

## The Disabled Students' Allowances

The government provides funding to individual disabled students from the UK<sup>1</sup> undertaking undergraduate and post-graduate taught courses or research degrees via the Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs). Unlike student loans, DSAs are not based on the student's family income and they do not have to be repaid.

Disabled students may have additional costs while studying and the DSAs are intended to help cover these costs. A student can apply for DSAs if they have any form of impairment.

DSAs can provide funding for the following, providing the need is disability-related:

- Specialist equipment – for example a digital recorder to record lectures; a computer with software to assist a student with spelling and grammar if they have a specific learning difference; a stethoscope with amplification or a visual display; a Braille device.
- Helpers – some students have a note taker to assist in lectures if they are not able to write their own notes. Other students have an assistant in the library to help with retrieving books or photocopying. Others may need study skills tutors or a sign language interpreter.
- General allowance - assistance with extra printing or photocopying costs; or an allowance for extra books.

Additional travel costs may be covered where, for example, a student is unable to use public transport and so gets to and from the university by taxi.

The amounts of funding available for each allowance is sufficiently generous for most students - though those with the most complex or expensive support needs can sometimes find their costs exceed the funding available. Where this is the case, the institution's Disability Service has a role in helping to discover other sources of funding.

The DSAs are administered by different organisations, depending on which nation the student lives in and what they study. Most undergraduates will need to apply to:

- Student Finance England (SFE).
- Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS).
- Student Finance Wales.
- Student Finance Northern Ireland.

Students receiving a National Health Service (NHS) bursary (for example student nurses or physiotherapists) for their general maintenance funding should apply through the NHS for their DSAs.

European Union and international students are not likely to be eligible to apply for the DSAs, but they should be encouraged to contact the institution's Disability Service to discover what support they can be offered.

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<sup>1</sup> Only "home" (UK domiciled) students are supported in this way, see last paragraph for information about European Union and international students.

## **The process of obtaining the DSAs**

The application process for DSAs takes several months, so it is helpful if prospective students can begin this around April in the year in which they plan to start their studies. If you are an admissions tutor please encourage applicants to discuss their needs with the institution's Disability Service. If your first contact is not until the student is on the course, it is not too late, encourage them to find out what support can be made available.

Once the student has provided the funding body with medical or psychological evidence of their impairment(s), the support each student requires from the DSAs is identified through a Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment is usually conducted by an assessor who is independent of both the higher education institution the student will attend and of the funding body. This process usually involves one of the specialist assessment centres which are dotted around the UK.

The assessor will discuss with the student:

- The impact of their impairment
- The format and activities of the course the student is taking, or intending to take.
- Their previous experience of education.
- Any other relevant information.

During the assessment the student will have the opportunity to talk about what support they might need and any support they have received in the past, for example while at school. They should also have the chance to try out some of the specialist software, computer hardware and other equipment that may be helpful for them during their studies. The student and assessor may find course information from prospectuses and course handbooks useful.

Once the assessment is complete, the assessor writes a needs assessment report which is first sent to the student for checking and comment. Once it is completed, it is sent to the funding body. Once the recommendations in the report have been given final approval by the funding body, the student can order, from approved suppliers, any equipment recommended and they can also (with the assistance of their institution's Disability Service) arrange any other support that has been approved.

Students are entitled to the DSAs throughout their course, though some funding bodies require the application to be renewed each year. The student must inform the funding body if there are any changes in their circumstances, for example if they change course or institution. Students who are not entitled to the DSAs should be encouraged to contact their university Disability Service to ask about alternative forms of funding and support.

## **What do I do if I think the student is not getting all of the support they need?**

Whether or not the student is already getting the DSAs, the best people to help will usually be your institution's Disability Service, as they may be able to identify solutions to any difficulties. You can either discuss your concern with the student direct, if you have a suitably private opportunity, or you can speak directly to the Disability Advisor in confidence.

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