start when you apply for Student Loans. DSA can help financially with extra travel costs and specialist equipment that you might need due to being disabled. Specialist equipment can include a laptop, printer with paper and ink, or a recording device for lectures. Other costs covered include non-medical helpers such as sign language interpreters and specialist mentors. This will be individual to you and your needs.

### Accommodation

I found accommodation challenging. Sharing a kitchen with other people meant having to face other people's mess. In my first year I was in university accommodation and I switched to private student flats in the second term of second year. This accommodation allowed me to have my own kitchen which meant I had to interact with fewer people. It was also more expensive. If noise and mess is something that bothers you, it might be worth requesting quiet accommodation though this may not always be possible.

Other options for accommodation include private housing which can be expensive for one person, so you'd likely need to share. It is important to make sure you choose your house mates carefully so that you know they have the same attitudes towards living as you to avoid conflict.

Another choice is to stay at your current address and commute. This may not be possible depending on the travel distance. Commuting may impact your university experience if you are not able to attend society events that you wish to so that is also something to take into consideration.

The most important aspect of accommodation is finding somewhere you are comfortable staying and where you can study. If you are not happy with where you live, it can impact your work.

### Surrounding area

In Egham, where Royal Holloway is located, there are many shops, cafes and parks which offer different food than that available on campus. Further afield, there is Staines-on-Thames where there is a cinema and several larger shopping areas. From Egham, Staines is less than five minutes by train and can even be walked to in less than an hour. Another place to visit is Windsor Great Park which is a woodland area where you can walk around the lake. So, when you go to university, take out a map and see what is around that you can visit and remember that some places can be closer than you might think.