

Disabled Students' Allowances – New DSA students

Higher Education Student Finance in England 2015/16 Academic Year

January 2016

Dear Colleague,

Attached is the guidance for '**Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for new DSA students**' for the 2015/16 Academic Year. This chapter contains guidance on DSA legislation and the administration of new DSA applications.

Guidance on the DSA legislation and administration of DSA applications for Continuing DSA students is published separately and can be found at www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/policy-information/guidance-chapters.aspx

Version 1.1 was updated at section 9.1 to replace reference to SFE complaints procedure with reference to SFE appeals procedure.

Version 1.2 was updated at section 6.6 to clarify the position on Radio aids and DSA funding.

Version 1.3 was updated at section 3.1.9 to clarify the position on applications received after the 9 month deadline and also at section 3.2.5 with some extra guidance on missed sessions at new paragraphs '**NMH 'sessions'**' on page 31 through to '**The role of the disability adviser in managing missed sessions**' on page 32.

Contents

Section 1 – Supporting disabled students in higher education.....	4
1.1 Introduction	4
1.2 The purpose and scope of DSAs	5
1.3 The purpose of this guidance.....	6
1.4 Who the changes apply to	7
1.5 Local Authority Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)	7
1.6 Access agreements and institutions' discretionary funding.....	8
1.8 The role of the student.....	10
1.9 The role of institution disability services.....	11
1.10 The role of the DSAs study needs assessor.....	11

1.11	The role of Student Finance England (SFE)	12
1.12	The role of the Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG)	13
1.13	Conflicts of Interest	14
1.14	Transitional arrangements	14
Section 2 – The Equality Act 2010 and the role of institutions that provide higher education courses		16
2.1	The Equality Act	16
2.2	Monitoring	16
2.3	Anticipating reasonable adjustments	17
2.4	Responding to individual requirements	18
2.5	Examples of reasonable adjustments and good practice	18
2.6	The Equality Act and work placements	18
Section 3 – Disabled Students' Allowances - technical guidance on eligibility and entitlement		20
3.1	General eligibility for DSAs	20
3.2	DSAs for full-time undergraduate students (regulations 40, 40A and 41)	25
3.3	DSAs for part-time undergraduate students (regulation 147)	34
3.4	DSAs for postgraduate students (regulations 158 – 168)	37
Section 4 – The DSAs application process		44
Section 5 – The DSAs Non-medical help allowance		46
5.1	The Student Loans Company Non-medical help services reference manual	46
5.2	BAND ONE – Support Assistants	47
5.3	BAND TWO – Enhanced Support Assistants	48
5.4	BAND THREE - Specialist Enabling Support	51
5.5	BAND FOUR - Specialist Access and Learning Facilitators	52
Section 6 – The major items of specialist equipment allowance		55
6.1	Computers	56
6.2	Other equipment	58
6.3	Assistive and Standard Software	58
6.4	Course Specific Software	59
6.5	Wheelchairs / mobility scooters	59
6.6	Radio aids for deaf students	59
Section 7 – The DSAs Travel Allowance		60
7.1	Attending the institution	60
7.2	Attending a work-placement	60
7.3	Attending a field trip	61
7.4	Taxi firm accounts	61
Section 8 – The DSAs general allowance		62
8.1	DSAs study needs assessments	62
8.2	Living Accommodation	63
8.3	Consumables	63
8.4	Books	63
8.5	Internet connection/costs	65
8.6	Special diets (for those living with allergies)	65
8.7	Fridges (for students needing to store medication)	65
Section 9 – Other		66
9.1	Appeals	66

9.2	Reimbursements.....	66
9.3	Procurement of NMH	67
9.4	VAT and Disabled Students' Allowances.....	67
9.5	Devolved administrations.....	68
ANNEX A - Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD).....		69

Section 1 – Supporting disabled students in higher education

1.1 Introduction

Supporting students to access and succeed in higher education remains a priority for government. For disabled students the government has put in place a comprehensive framework of support, backed by legislation. For the purpose of this document the term ‘institution’ covers any institution which provides higher education (HE) courses which are designated for HE student support purposes, including further education colleges providing HE and alternative providers, unless otherwise indicated. Institutions have the primary legal duty to support disabled students in their studies in higher education, set out in the Equality Act 2010. The government provides additional funding for individuals through the Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs). Provisions in the Care Act mean that 18 year olds who have eligible needs for care and support will in future receive a statutory Care and Support Plan delivered by a Local Authority. Our aim is to ensure that students receive the support they need, through their local authority, their institution and through government, to remove disability related barriers to learning.

All students should be able to access the support they need to ensure that they are able to demonstrate their full academic potential at higher education level, through appropriate academic achievement. This is our aim for all students, including disabled students. Disabled students should arrive at university confident that any barriers to their learning have been identified, understood and appropriate steps taken to reduce their impact. The learning environment should be as inclusive as possible, so that individual interventions are the exception, not the rule. Institutions should engage in a continual improvement cycle that develops inclusive practice, with the aim of reducing the number of individual interventions required. Funding through DSAs should be the top of an apex of support, underpinned by an inclusive environment, and individual reasonable adjustments where required.

This guidance relates to students applying for the English Disabled Students Allowances. The document provides guidance on full-time DSAs, DSAs for full-time distance learning students, part-time DSAs and DSAs for postgraduate students (Part 12) as provided in **Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 as amended by the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2012, The Education (Student Support and European University Institute) (Amendment) Regulations 2013, The Universal Credit (Consequential Supplementary, Incidental and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2013 and The National Treatment Agency (Abolition) and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (Consequential, Transitional and Savings Provisions) Order 2013 (referred to as the “Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 as amended”)**. References throughout to the 2011 Regulations are to the 2011 regulations as amended by any subsequent legislation. Guidance on other grants for living and other costs payable under Part 5 of the Regulations is provided separately in the guidance chapters ‘Assessing Financial

Entitlement' and 'Grants for Dependants'. Both these guides are updated annually for each academic year.

1.2 The purpose and scope of DSAs

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) have been providing individual statutory support for disabled students for over 25 years. In that time the number of disabled students entering and succeeding in higher education has increased¹. Over the same period the response of the HE sector has evolved, with institutions now anticipating significant numbers of disabled students and working to improve access and inclusivity for those students.

DSAs continue to have an important role. Some students do have needs that are not easily anticipated and support would require individual analysis to accommodate. DSAs will continue to contribute to the additional costs resulting from disability over and above those provided as reasonable adjustments. It remains the case that DSAs will only be considered where it has been established that the student is obliged by reason of their disability to incur additional expenditure to be able to attend or undertake their course i.e. the support is essential. Such expenditure must be reasonably incurred and appropriate to the individual needs of the student. DSAs are not intended to assist with disability-related expenditure that the student would continue to incur if they were not following their course. Local authority social services may well continue to provide assistance towards personal care costs that will be incurred irrespective of whether or not the student is attending their course.

This document sets out the framework for higher education students domiciled in England and applying for DSAs for the first time for an academic year starting on or after 1 September 2015.

Disabled students should expect to be able to study effectively and leave higher education as more autonomous, independent learners, ready to follow their chosen career. The provision of support, both institution and DSAs, should focus on achieving those outcomes.

¹ In absolute terms the number of students declaring themselves as disabled has increased more than fourfold since 1994/95. In 2012/13 10% of first year UK domiciled HE students declared themselves as disabled, compared with 3% in 1994/95.

1.3 The purpose of this guidance

This guidance is for use by DSAs study needs assessors and Student Finance England DSAs assessors when considering the support that may be funded through DSAs. Higher education institutions' staff may also find the information helpful when considering how best to support their disabled students and signposting students to available DSAs support.

Higher education institutions are under a duty to support disabled students as set out in the Equality Act 2010. An institution should anticipate and respond to the needs of its disabled students where it is reasonable to do so. This guidance does not set out what an institution should do to meet that legal duty. The decision on how to satisfy that duty is for the institution to determine and advice is available from other sources, for example the Equality Challenge Unit <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/managing-reasonable-adjustments-in-higher-education/> .

This guidance sets out the type of support that may be funded for students through DSAs.

Information on complementary sources of funding is set out at sections 1.6 – 1.8.

For 2015/16 the maximum amounts through DSAs are:

Type of student	Specialist equipment allowance	Non-medical helper allowance	General allowance
Full-time	Up to £5,212 for the whole course	Up to £20,725 a year	Up to £1,741 a year
Part-time	Up to £5,212 for the whole course	Up to £15,543 a year	Up to £1,305 a year
Postgraduate	A single allowance of up to £10,362 a year		

The travel allowance is uncapped.

The DSAs study needs assessor will continue to consider what DSAs-funded support is essential for the individual student. This reflects the regulatory requirement that funding through DSAs will only be provided for costs a student is *obliged* to incur. The DSAs study needs assessor will have regard to this guidance and regulations when determining what DSAs-funded support to recommend for the student. The Secretary of State requires the Student Loans Company to deliver DSAs according to the regulations and the guidance set out here, where applicable. Institutions should consider how they can best support this process, for example by publishing the support available to their general student body, and disabled students in particular, on their websites.

The DSAs assessor should also be aware of the requirement for local authorities to provide the DSAs assessor with current assessment information for young people with special educational needs who have been supported through an Education, Health and Care plan while at school and/or college, where requested by the student².

1.4 Who the changes apply to

Any changes set out in this document apply to all disabled students applying for DSAs for the first time for academic year 2015/16. Continuing students in receipt of DSAs will continue on their current package of support for 2015/16. This includes undergraduate and postgraduate students studying part-time, full-time or by distance learning. See 1.13 for full details of transitional arrangements. Assessors should refer to the separate 2015/16 guidance for continuing students where appropriate.

1.5 Local Authority Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Some disabled students will enter HE having had an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan while at school or college.

The new 0-25 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice makes clear that local authorities should plan the transition into higher education before ceasing to maintain the young person's EHC plan, including how health and social care support will be maintained, where it continues to be required.

The Code of Practice makes clear that, where health and social care support is still required, local authorities should plan how it will be maintained and which authority will provide it, before ceasing the EHC plan. Even though an EHC plan will cease when a young person takes up a place in higher education, the health and social care support they remain entitled to will continue. Provisions in the Care Act mean that 18 year olds who have eligible needs for care and support will in future receive a statutory Care and Support Plan. This would form the Care part of their EHC Plan where one is in place but would continue in its own right as a statutory Plan once a young person entered Higher Education and their EHC Plan was no longer maintained.

In addition, the regulations which accompany the Act require Local Authorities to:

- make young people aware of support available to them in higher education through their local offer, including the Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) and how to make an early claim so that support is in place when they start their course;
- share a copy of an EHC plan with the Higher Education Institution that a young person will be attending and also with the person assessing

² 0-25 SEN Code of Practice, Chapter 8, page 134, paras 8.45-8.48:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

them for the Disabled Students Allowance with a young person's consent (for example the DSAs study needs assessor). The intention here is to ensure that the valuable up-to-date information contained within an EHC assessment is shared, both with the person assessing them for the DSAs, and with the institution that they are planning to attend, so that other provision may be made as appropriate, in line with the institution's own policies.

- set out in an easily accessible and public "local offer" the support available to young people in higher education, particularly DSAs and the process and timescales for making an application for DSAs.

1.6 Access agreements and institutions' discretionary funding

The Secretary of State and the Minister for Universities issued guidance to the Director of Fair Access in February 2011. The guidance described what should be set out in new access agreements. It asked the Director to focus more on the outcomes of outreach and other access activities and to review access agreements every year.

The guidance made clear that under-represented groups across higher education include disabled students. It specifically said that we would like institutions to consider these and other under-represented groups within their overall approach to access, and that we would like the Director to take account of their efforts in considering access agreements.

The guidance established a new framework for widening participation, placing increased responsibility on universities. Those institutions with access agreements agreed with the Office for Fair Access estimate they will spend £713m on measures to support access and student success for disadvantaged students and including disabled students through their access agreements in 2014/15, up from £444m in 2011/12.

1.6.1 The Office for Fair Access guidance to institutions

The Office for Fair Access publishes guidance to institutions annually concerning how they should produce their access agreements. For 2013-14 access agreements (published April 2012), The Office for Fair Access asked institutions to say how they had executed their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The guidance for 2014-15 and 2015-16 access agreements required institutions to demonstrate that due regard to the promotion of equality and diversity is embedded in their work throughout the document. It asked institutions to consider how their access agreement and the institution's equality and diversity strategy could be better aligned to complement and strengthen each other.

In constructing their own targets and benchmarks for success, institutions are asked to assess their performance using HESA data and relevant equality data, such as concerning disability.

In their 2014-15 Access Agreements:

- Around 60% of institutions included a target relating to disabled students.
- Of these, a small number of institutions have set collaborative disability targets. For example, members of the Hampshire Universities Widening Participation Group set a target to establish a collaborative disability network, and universities in the south-west have set targets relating to the work of the South West Disability Group and the Cornwall Disability Research Network.
- Of all the institutions which submitted National Scholarship Programme information for 2014-15 to HEFCE (226), 55 (24%) used disability as part of their criteria.

An institution can choose how to allocate discretionary funds in whatever way they wish. However, many choose actively to support those who fall into certain groups, including disabled students and students from low income families. For example, in their 2014/15 access agreements:

- Falmouth University provides a £1,000 award in the first year, to any student with a registered disability other than dyslexia, to encourage disclosure and ensure appropriate support is put in place.
- The University of Gloucestershire have a Disabled Students' Sports Excellence Fund to encourage diversity in the sporting community, which is a significant part of the University's academic and cultural contribution to Gloucestershire. This fund will provide up to five bursaries of £1,000 cash and £1,500 fee waivers, in addition to other benefits, in each year of their course, to support students who have the potential to represent at national, regional or University level.
- Sussex Downs College provides disabled student awards of between £300 and £600 twice throughout the course according to income.
- Goldsmith's University offers up to four bursaries of £4,500 to disabled students. These awards are assessed on academic merit and on student need, to ensure that they are well-focussed.

1.7 The role of HEFCE

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocates a Disability Premium to publicly-funded institutions in England (£15m in 2014/15), through the student opportunity fund. Allocations are made to publicly-funded institutions on a pro-rata basis, based in part on the proportion of students recruited who are in receipt of DSAs. The aim of the funding is to support the recruitment and retention of disabled students. The funding is not ring-fenced but the investment in disabled students and activities supported are recorded through institution's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment submission to HEFCE.

Although institutions are accountable for showing that their funds have been spent appropriately, institutions are autonomous in the way they distribute funds internally. HEFCE does not produce detailed guidance on how institutions should use their disability-related funding allocation but draws institutions' attention to its guidance on base-level provision and the Equality Act.

1.7.1 The Student Opportunity Fund

Alongside the funding institutions receive from students through the fees they charge, the Government also provides financial support for institutions through the Teaching Grant. The student opportunity fund is part of the overall Teaching Grant allocated to Higher Education Institutions by HEFCE and it is their responsibility to take decisions on how their budgets are allocated. For 2014/15 HEFCE allocated a total of £366 million through their student opportunity fund for widening access, student retention and success, and to support disabled students. The element for disabled students is designed to support greater access to higher education for disabled students and improve their overall learning and teaching experience.

The HEFCE disability allocation supports a wide range of activities in the majority of institutions. Over three-fifths of survey respondents (N = 104) reported that they provide additional support for examinations and assessments (64); staff development (63); a dedicated disability support unit (60); additional admissions support (59); non-medical helpers (57); specialist IT equipment (57); induction materials (54); additional pastoral support (54); and provision of modified or additional learning tools (53).

The majority of these services are designed specifically for disabled students. However, like some wider retention work, there are a minority of activities that are not only targeted at students known to have a disability. The interviews revealed that diagnostic services are available to all students in at least some institutions, in addition to a range of other services – such as note takers or specialist IT equipment. For example, an interviewee from an institution reported that voice recognition software had recently been installed on all university computers for the benefit of all students³.

Whilst no ring-fenced funding is provided to institutions to support disabled students, an institution should consider carefully how it will support its disabled students, including those on low incomes who may require individual access to personal computer equipment.

1.8 The role of the student

Any student wishing to apply for DSAs should continue to do so. The eligibility criteria are set out in section 3 and the application process is set out at section 4. Students are advised to apply for DSAs as soon as possible, to ensure that all parties involved in identifying and providing support are aware

³ The uses and impact of HEFCE funding for widening participation' CFE Consulting and Edge Hill University, March 2013

of the student's needs. The student is encouraged to contact the disability services at their chosen HE institutions at the same time as completing their DSAs application form, to ensure reasonable adjustments can be considered.

1.9 The role of institution disability services

Those working in disability services within institutions will have a well contextualised understanding of their disabled student body and have the key role in ensuring support is delivered effectively. Students may contact disability advisers before making an application for DSAs. The starting point for the disability adviser is the effective provision of reasonable adjustments, both for students who may claim DSAs and for those who don't (for example overseas students). The student should be advised to claim DSAs if an identified need cannot be met through a reasonable adjustment and funding through DSAs is available. However, many students will choose to apply for DSAs without speaking to a disability adviser, particularly those who are applying early and have not had their institution confirmed.

If asked to assist a student with their DSAs study needs assessment it is essential that the disability adviser does not advise the student to purchase equipment or services on the assumption that funding through DSAs will be made available. Eligibility for DSAs can only be determined by Student Finance England (SFE) and entitlement to funding through DSAs will be based on the recommendations of a DSAs study needs assessor.

However, disability advisers have an understanding of the institutional environment and will have access to academic teaching staff and to detailed course information. Similarly, disability advisers will also be an important point of liaison during the study needs assessment process, when the details of DSAs support packages are being established.

Disability advisers will also have an up-to-date knowledge of the level and type of support offered by their institution as reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act, or more generally as part of the institution's support for disabled students or students in general. Institutions should also be working towards making this information more readily accessible to relevant stakeholders, including students and Assessment Centres. Needs assessors must take account of what help is available from the institution (for example, transcribing services) when assessing what type and level of support is additional to that already available in order to make appropriate recommendations.

1.10 The role of the DSAs study needs assessor

The role of the DSAs study needs assessor is to consider the nature of the student's disability and its impact, analyse their previous educational experience and establish a package of solutions to enable access to their current chosen course. Through discussions with the student, and using the information in the specialist diagnostic assessment report, EHC plan, or other information provided by their GP, consultant etc., the assessor should identify

what support is essential to enable the student to demonstrate their academic potential. Assessors are required to have regard to the relevant DSAs clauses in the Student Support Regulations, this guidance and value for money principles when considering the support funded through DSAs that they wish to recommend for the student. DSAs support should not be recommended where support is available from another source e.g. the institution, NHS, local authority etc.

DSAs study needs assessors should set out clearly in the report what recommendations they are making for DSAs-funded support. Any recommendations for DSAs support will continue to require clear and robust justification. Decisions on the support to award will be taken by Student Finance England, taking into account the recommendations of the DSAs study needs assessor.

If the DSAs study needs assessor identifies a need for support that falls outside DSAs funding, they will wish to advise the institution of their findings for consideration under reasonable adjustments. The DSAs study needs assessor should not state how that support should be delivered or the level required – that is for the institution to determine taking into account the individual needs of the student. The advisory note in the report should simply state: ‘The DSAs study needs assessment has identified some areas where the student may require support, but the support falls outside the scope of DSAs. It is therefore suggested that the university and its academic, administrative and support departments note the following areas where the student may require additional support and consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the identified need...’

Study needs assessors are required to follow certain processes when undertaking a DSAs study needs assessment and compliance with those processes will be audited annually. A standard Needs Assessment Report is used to ensure consistency of approach. The Report will be sent to Student Finance England, and simultaneously to the institution’s disability service if the student gives their permission to do so.

The DSAs study needs assessor makes recommendations; they do not make final decisions on eligibility or entitlement to DSAs. Decisions on eligibility and entitlement are a Secretary of State function which has been delegated to the Student Loans Company (including Student Finance England). Eligibility criteria are set out in the regulations. Student Finance England will have regard to the recommendation of the DSAs study needs assessor when considering entitlement to DSAs support.

1.11 The role of Student Finance England (SFE)

SFE is a Student Loans Company service, providing financial support to students on behalf of the UK Government to students from England entering higher education in the UK. SFE are required to deliver DSAs within the framework set by the Student Support Regulations and guidance. SFE may

contact BIS with questions that arise from the applications they are processing and the guidance may be updated to clarify the policy if needed.

SFE are required to make decisions on DSAs awards, taking into account the recommendations of the DSAs study needs assessor. SFE will challenge DSAs study needs assessment reports where DSAs support is recommended that falls outside this guidance or where support from other sources is known to be offered. Similarly the report will be challenged if the individual DSAs recommendations are not sufficiently justified according to the guidance and the impact identified during the DSAs study needs assessment. Challenges will be brought to the attention of the Assessment Centre manager for monitoring purposes.

1.12 The role of the Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG)

DSA-QAG is a non-profit making company with charitable status. Its Board consists of Chairman, two NUS trustees and two independent trustees. Institutions, assessment centres and equipment suppliers are 'associate members' of DSA-QAG, with observers from BIS and the SLC. A central administrative unit supports this work. DSA-QAG has responsibility for a quality assurance framework against which levels of service for both DSAs assessment centres and equipment suppliers are audited.

From 2015/16, only DSA-QAG accredited assessment centres can provide DSAs-funded study needs assessments (England and Wales). Assistive technology, including assistive software is expected to be provided and installed by registered assistive technology service providers. Student may opt to source their computer from the open market. Assistive technology training is currently provided by a mix of providers, some of whom fall within this arrangement and some who do not. More information on DSA-QAG and a list of registered and accredited assessment centres and suppliers is available at the following website: <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/>. Non-medical help services are not included in the DSA-QAG registration scheme for 2015/16.

DSA-QAG registered or accredited organisations are required to comply with the standards set out in the DSA-QAG Quality Assurance Frameworks in order to retain accreditation to deliver DSAs related services <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/Framework-Documents/framework-documents.html> . This does not affect their membership of DSA-QAG.

From 2015/16 Assessment Centre and assistive technology service providers are required to be registered with DSA-QAG in order to deliver DSAs services, unless they are based in Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Alongside this, from 2015/16 a new oversight group led by BIS will have the role of considering the accreditation of the DSA-QAG membership organisations, disseminate good practice and consider actions for

organisations who do not meet expected standards. Peer review will form part of this process.

1.13 Conflicts of Interest

Public funds should be used fairly, transparently, and for the purpose intended. Anyone making decisions about the administration, distribution or use of DSAs must at all times be conscious of any relationships or links they have, or any actions they take or do not take, that could raise doubts about their impartiality or probity. This includes any relationships or links – including personal, financial, business, or familial – that could be seen to have an influence on their decision making. Managing conflicts of interest appropriately is essential for protecting the integrity of the DSAs process. Guidance on conflicts of interest will be issued shortly.

1.14 Transitional arrangements

The changes set out in this guidance apply to:

- (i) Students who are starting a higher education course for the first time in 2015/16 and are applying for DSAs for the first time;
- (ii) Students who are starting a higher education course in 2015/16 and are applying for DSAs, having studied on a previous course where they were not awarded DSAs;
- (iii) Students who are starting a higher education course in 2015/16 and are applying for DSAs, having ceased to undertake a previous HE course where they were awarded DSAs more than 5 months before the start of the current course (i.e. the gap between the two courses is more than an intervening vacation); or
- (iv) Students who are continuing a higher education course in 2015/16 and who are applying for DSAs for the first time.

Transitional arrangements are in place for the following students, who will continue to be assessed under the Student Support Regulations 2011 and the 'continuing students' DSAs guidance published separately.

- (i) Students who are continuing on a higher education course in 2015/16, having been awarded DSAs for a previous academic year/years of their course;
- (ii) Students who are transferring to a higher education course starting in 2015/16 from a previous course which started before 2015/16, where the student was awarded DSAs for the course they transferred from;
- (iii) Students who are starting a higher education course in 2015/16 immediately after (excluding an intervening vacation – maximum 5 months) completing a previous higher education course, where the student was awarded DSAs for the previous course; or
- (iv) Students who started a higher education course before 2015/16, who suspended their studies with the agreement of their HEI and notified Student Finance England and are returning to their course in 2015/16, where the student was awarded DSAs for a year/years of the course

before 2015/16. The period of suspension is normally up to 1 academic year in length but could be up to two years in exceptional circumstances.

Section 2 – The Equality Act 2010 and the role of institutions that provide higher education courses

2.1 The Equality Act

As independent and autonomous bodies institutions are entirely responsible for addressing any issues of discrimination that might come to their attention. The Government provides a legal framework for individuals, which protects their right not to be discriminated against – primarily through the Equality Act 2010. Institutions are prohibited by law, through the Equality Act 2010, from discrimination against students with protected characteristics which includes disability.

Under the Equality Act 2010 institutions have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to ensure they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled students.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments comprises three requirements:

- Where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.
- Where a physical feature puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function.
- Where not providing an auxiliary aid or service puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to provide that auxiliary aid/service.

The duty to make adjustments arises where a provision, criterion or practice, a physical feature or the absence of an auxiliary aid or service puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled.

The Act leaves open what particular auxiliary aids or services might be provided in specific circumstances. The duty remains with the education provider to determine what steps it would be reasonable for them to take.

2.2 Monitoring

- Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011, institutions are required to publish information as to their compliance with the general public sector equality duty. This requires institutions to publish information to demonstrate they have had due regard to the equality objectives

- In order to give proper consideration to the aims set out in the public sector equality duty, a relevant body will need to have sufficient evidence of the impact its policies and practices are having, or are likely to have, on people with different protected characteristics.
- The courts have made clear the need to collate relevant information in order to have evidence-based decision making and a body subject to the duty will need to be able to show that it had adequate evidence to enable it to have due regard.
- Adequate and accurate equality evidence, properly understood and analysed, is at the root of effective compliance with the public sector equality duty. Without it, a body subject to the duty would be unlikely to be able to have due regard to its aims.
- In addition, all providers of higher education courses which attract public funding, including alternative providers with courses designated for student support purposes, are expected to comply with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The Quality Code sets out Expectations which higher education providers are required to meet to ensure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for all students, including disabled students; that the learning opportunities provided are monitored; and that the provider considers how to improve them. Providers which attract public funding are required to be reviewed periodically by the QAA to ensure they are meeting those Expectations.
- Under the quality code institutions are expected to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. They need to apply processes consistently for assessing the impact of current and proposed policies and procedures on all students, taking into account the diversity of protected characteristics, in line with principles of equity, and to identify organisational barriers to student development and achievement.

2.3 Anticipating reasonable adjustments

The duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students is anticipatory, which means institutions must plan ahead and take a strategic approach to addressing the barriers that potentially impede individuals with different kinds of disability. This will involve institutions putting in place systems that are inclusive or can be utilised as appropriate by disabled students, staff and/or visitors.

Some disabilities are more common in the student body than others. Our evidence shows that the prevalence of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) in the UK domiciled student population has been fairly constant over the last decade and is estimated to be higher than in the general population. Students with SpLDs constitute just under half of the higher education population that declare a disability, the largest disability group that institution

provision needs to accommodate. Within this group the most common learning difficulty is dyslexia. This suggests that all institutions will have a number of students with dyslexia who may require adjustments, which could include making changes to course materials and course delivery.

We would expect institutions to particularly consider what anticipatory adjustments should be made to accommodate this significant proportion of disabled students. However, we recognise that for some students these adjustments will not be sufficient, and for these DSAs support will need to be accessed.

2.4 Responding to individual requirements

It will not always be possible for institutions to anticipate the needs of every prospective disabled student. Disability is an individual experience, with both the nature and the impact of the disability varying from individual to individual. Once an education provider becomes aware of the requirements of an individual disabled student it should consider what reasonable adjustments it can make to meet those requirements.

In the past, the provision of DSAs may have removed the need for reasonable adjustments in some cases. However, DSAs funding is not a replacement for reasonable adjustments. Institutions should not take the continued provision of DSAs as setting the limit to their reasonable adjustments. We expect institutions to strive to provide the best possible support for all their students, including their body of disabled students, to continue to remove or reduce the need for individual support through DSAs.

2.5 Examples of reasonable adjustments and good practice

Over time we hope to provide case studies of good practice in institutions, which those involved in strategic planning within institutions may wish to have regard to. Each institution will have its own response to how to best support its body of disabled students and case studies will be offered as examples, not a statement of what each institution should be doing in a particular area.

There are many sources of information on managing reasonable adjustments, for example: *Managing Reasonable Adjustments in Higher Education* (Equality Challenge Unit 2010), *Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties* (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2010)) etc.

2.6 The Equality Act and work placements

Work placements are included in the Equality Act 2010 which means that college and university staff must also take into account a person's disability when arranging work placements and liaise with the work placement providers to implement the support. This includes people who are on a work placement as part of a vocational training programme. A vocational training programme is likely to include most students who are undertaking a work placement as an

integral part of a further or higher education course. The providers of work placements are now required to ensure that they do not have discriminatory practices and also to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people on a work placement. The length of the work placement may be a factor when determining whether an adjustment is reasonable.

Section 3 – Disabled Students’ Allowances - technical guidance on eligibility and entitlement

3.1 General eligibility for DSAs

The personal eligibility criteria for receiving full-time and part-time student support, including DSAs, are set out in regulations and are covered in the SLC’s ‘Assessing Eligibility Guidance’ chapter.

Additionally, a student must meet the definition of disability in order to be eligible to receive DSAs (see 3.1.1 below) – but see transitional arrangements at 1.13.

DSAs are not subject to:

- an age limit;
- previous study rules; or
- income assessment.

A student can only receive support for a designated course. Where the eligible course does not appear on the institution database, it will not be possible to fully process the application. Information on what action should be taken in this situation is covered in the ‘General Eligibility and Financial Assessment Administration’ guidance.

Students are potentially eligible for DSAs whilst attending an overseas institution as part of their UK course, whether obligatory or optional.

Students who are personally eligible for student support under paragraph 9 of Schedule 1 of the student support regulations (i.e. nationals of member states of the European Union), but not under any other paragraph of that Schedule, are not eligible for DSAs.

DSAs are not available for:

- Disability related expenditure that the student would incur even if they were not attending a course of higher education;
- Costs that any student might have regardless of disability;
- Auxiliary aids and services which are provided by the student’s local authority under a Care Plan;
- Auxiliary aids and services which are provided through other public funding e.g. mobility allowances, NHS support;
- Treatment for a disability;
- Diagnostic assessments for any type of disability or health condition;
- Temporary illness or injury – support from the institution or the NHS is appropriate here; or

- General learning difficulties – institution academic support is appropriate here.

Costs incurred during vacation periods

Study skills support, assistive technology support or assistive technology installation and training provided during the long vacation may be considered through DSAs, if SFE are satisfied that the support is reasonable and appropriate with regard to the circumstances of the student. Any such support undertaken outside term-time does not count as attendance and therefore would not trigger Loan Courses Loan or extra weeks' maintenance loan.

Social Services

Social Services may continue to provide assistance towards personal care costs that would be incurred in the UK, regardless of whether or not a student is attending a course. Support needs can be reassessed by Social Services when there is a change in a person's personal circumstances, such as leaving home to attend a course or a change in health. In the event of a student moving away from their home area to attend a course, funding responsibilities for personal care would continue to rest with the Social Services Department in the student's home area. Social Services receive money from Central Government to fund personal care support for disabled people and are responsible for deciding how their budget allocation is spent.

3.1.1 Definition of disability

For DSAs, the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability is used to determine eligibility. Students falling within the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability are eligible to apply for support through DSAs.

The Act defines a disabled person as a person with a disability. A person has a disability for the purposes of the Act if he or she has a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (S6(1)).

Sometimes a student's disability does not substantially affect their normal day to day activities but does have a substantial effect on their ability to study. In the context of DSAs 'day-to-day activities' includes education. See guidance at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85010/disability-definition.pdf which is issued pursuant to section 6(5) of the Equality Act 2010.

3.1.2 Evidence of a disability

For most applicants, there should be little difficulty establishing their eligibility for DSAs. Their disability will have been identified and documented at an earlier stage, in many cases while they were at school. However, it is not essential for an applicant's disability to have been identified at school in order to be eligible for DSAs.

The DSAs are not intended to provide assistance to members of the general student population who experience temporary illness or injury. Assisting such students would properly be the responsibility of institutions and the NHS, as appropriate. Nor are DSAs intended to provide assistance to students with general learning difficulties.

A student wishing to apply for DSAs is required to submit medical/diagnostic evidence in order for eligibility to DSAs to be determined. Medical evidence can be in the form of a diagnostic assessment (for students with a SpLD), or evidence from a GP or consultant, or other qualified medical practitioner or appropriate specialist. Medical evidence should state the nature of the student's disability and ideally should also briefly explain how the student's disability impacts upon them. SFE will seek further information from the student/medical practitioner if it is not clear that the student meets the definition of disabled. Evidence included in an EHC plan can support the diagnosis, particularly in signalling areas where the student needs support.

Students with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia will need to provide evidence of this by submitting a diagnostic assessment from a practitioner psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher (see Annex A for more information on diagnosing and assessing students with SpLD). The diagnostic assessment must have been carried out after the student's 16th birthday to be valid for DSAs purposes. Institutions may be able to offer assistance to students requiring a post-16 diagnostic assessment.

Cases may arise where the evidence that the student has a disability is deemed insufficient. In such cases, the student should be invited to provide further evidence, perhaps in the form of a diagnosis undertaken by a professional body or another acceptable person or their EHC Plan. In making such an invitation, it must be made clear to the student that they will normally be liable to meet the cost of providing the necessary evidence. This cost cannot be met through DSAs, however some institutions may consider providing help with the costs of diagnostic assessments e.g. for dyslexia.

Once satisfactory evidence is received, the student will be notified to book a DSAs study needs assessment to identify the appropriate course-related support. The cost of the DSAs study needs assessment is met from the general allowance of the DSAs. Once the initial evidence of a disability has been accepted, in most cases there should be no need for students to provide updated evidence of their disability at a later stage in the course. An exception would be if the student's condition changes or if there is reason to believe that the student's condition may change later in the course. Sometimes an expert may also include recommendations for DSAs support with their medical evidence. Given that the expert is unlikely to be aware of course requirements and appropriate strategies and technologies, there is still a requirement for the student to receive a separate full DSAs study needs assessment of their course needs, and different recommendations may be made.

Any cost a student incurs obtaining the necessary expert evidence or opinion cannot be met from the DSAs. This is because such costs are not incurred by the student to attend or undertake their course; they are incurred to substantiate their eligibility for DSAs.

3.1.3 Students diagnosed after the start of their HE course

Students who become disabled or are diagnosed with a disability, including a SpLD, after the start of their HE course of study may apply for DSAs once they have received their diagnosis, diagnostic assessment or have medical evidence confirming the presence of their disability.

3.1.4 English students studying in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Some English students who intend to study in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland may attend a DSAs study needs assessment in England before they start their course. This should be carried out by a DSA-QAG registered or accredited assessment centre.

However, there will be some occasions when students who are domiciled in England but study in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland require a DSAs study needs assessment during term time. In these circumstances, SFE will continue to accept DSAs study needs assessments carried out by centres used by the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) and the Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland). Students studying in Wales are covered by the DSA-QAG administered list of assessment centres.

SAAS operate a 'Toolkit of Quality Indicators for Needs Assessments' under which institutions and centres become validated as assessors recognised by SAAS. A list of institutions and centres validated by SAAS to undertake DSAs study needs assessments can be found on the SAAS website: www.saas.gov.uk (click on 'disabled students', and then 'needs assessment').

Centres in the devolved administrations must have regard to the English Student Support Regulations and this DSAs Guidance when recommending support for English students.

3.1.5 Prisoners

Full-time students who are prisoners and who began a designated course before 1st September 2012 are potentially eligible for DSAs but will not generally qualify for other grants for living and other costs under Part 5 of the Regulations (regulation 109(8) & (9)). See 'Grants for Dependants' guidance chapter. No Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) (including DSAs for postgraduate courses) will be available to any prisoner who starts a course on or after 1 September 2012. The responsibility to provide assistance for disabled prisoners will lie with the Prison Service.

3.1.6 Means-tested NHS bursaries

Under regulation 38(4)(a), students are not eligible for grants for living and other costs for any academic year during which they are eligible to apply for NHS means-tested bursaries or similar awards bestowed under section 63 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, article 44 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 or sections 73(f) and 74(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (if the latter is granted in respect of a course leading to a qualification in a healthcare profession other than as a medical doctor or a dentist). Students who are eligible to apply for an NHS bursary should be directed to the NHS Student Bursaries website at <http://www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk> for information about the financial support available through the NHS Bursary Scheme. Or they can phone the NHS Student Bursaries Helpline on 0845 358 6655.

3.1.7 Students who begin an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course on or after 1st September 2010

Where a student begins an ITT course on or after 1st September 2010, the student support package available will depend on whether the course is either full-time or part-time. Designated full-time first degree and postgraduate ITT courses of at least one academic year in length will attract the same support package as full-time non-ITT first degree courses. Designated part-time first degree and postgraduate ITT courses of at least one academic year in length will attract the same part-time package as other part-time non-ITT first degree courses: for courses starting before 1 September 2012, a fee grant and a course grant and for courses starting on or after 1 September 2012, an up-front fee loan (see 'Support for Part-time Students' guidance chapter). Part-time ITT courses will also attract DSAs.

3.1.8 DSAs applications received in the final stages of a course

Students are permitted to apply for DSAs at any stage of their course and DSAs funding can be considered for support needs from the date the application is received, irrespective of the time left on the course. It is advised that students requiring support near the end of their course should contact their disability adviser in order for reasonable adjustments to be considered in the first instance.

Disability Advisers may be able to arrange institutional support, such as exam support, study support or revision skills, and loan equipment.

3.1.9 Time limits

The Student Support Regulations require that student support must be applied for on an annual basis. Generally a time limit for applications is set at nine months from the start of the academic year (Regulation 9). For disabled students this can be extended as long as the application has been made as soon as is reasonably practicable (Regulation 9(2)(d)). Students are advised to apply as soon as possible, to enable support to be put in place by the start of the academic year.

Students may apply outside the general time limit for a number of reasons for example, they are newly diagnosed with a disability or the need for support has only arisen later in the academic year or towards the end of their course. Students are permitted to apply for DSAs irrespective of the time left on the course. Students should continue to apply for support as and when the need arises. However, students applying outside the general time limit will need to provide details of why they have applied outside the general time limit to enable the Secretary of State to determine that they have applied as soon as reasonably practicable.

Applications for DSAs that are made after the end of the academic year will generally not be considered retrospectively for that year. The application will ordinarily be administered as being an application for the academic year within which the application has been received.

It is advised that students requiring support near the end of their course should contact their disability adviser in order for reasonable adjustments to be considered in the first instance. Disability Advisers may be able to arrange institutional support, such as exam support, study support or revision skills, and loan equipment.

3.2 DSAs for full-time undergraduate students (regulations 40, 40A and 41)

3.2.1 Sandwich courses and work placements

Students on part-year paid or unpaid placements where the periods of full-time study in the academic year are 10 weeks or more in aggregate are potentially eligible for DSAs. For example, DSAs could pay for additional disability related travel costs to and from the institution using the travel allowance.

When a student is going on a work placement as part of their course, the DSAs study needs assessment should take this into account and, for example, consider the portability of equipment if students need to take it with them on the placement. The institution and the provider of the work

placement should consider what reasonable adjustments are required to support the student during their work placement. Some courses already provide separate funding towards costs e.g. social work courses may attract a bursary towards travel costs.

Under regulation 38(6) students are not eligible for grants for living and other costs, including DSAs, in any academic year of a sandwich course where the periods of full-time study are in aggregate less than 10 weeks (unless the period of work experience is an unpaid placement of a type specified in regulation 38(7)). Students who do not qualify for grants for living and other costs under regulation 38(6) are eligible for a reduced rate maintenance loan which is not subject to income assessment (regulation 80(1)(b) & 80(2)(b)).

Under regulation 38(7) students undertaking certain types of unpaid work experience in the public or voluntary sectors are potentially eligible for grants for living and other costs, including DSAs (even where the periods of full-time study in the academic year are less than 10 weeks in aggregate) - see 'Assessing Eligibility Guidance'.

3.2.2 Students who become eligible during the course

Under regulation 38(8) & 38(9), a student **may qualify** for DSAs from and including the academic year during which:

- the student's course becomes designated;
- the student, their spouse, civil partner or their parent is recognised as a refugee or is granted Humanitarian Protection (in this context 'spouse' or 'civil partner' does not include a co-habiting partner of the student - also refer to the 'Assessing Eligibility' guidance);
- the state of which the student is a national accedes to the European Union and where the student has been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and Islands throughout the three-year period immediately preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course;
- the student acquires the right of permanent residence;
- the student becomes the child of a Turkish Worker;
- the student becomes a person described in paragraph 6(1)(a) of Schedule 1 (of the Student Support Regulations); or
- the student becomes the child of a Swiss national.

However, such a student is not eligible retrospectively. With the exception of the allowance for major items of specialist equipment, a student is not eligible for DSAs for quarters falling before, or in which, the date eligibility was acquired due to an event listed above. A student is not eligible for DSAs for academic years of the course falling **before** the academic year in which the events listed above occur.

3.2.3 Full-time distance learning courses

Where disabled students undertake a full-time course by distance learning solely because their disability prevents them from attending an institution, they are treated as being in attendance on the course. Such students are

potentially eligible for DSAs under regulation 40, 40A & 41. They are also potentially eligible for the other elements of the full-time student support package (except travel grant).

Where disabled students undertake a full-time course by distance learning but are not compelled to study in this way because of their disability, they cannot be treated as being in attendance on the course. Students electing to study by distance learning are instead considered for eligibility for DSAs under regulation 127 which are payable at the same full-time rates as those provided under regulation 41. Where the student commences their full time distance learning course prior to 1st September 2012, they are also potentially eligible for a fee grant and course grant similar to those offered to eligible part-time students. Where the student commences their full time distance learning course on or after 1st September 2012 they will potentially be eligible for a tuition fee loan to cover the tuition fee charged, but no maintenance support. Such students will continue to be potentially eligible for DSAs under regulation 127.

There is further guidance about full-time distance learning courses in the 'Assessing eligibility guidance 2014/15'.

3.2.4 Maximum DSAs for full-time undergraduate students

There are four elements to the full-time undergraduate DSAs, which are available for students for students attending full-time courses or part-time ITT courses which began before 1st September 2010:

- NMH allowance
- Major items of specialist equipment allowance
- Travel allowance
- General allowance

The maximum allowances that such students may receive in 2015/16 are given in the table below. Two of the allowances (non-medical helper allowance and general allowance) are lower for students attending part-time ITT courses which began before 1st September 2010 where the period of full-time attendance, including teaching practice, during the academic year aggregates less than six weeks.

Allowance	Maximum payable	
	Full-time	Part-time ITT course which began before 1st September 2010 (less than 6 weeks attendance)
Non-medical helper allowance (each academic year)	£20,725	£15,543
Specialist equipment allowance	£5,212	£5,212

(for the duration of the course)		
General allowance (each academic year)	£1,741	£1,305
Travel allowance	Uncapped	Uncapped

There is no provision to pay more than the maximum allowances set out in the Regulations. It is not possible, therefore, to use unspent DSAs from a previous academic year or anticipate grant entitlement for a future academic year to pay more than the maximum allowances in the current academic year. Moreover, only the general allowance may be used to supplement expenditure on specialist equipment and non-medical helpers should the student's needs exceed the maximum allowances under the Regulations. The specialist equipment allowance, non-medical helper allowance and the travel allowance should be used for the sole purpose as named and should not be used to supplement other DSAs.

3.2.5 Non-medical helper allowance (regulation 41(2)(a))

The non-medical helper allowance is to provide funding for additional support which the student requires, because of a disability, to undertake their course on an equal basis to other students. Institutional reasonable adjustments, including technical adjustments, should be considered in the first instance, before a recommendation for DSAs funding is made.

For details of the non-medical helper support that DSAs funding is available for, please see section 5.

In most instances non-medical help support is paid by SFE upon receipt of an invoice. Frequency of payment is determined by when the invoice is received. Invoices are paid on a first-come, first-served basis. Therefore suppliers should provide invoices as soon as practicable. SFE are not permitted to pay support that exceeds the maximums set out in the regulations.

It is important that students receive good quality support that is provided by individuals who are trained to provide the right level and type of support and recognise and respect the boundary between supporting a student to access their studies and providing academic support. DSAs NMH services should also be provided by support workers who have the appropriate employed or self-employed status.

Using non-medical helpers arranged directly by institutions or via an individual or organisation working in partnership with an institution

Many universities already employ non-medical helpers on behalf of disabled students, use an external organisation to provide support workers or administer a register of non-medical helpers who are self-employed. This involves advertising, recruiting, training, organising and paying the non-medical helpers. Some institutions operate a register of support workers and have formal contracts or agreements with the non-medical helpers. In such

arrangements, as well as paying the non-medical helper's wages, DSAs could also pay for the non-medical helpers' tax, national insurance contributions and other employer-related costs.

Using self-employed non-medical helpers

Non-medical helpers who are self-employed are responsible for their own tax and national insurance contributions etc. Using a self-employed non-medical helper would mean that students, or any other body, are not the employer of the non-medical helper. For the purpose of tax and National Insurance contributions it is the engager's responsibility to decide whether someone is an employee or self-employed. HMRC can provide advice and, in deciding whether to approve a non-medical helper as self-employed, HMRC would look at what the job involves. If a person negotiates their own fees, runs their own business and works for a number of people it is more likely they would be classed as self-employed.

DSAs funding will not be available for individuals without an appropriate employment status i.e. they must be registered with HMRC to pay tax and national insurance on their earnings. DSAs funding will not be provided for family members or friends to provide NMH support without evidence that they have the appropriate qualifications and employment status. Students will be asked to provide appropriate evidence when requesting that a family member or colleague provides their support. Exceptions can be considered, for example for the short-term, but only in cases where an appropriate support worker cannot be identified before the student's studies commence.

Administration charges for arranging non-medical helpers

In the context of DSAs, many institutions arrange and administer non-medical helper support; and institutions may incur extra costs in providing this service. Such costs might include recruiting potential non-medical helpers, advertising for helpers, selecting suitable candidates, training unqualified non-medical helpers and maintaining records of their personal and financial details. Administration costs form part of the on-costs that are a legitimate part of the overall cost. However, on-costs must relate solely to the provision of support for that particular student. DSAs cannot be used as a contribution towards the infrastructure, general administration and pastoral costs of the institution. That is, DSAs must not be used to cross-subsidise the infrastructure of institutions' disability services.

Institutions' governing bodies are responsible for the proper stewardship and value for money of public funds, and the amount institutions claim for DSAs administration needs to be relevant and proportionate, and to have been incurred by the institution specifically in providing the DSAs service to the DSAs recipients in their care. Fixed percentages without an evidence base do not provide a sound basis for the calculation and award of relevant administration costs. Finding the clearly calculated cost of activity is a more transparent and sustainable means of funding than arbitrary fixed percentages. Costs should be based on actual delivery and not assessed

delivery. Institutions may be asked to submit information on how any on-costs in relation to the DSAs recipient have been calculated.

Administration charges and associated overheads should be claimed only once: the same activity should not be claimed twice. A reasonable level of actually-incurred marginal costs should be the maximum. Institutions and providers should clearly distinguish the types of services and their costs on the invoices submitted. All costs must be clearly indicated on the invoice. Additional costs not included in the stated on-costs for providing the service will not be funded through DSAs. Any provider, institution or private, may be asked to submit details of how their administrative costs have been calculated with the first claims each year. Costs are expected to be maintained at the same level during the financial year for certainty for the student and SFE.

A fundamental review of costs should be undertaken by institutions / providers periodically to ensure that the service continues to provide value for money (for example, that efficiency improvements are effectively managed, to avoid a “last year plus x per cent” approach, and to assess whether the level of resources used to provide the service remain appropriate in the light of changing demand and other factors) and to avoid double-counting.

SFE should be satisfied that claims for DSAs are made in accordance with guidance and should query costs which do not appear to them to be reasonable.

Cancellation charges when students fail to attend a pre-arranged session with a non-medical helper

As a general rule NMH provision will only be paid for through DSAs if the student has booked their support sessions with their NMH provider and attended the sessions. ‘Booked’ means that the student and NMH provider have agreed the date, time, location and support role in advance of the session. Please see below how sessions that are not attended by the student will be treated for funding purposes.

DSAs will not generally be provided to meet the cost of cancelled support sessions if the cancellation is made with more than 24 hours’ notice.

There will be occasions where a student does not attend a booked support session and/or does not give more than 24 hours’ notice of cancellation, for example, because they were ill or had a personal emergency or unforeseen circumstances. In these cases the student is engaging with their support provider and only cancelled at short notice, or did not attend, due to a reason outside of their control. When this occurs it is understood that the NMH provider has arranged for a Non-medical Helper to attend the support session and so has incurred a cost for arranging the support. The cost of these booked support sessions will be met from the student’s DSAs as it is understood that the student booked the session expecting to attend (subject to the repeated missed sessions rule below).

There may be occasions where a student does not attend a session and could have cancelled the session with more than 24 hours' notice. The cost of such sessions may still be met through the student's DSAs where the NMH provider has incurred a cost for arranging the support and paying the support worker for those sessions (subject to the repeated missed session rule below).

However, in all scenarios, DSAs funding will not be provided for NMH provision that is repeatedly not being used once booked, or cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice, when they could have cancelled the support session with sufficient notice or where students indicate that they no longer need or want NMH support. Repeatedly may be if more than two sessions have been missed per term.

DSAs funding will not be provided where the institution is responsible for cancelling the session. The institution must take responsibility for notifying the student that the session is cancelled to enable the student to cancel the session with the NMH provider.

All missed sessions will be carefully considered by SFE before payment and where more than two sessions have been missed per term, to ensure that all parties understand their responsibilities and reasons for missed sessions are being investigated and documented. DSAs funding may be suspended.

NMH 'sessions'

A 'session' will be deemed to be the entire day. Therefore a provider who has been booked to provide a support role at any point during that day will have an equal status. For each support role, that day will be deemed the first missed session. Similarly, where repeat sessions are booked during the day, all sessions for that support role will be deemed as a single session, but charges should not be made where the support provider is able to make alternative arrangements for the remainder of the day.

Any support that was not scheduled for that day will remain unaffected. No 'missed sessions' will be counted against unscheduled support for that day.

Example: A student has four booked sessions during the day:

Booked session 1 BSL + notetaker
Booked session 2 BSL + notetaker + library assistant
Booked session 3 BSL + mentoring
Booked session 4 notetaker + study skills support.

All the BSL support booked for that day will be counted as one missed session for the purposes of DSAs-funding.

All the notetaking support booked for that day will be classed as one missed session for the purposes of DSAs-funding.

The same will apply for the library assistant, mentoring and study skills support.

The student has been also recommended to have workshop assistant support, but none was booked on this particular day, therefore any allocation of workshop assistant support remains unaffected.

What action should the support worker or service provider take when a session is missed?

At the first missed session, the support worker or service provider should make all reasonable efforts to contact the student to find out the reason for the student missing the session and confirm arrangements for the next session booked. The support worker should not attend the next session until the arrangement is confirmed with the student. If the student states they no longer require the support, support should be terminated and SFE informed. The same process should be followed for the second missed session. The support worker should not suspend the student's support if the student wishes to book a future session. If the support worker no longer wishes to continue providing the support, they should notify SFE immediately so that another support worker can be identified. Alternatively they should contact the disability adviser to discuss ongoing support.

What is deemed to be a term when considering missed sessions?

Generally the academic year falls into 3 terms/semesters. However, some courses have non-standard delivery models that do not fall into 3 periods. For ease we will refer to terms. This refers to the study periods that run either side of the standard holidays i.e. September – December, January to April, and May to July/August. The start of the academic year is not relevant for this purpose.

DSAs-funding is payable on a first come, first served basis. Therefore where a student is nearing the statutory cap and a number of support workers are requiring payment this will still be managed on a first-come, first served basis. Providers are encouraged to submit invoices in a timely and regular manner to ensure payment can be made.

Whilst BIS acknowledges that exceptions may need to be considered, it is expected that providers and students are working together to minimise the number of missed sessions and that exceptions will only be considered rarely.

NMH support following missed sessions

SFE will not suspend support after two missed sessions. It is assumed that the need for support continues and that sessions are being managed by the support worker and the student. However, payment will not be made for any missed sessions occurring beyond the first two, other than in exceptional circumstances.

The role of the HEI disability adviser in managing missed sessions

Where there is consent to share information with the institution, support workers may wish to liaise with the disability adviser if it appears that the student is not managing their sessions effectively and sessions are regularly

being cancelled or missed without cancellation. This may indicate other problems or may indicate that the student does not require, or is not satisfied with the support they have been recommended. Early intervention in such cases may result in different support being offered.

BIS/SLC will separately consider what action might be taken if the nature of the student's disability is such that they might regularly need to miss booked sessions without warning. Study needs assessors should indicate on the needs assessment report if they identify that this is likely to occur.

NMH and local authority care plans

The provision for the non-medical helper allowance does not remove the duty of local social services to provide assistance towards personal care costs that would have been incurred irrespective of a student's attendance on a course. DSAs funding is not available for personal care costs.

3.2.6 Major items of specialist equipment allowance (regulation 41(2)(b))

The specialist equipment allowance is to provide funding for additional major items of specialist equipment which the student requires, because of a disability, to undertake their course effectively. Institutional reasonable adjustments should be considered in the first instance, before a recommendation for DSAs funding is made.

For details of the equipment that DSAs funding is available for under this allowance, please see section 6.

The specialist equipment allowance is for the duration of the course. Where the allowance is increased in subsequent years, a student who had received the maximum grant for specialist equipment can receive additional funding up to the new maximum amount, if required.

Course transfers and specialist equipment allowance

If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any amount awarded for specialist equipment in relation to the first course will be taken into account as the period of eligibility has not been broken. For example, a student receives £3,000 from the specialist equipment allowance but then transfers their eligibility to another course. Their specialist equipment entitlement for the second course should not exceed £2,212, as £3,000 has already been awarded for specialist equipment and given that £5,212 for 2015/16 is the maximum specialist equipment allowance.

All equipment purchased with the help of this allowance is and remains the property of the student.

3.2.7 Travel allowance (regulation 41(2)(c))

The travel allowance may be used to pay the additional costs of travel to and from the institution which are incurred because of a disability.

For details of the costs that DSAs funding is available for under this allowance, please see section 7.

3.2.8 General allowance (regulation 41(2)(d))

The general allowance may be used both for miscellaneous expenditure not covered by the other allowances and to supplement the specialist equipment allowance and non-medical helper allowance, if necessary. The cost of a DSAs study needs assessment is drawn from the general allowance.

For details of the costs that DSAs funding is available for under this allowance, please see section 8.

3.3 DSAs for part-time undergraduate students (regulation 147)

3.3.1 Eligibility

Students who begin part time courses on or after 1st September 2012 must be studying at a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the academic year to be eligible for PT DSAs (regulation 147(4)).

Under regulation 147 an eligible part-time student qualifies for DSAs to assist with the additional expenditure that the Secretary of State is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake (i.e. to attend or study by distance learning) a designated part-time course because of a disability.

DSAs for students undertaking a part-time course which they commenced prior to 1st September 2012 with the Open University are currently administered by the Open University and will continue to be until the course is completed. From AY 2014/15 DSAs for students undertaking a part-time course with the Open University which commenced on or after 1 September 2012 will be administered by SFE.

The part-time DSAs scheme closely follows that for full-time students. However there are some differences and these are explained below.

3.3.2 Designated part-time courses

To be eligible for support, including DSAs, a student must be undertaking a designated part-time course. The criteria for course designation in respect of part-time support, including part-time DSAs, are set out in the 'Support for part-time students – policy guidance 15/16' guidance chapter.

3.3.3 Maximum DSAs for part-time undergraduate students

There are four allowances for students undertaking part-time courses. These mirror those available to full-time students, but have different maximum amounts. The maximum allowances that part-time students may receive in 2015/16 are given in the table below. The maximum amount of the non-medical helper allowance and general allowance are calculated as a percentage of the full-time rates, based on the actual intensity of study. Some examples of the maximum amounts available are given below.

Allowance	Maximum payable	
Specialist equipment allowance (for the duration of the course)	£5,212	
Non-medical helper allowance (each academic year)	£15,543	75% of a FT course = £15,543 60% of a FT course = £12,435 25% of a FT course = £5,181
General allowance (each academic year)	£1,305	75% of a FT course = £1,305 60% of a FT course = £1,044 25% of a FT course = £435
Travel allowance	Uncapped	

For part-time students the cost of the DSAs study needs assessment should be drawn from the general allowance before the pro-rata percentage is applied to the allowance.

There are no provisions within the Regulations to pay more than the maximum allowance for the academic year. Please refer to the guidance in respect of full-time DSAs at paragraphs 20 & 21.

3.3.4 Students whose status as an eligible (full-time) student is converted to that of an eligible part-time student (regulation 152(1)-(4))

When a student transfers from a full-time to a part-time course, their status must be converted from an eligible full-time student to that of an eligible part-time student. Where a student transfers from a full-time to a part-time course part way through the academic year:

- a) no instalment of full-time DSAs is payable after the student becomes an eligible part-time student;
- b) the maximum amounts of part-time DSAs are reduced by one third where the student becomes an eligible part-time student during the second quarter of the academic year and by two thirds where they become an eligible part-time student in a later quarter of that year; and
- c) where full-time DSAs have been paid to the student in a single instalment, the maximum amount of the corresponding part-time DSAs payable to them are reduced by the amount of full-time DSAs already paid (or further reduced if paragraph (b) above applies). If the resulting amount is nil or a negative amount, the part-time DSAs are not payable.

3.3.5 Students whose status as an eligible part-time student is converted to that of an eligible (full-time) student (regulation 152(12)-(13))

When a student transfers from a part-time to a full-time course, their status must be converted from an eligible part-time student to that of an eligible full-time student. Where a student transfers from a part-time to a full-time course part way through the academic year:

- a) no instalment of **part-time** DSAs are payable after the student becomes an eligible full-time student;
- b) the maximum amounts of any full-time DSAs are reduced by one third where the student becomes an eligible full-time student during the second quarter of the academic year and by two thirds where they become an eligible full-time student in a later quarter of that year; and
- c) where part-time DSAs have been paid to the student in a single instalment, the maximum amount of the corresponding full-time DSAs payable to them is reduced by the amount of part-time DSAs already paid (or further reduced if paragraph (b) above applies). If the resulting amount is nil or a negative amount, the full-time DSAs are not payable.

3.4 DSAs for postgraduate students (regulations 158 – 168)

3.4.1 Eligibility

To be eligible for the postgraduate DSAs students must meet the personal criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations and undertake a designated postgraduate course.

Under part 12 of the Regulations an eligible postgraduate student qualifies for DSAs to assist with the additional expenditure that the Secretary of State is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake (i.e. to attend or study by distance learning) a designated full- or part-time postgraduate course because of a disability.

Postgraduate students studying by distance learning are eligible for DSAs, but only if the course is undertaken in the United Kingdom (regulation 159(11)). Students undertaking courses on a distance learning basis are deemed to be studying at their home address. Therefore, to receive DSAs postgraduate distance learners must remain living in the United Kingdom whilst undertaking their course.

Under regulation 159(4), a postgraduate student is not eligible for DSAs if they:

- a) are eligible to apply for a -
 - NHS bursary or award under section 63 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 or article 44 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972;
 - allowance under the Nursing and Midwifery Student Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 1992;
 - allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by a Research Council.

- allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by their institution which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability;
 - the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) bursary for students on postgraduate social-work courses which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability;
- b) are in breach of an obligation to repay a student loan;
- c) have not ratified an agreement for a student loan made with them when they were under the age of 18; or
- d) have shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support.

Under regulation 159(18) an eligible postgraduate student is not eligible for support for more than one designated course at a time.

DSAs for students undertaking a postgraduate course with the Open University, where the course commenced before 1st September 2012 are currently administered by the Open University and will continue to be until the course ends, From AY 2014/15 DSAs for students undertaking a postgraduate course with the Open University, where the course commenced on or after 1st September 2012 will be administered by SFE.

The postgraduate DSAs scheme differs from that for undergraduate students in that one single allowance is available.

Regulation 166 provides for a DSA of up to **£10,362** for the academic year **2015/16** to be available for eligible postgraduate students undertaking designated full- and part-time postgraduate courses. There is no statutory provision to pay a postgraduate student in excess of **£10,362** during academic year 2015/16.

There are no specific limits within the maximum **£10,362** on particular items or type of help on which the grant can be spent. The allowance is awarded depending on the recommendations of the DSAs study needs assessment carried out by the assessment centre. The cost of the DSAs study needs assessment is payable from the postgraduate DSA, but, as with undergraduate DSAs, it cannot be used to pay for establishing a student's disability. The postgraduate DSA may be spent on specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, other general support or additional travel costs, or a combination of the above, up to the maximum amount for the academic year.

3.4.2 Postgraduate courses designated for DSAs

Regulation 161(1) provides the criteria for course designation in respect of postgraduate DSAs. The requirements are:

- a first degree or higher qualification should be an entry requirement to the course;

- a course duration of at least one academic year;
- where the course commences on or after 1st September 2012, if the course is part-time, it must be of a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the academic year and ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than four times the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course;
- where the course commences before 1st September 2012, if the course is part-time, it must be ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than twice the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course;
- the course is wholly provided by an authority-funded⁴ institution in the UK ; provided by a publicly funded institution in the UK on behalf of an authority-funded educational institution or by an authority funded institution in conjunction with an overseas institution;
- the course is not an initial teacher training course or a course taken as part of an employment-based teacher training scheme.

Full and part-time Legal Practice courses and Bar Vocational courses provided by authority funded institutions are designated postgraduate courses under the Regulations as the entry requirement to such courses is a first degree or higher

The Secretary of State may specifically designate courses for the award of postgraduate DSAs that are not automatically designated under the Regulations. Details of the specific designation process along with an application form can be found on the HEFCE's website <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/reg/desig/>

The HEFCE website also includes links to the latest BIS guidance on the new process. The current list of providers that have courses which have been specifically designated can also be found on the HEFCE website at: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/TheRegister/>

⁴ "authority-funded" means—

(a)

in relation to educational institutions in England, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for England;

(b)

in relation to educational institutions in Wales, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales;

(c)

in relation to educational institutions in Scotland, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Scottish Funding Council; and

(d)

in relation to educational institutions in Northern Ireland, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland or the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland.”;

Eligible students on courses that are designated during the academic year will only be eligible for DSAs for the quarters following the award of designation, with the exception of the specialist equipment allowance.

3.4.3 Postgraduate ITT courses

Students on postgraduate ITT courses are potentially eligible for DSAs under the full-time or part-time scheme. They are not therefore eligible for the postgraduate DSA.

3.4.4 Periods of eligibility

Regulation 162 provides for DSAs to be paid for the period ordinarily required to complete the course (subject to the course satisfying the requirement of regulation 161). If a student withdraws from the course, abandons or is expelled from the course the period of eligibility is terminated and no further support should be paid.

Where the part-time course begins before 1st September 2012 and where a student intends at the outset to complete a part-time postgraduate course in not more than twice the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the academic year during which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe. (See examples 1, 2 and 3 below).

Example 1: Student A studies part-time for a master's degree (which takes 1 year to complete studying full-time) for two years and then studies part-time for a PhD (which takes three years to complete studying full-time) for a further six years. As the duration of each of the two part-time postgraduate courses does not exceed twice the period normally required to complete its full-time equivalent, student A is eligible to receive support for the whole of that time.

Example 2: Student B undertakes the same two courses. However, while student B studies part-time for the master's degree for two years, they then study part-time for the PhD for eight years. As the PhD normally takes three years to complete full-time, the duration of the part-time PhD exceeds twice the period normally required to complete its full-time equivalent and is therefore not designated for support. Student B is only eligible for support for the two years of the master's degree.

Example 3: Student C states an intention to study part-time for a PhD for six years. The equivalent full-time PhD would take three years. The student is awarded the DSA in years one to five of the course as the part-time study is at least 50% of a full-time course. However during the fifth year the student's pattern of part-time study changes so that they now require a further three years part-time study to complete the course, making eight years in total. This period exceeds twice the period normally required to complete an equivalent full-time course and so the student cannot receive DSA support for the final

three years of the course. Their eligibility will cease at the end of the fifth year.

Where the part-time course begins on or after 1st September 2012 and where a student intends at the outset to complete a part-time postgraduate course in not more than four times the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the academic year during which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe (see example 4 below).

Example 4: Student D states an intention to study part-time for a PhD for 12 years. The equivalent full-time PhD would take three years. The student is awarded the DSA in years one to eleven of the course as the part-time study is at least 25% of a full-time course. However during the 11th year the student's pattern of part-time study changes and they reduce intensity to below 25%. This will effectively make the period of study exceed four times the period normally required to complete a full-time course and means the student cannot receive any further DSA support. Their eligibility will cease from when the intensity drops below 25%.

It is the institution to decide whether a postgraduate course is full-time or part-time and whether a part-time course takes more than twice (where the course begins before 1st September 2012) or where the course takes more than four times the period ordinarily required (where the course begins on or after 1st September 2012) to complete a full-time course leading to the same qualification.

The period of eligibility may be terminated where the eligible postgraduate student has shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support.

SFE may also terminate the period of eligibility or decide that a student no longer qualifies for an amount of grant if a student has failed to comply with a request to provide information or provided information that they know is false. If the provisions in regulation 162(8) are used, support already paid to the student may be treated as an overpayment for recovery under regulation 168.

3.4.5 Transfer of eligibility

Regulation 163 provides for eligible postgraduate students to transfer their eligibility to another postgraduate course. A transfer is permitted provided that the period of eligibility for the first course has not expired or been terminated and a request to transfer eligibility is made by the student. It is also a requirement that the exporting institution recommends a transfer in writing and that the importing institution agrees to the transfer. If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any DSAs amount awarded for the first course is taken into account for the second course as the period of eligibility has not been broken. For example, a student receives support of £3,000 but transfers to another course. For the remainder of the academic year, the student has

£7,362 remaining (£10,362 maximum grant available less £3,000 already received for the first course). Students transferring courses may continue to receive support without the necessity of a further DSAs study needs assessment unless their disability has changed or the course is substantially different.

3.4.6 Students moving directly from undergraduate to postgraduate study

Where a student has just graduated and is proceeding directly to postgraduate study in a similar subject area, the DSAs study needs assessment that was undertaken in respect of the undergraduate course may in many cases be sufficient to identify the student's support needs in respect of the postgraduate course. This means, for example, that the student could continue to receive support from non-medical helpers without the necessity of a further DSAs study needs assessment.

Where the support already in place is not sufficient, the institution should consider what reasonable adjustments may be needed. A DSAs study needs assessment can be funded through the postgraduate DSA in certain circumstances, but only with prior approval of SFE. DSAs will not cover the cost of DSAs study needs assessments that are undertaken without prior approval from SFE.

If a student is recommended new equipment via a DSAs study needs assessment, any equipment the student received as an undergraduate must be taken into account, having regard to how recently the equipment was bought. Requests for any new equipment should be considered very carefully.

Students who have not studied recently (those with a break of at least two years since graduating) should be assessed in the same way as undergraduate students. They should provide evidence of disability and then have their course related needs assessed. However, if medical evidence of a life-long disability is already held on file, SFE may determine that further medical evidence is not required.

3.4.7 Postgraduate students completing dissertations after their course ends

A student retains their status as an eligible postgraduate for a period equal to that which is ordinarily required to complete the relevant designated postgraduate course. If the ordinary duration of the course includes a period to complete a dissertation or thesis, the Regulations provide for the student to be eligible to receive postgraduate DSA for the period spent completing their dissertation or thesis. For example, if a course ordinarily takes two years to complete and the second year of the course is writing up the thesis, the postgraduate student will qualify for support during the writing up period.

Generally the period of eligibility is limited to the ordinary duration of the course. However, regulation 162(9) provides some discretion to extend or renew a student's eligibility for such further periods as may be considered appropriate after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course. Such discretion will be considered on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the reasons for the request to extend the course after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course.

In the case of part-time designated postgraduate courses which began before 1st September 2012, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean that the overall duration of the part-time course will be more than double the time needed to complete a full-time equivalent course, the part-time course would then cease to be designated. Consequently, the student would not qualify for any further DSAs support. Where the part-time postgraduate course begins on or after 1st September 2012, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean the overall duration of the part-time course will be more than four times the time needed to complete the full-time equivalent course, the part time course will cease to be designated and the student will not qualify for further DSAs support.

In the case of part-time postgraduate designated courses regulation 159(9) provides that where the course begins on or after 1st September 2012, an eligible student will not qualify for postgraduate DSAs where the course intensity of study in the academic year for which the support is requested is less than 25%.

3.4.8 Erasmus Students

Additional grant support is available to disabled students on an Erasmus+ Programme to cover the costs of their support needs. Applications are made by the participating institution to the relevant Erasmus+ National Agency once a student is identified as a participant and their support needs are known. Funding covers 100% of the identified costs and are dependent on actual needs rather than a set grant amount or formula. DSAs funding is therefore not available for Erasmus students.

Section 4 – The DSAs application process

Eligible disabled students from England can apply for DSAs support as soon as Student Finance England launches the application process. Students should complete their DSAs application form and submit it to Student Finance England along with the appropriate medical evidence. SFE may request further information from the student if needed. There are two DSAs application forms. The full form - DSA1F - is aimed at students who have not applied for any other student support, and the slim form - DSASL - is aimed at those students who have already completed an application for student support and therefore do not need to provide certain information again. Both forms ask students to give their consent to the release of information about their DSAs application to third parties such as disability advisers and assessment centres.

Students may wish to speak to their disability adviser before making an application, so that potential reasonable adjustments can be discussed and considered. The disability adviser may also assist the student with an application for DSAs if it appears that additional support is required.

Once the student undertaking a designated course has established their general eligibility and provided satisfactory evidence of their disability, they are eligible at that stage for DSAs and will be advised to contact an assessment centre at the first possible opportunity in order to arrange a DSAs study needs assessment. Entitlement for an award of DSAs will be determined by SFE taking into account the recommendations following the DSAs study needs assessment. Some students may choose not to apply for DSAs as they will receive sufficient support through their institutions.

When notifying students that they will need to undergo a DSAs study needs assessment, SFE should inform the student what is involved in the assessment and that if they do not attend the DSAs study needs assessment they will not be able to receive any additional DSAs-funded support they may require. From 2015/16 DSAs study needs assessments can only be carried out by DSA-QAG registered or accredited assessment centres (England and Wales). Students should be directed to the DSA-QAG website for an up-to-date list of accredited assessment centres.

Funding through DSAs covers the cost of only one DSAs study needs assessment, other than in such circumstances as SFE deem a further DSAs study needs assessment is needed. Students should be advised that they will not receive DSAs funding for a second DSAs study needs assessment without prior approval from SFE. Assessments arranged without prior approval from SFE will not be funded through DSAs.

The DSAs study needs assessment will help determine what support the student might require and the amount of DSAs for which the student is entitled. Assessors should consider the information contained in a young person's EHC plan and supporting documentation where the Plan is current and has been made available by the student/local authority. Similarly, the

assessor will cover the disabilities / SpLDs approved as eligible by SFE, taking account of the medical evidence submitted in relation to the approved condition(s). Entitlement to DSAs for new DSAs applicants for 2015/16 will be assessed according to the regulations and this guidance.

During the DSAs study needs assessment interview, needs assessors are requested to check that the student is aware of disability support services in their institution. Given that the DSAs study needs assessment may be carried out some months before the start of the course, some students may subsequently attend a different institution or course. In such cases, SFE may seek further information from the assessor or disability adviser, as appropriate. Students should not be advised to attend a second DSAs study needs assessment without prior approval from SFE.

A DSAs study needs assessment report will contain information about the student's disability which is classed as sensitive personal data under the Data Protection Act. This means that the written consent of the student should always be obtained before releasing the DSAs study needs assessment report or any other disability-related information to a third party. A copy of the needs assessment report should be sent to the institution's Disability Adviser and SFE by the assessment centre, once agreed. Where the student gives consent, a copy of the student's DSA2 letter, which sets out the agreed DSAs support, can be provided to the assessment centre by SFE. This allows the DSAs study needs assessor to see any recommendations which are queried or deemed to be outside the scope of DSAs funding and may also help reduce instances of similar recommendations in the future. It also facilitates any follow up meeting which the student might request later in their course, by ensuring the assessment centre is aware of exactly what the student has been awarded.

Providing that students have granted permission, a copy of the DSAs study needs assessment and awards letter (DSA2 letter) should also be sent by SFE to the Disability Adviser at the student's institution once they have received confirmation of a place. This will help ensure that the support the student requires is put in place.

Section 5 – The DSAs Non-medical help allowance

The Government has announced that for 2015/16 the full range of NMH support will continue to be funded through DSAs. The Government's preferred option on how NMH support might be provided from 2016/17 will be the subject of separate guidance and will be published in due course.

For 2015/16 DSAs will continue to fund the range of non-medical help support set out in the SLC non-medical help services reference manual.

DSAs should not be used for charges for support, counselling or tutorial services which the institution makes available to all students.

DSAs are not intended for the costs of extra academic tuition, subject specific coaching or support in the main subject area(s) being studied. Institutions should meet these costs as part of providing the course.

Where an institution makes special adaptations to course hand-outs or other course equipment for use by a disabled student during the delivery and assessment of the curriculum, it should meet any associated costs as part of providing the course.

5.1 The Student Loans Company Non-medical help services reference manual

The Student Loans Company (SLC) commissioned research into the range of non-medical help provision funded by DSAs. The research informed a reference manual which grouped activities within bands based on the type of support provided (e.g. practical, enabling etc.), the qualifications the support worker might be expected to have and the hourly cost of the support.

<http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/products/disabled-students'-allowances/dsas-forms-and-guides.aspx>

The researchers analysed over 100 different non-medical helper job titles and descriptors and, where possible, developed generic terms to describe the support provided.

The reference manual does not set out what DSAs will or will not fund. The reference manual was developed to enable SFE to manage and streamline the invoicing process for students drawing down this support. Institutions and providers must use the descriptors set out in the manual when submitting invoices for payments.

The reference manual also sets out the indicative range of costs of support. Further information on when the indicative costs will be phased in and what will happen in cases where the provider charges more than the indicative cost will be provided separately in due course.

5.2 BAND ONE – Support Assistants

The role of a support assistant is generally to provide support in the following area: practical support around the campus; practical support in the library, laboratory or workshop/studio, reading aloud, scribing, proof reading/text checking (pointing out errors but not providing corrections).

5.2.1 Practical Support Assistant

This role may include providing practical and mobility support to assist a student with a physical impairment in manoeuvring around the campus. This could include helping to manipulate a wheelchair, carrying books, IT equipment etc. It could also include general orientation and finding out where things are located for students whose disability means that they have problems with orientation. It could also include 'social support' in order to ensure access to the wider aspects of student life, for example for a student on the autistic spectrum who had difficulty with social interaction. While some of these tasks, such as carrying equipment for a student with mobility difficulties, will need to continue throughout a student's course, others, such as general orientation, should decrease as the student becomes more able to manage independently.

DSAs funding is not available for any aspects that are covered by a local authority care plan. Such support will continue to be provided under the duties placed upon the local authority.

5.2.2 Library Support Assistant

This support is provided to help students search library catalogues, locate materials, collect materials, photocopying etc. Access to libraries and information available through libraries to support students in their study can be supported in many ways. Libraries should particularly consider the provision of e-books and alternative format publications to assist disabled students. This would reduce the need for the provision of hard copy publications and scanners/photocopying. See information on e-books and accessible format publications at 8.4.

It is expected that library staff should all have disability awareness training and be available to assist disabled students with accessing information including support to use systems that aren't accessible to assistive technology. It is not expected that provision is available to assist disabled students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. That might not be a reasonable expectation. Contact time for lectures and tutorials varies greatly from course to course. This should provide sufficient time for all students, including disabled students, to access libraries during the normal opening hours.

5.2.3 Reader

A reader provides support for students whose disability makes reading or other forms of accessing text impossible. There are now many forms of

assistive software that provide this facility and appropriate alternatives should be considered. Assistive software may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where this barrier exists and where students will not require additional support to use systems that aren't accessible to assistive technology.

5.2.4 Scribe

A scribe is used to write down or type what a student dictates.

There are now forms of assistive software that can help in this area which may remove the need for human support in many cases. Assistive software may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where this barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the support needs of the student.

5.2.5 Workshop/Laboratory Assistant

Supporting a student in gaining access to the practical aspects of their course, e.g. in the laboratory or in a workshop/studio situation.

5.2.6 Sighted Guide

A sighted guide may be required to assist a student with visual impairment to navigate the campus and may be required for all or part of each day the student needs to attend the university. This role is about the physical attendance at lectures, tutorials, workshops etc. and not about accessing the information that is delivered.

5.2.7 Proof Reader/text checker

Text checking, often referred to as proof reading in this context, is provided for a range of students to help identify and point out the types of errors that the student has been made in grammar/spelling/structure etc. and to give advice on ways of rectifying such errors in the future. This type of support is valuable for the general student body and institutions will wish to consider how best to meet the needs of all their students. For disabled students there are now alternative forms of assistive software that can provide some support in this area. Assistive software may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where a particular barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the support needs of the student.

5.3 BAND TWO – Enhanced Support Assistants

Functions undertaken by Enhanced Support Assistants include: supporting students to develop their independence and autonomy in HE, for example by providing support with issues such as time keeping; organisational skills etc.

and can be supplemented by practical support e.g. library support, workshop support etc. and supporting a disabled student during examinations.

5.3.1 Study Assistant

This role does not refer to the specialist one-to-one skills support which is provided under band 4 support – see 5.5.2

This support is provided where a mix of enabling strategies complemented by some practical assistance has been required. This is usually as a result of the student's combined complex circumstances. Previously this has been described as supporting the student in adapting to the academic demands of HE, providing information, helping with time keeping, helping with organisational skills etc. and can be supplemented by practical support e.g. library support, workshop support etc.

Recommendations for study assistants should be rare and confined to those cases where a range of support is needed to overcome multiple issues. Recommendations for study assistant support should not be made simply because a student requires a mix of Band One support and or Band Two support. Wherever possible support should be defined clearly within the different activities and funding drawn down appropriately.

5.3.2 Examination Support Workers

The cost of any arrangements that institutions may need to make to enable a disabled student to take examinations (e.g. providing physical access to the examination hall or allowing the examinations to be taken and invigilated somewhere else) should not be set against DSAs.

DSAs funding is available for Examination Support Workers. This might include reading out the examination paper, writing down student answers using exactly the words used by the student and for some students, e.g. those on the autistic spectrum who might get very focussed on a particular question, giving a prompt as to when it is time to move on to another.

Institutions will also need to have regard to competency standards when considering how disabled students undertake an examination of their skill in a particular area.

5.3.3 Manual Note-takers

This support is provided for students who require notes to be taken on their behalf, for example because they have a physical or hearing impairment. The activity of note-taking is to produce an accurate record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, off-campus events etc. in the student's preferred style and format.

There is a wide range of ways to deliver information to students which may reduce or remove the need for individual note-taking. For disabled students

there are also many forms of assistive technology that can provide some support in this area, for example recording devices, and these should be considered as an alternative to note-taking where possible. Assistive software is likely to enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where a particular barrier exists.

The DSAs Study Needs Assessor should determine the required format of notes at the needs assessment taking in to consideration the course, the student's needs and compatibility with the student's assistive technology where appropriate. If the student requires typed notes, then that should be made clear and an appropriate person appointed to take the typed notes. If the student requires handwritten notes, that should similarly be justified (e.g. in the case of needing diagrams for a specific lecture etc.).

The DSAs study Needs Assessor should also try to determine: the actual number of note-taking hours required based on timetable; or where this is not possible (i.e. prior to course commencement or when module options have not been finalised) make informed estimate of the likely number of hours based on contact with HEI, discussion with the student etc.

Where typed notes are required by the student the assessor must take steps to identify workers that can take typed notes at the time required. Only if that is not possible should provision for a handwritten note be provided with the notes being typed up for the student afterwards. A note typed at the time is the default position if available – given value for money considerations. The typing up of written notes by the note-taker or a third party is not considered to be electronic note-taking or specialist transcription services and should not be charged as such (see 5.4.2 and 5.4.3).

In the case where handwritten notes and subsequent typing up is the only available option, (see example above) a maximum additional charge of 30 minutes will be paid for the typing up time, per 1 hour of manual note-taking. But only where it has not been possible to provide a note-taker that can take typed notes or typed notes are not appropriate.

Note-taking costs should be clear on the invoice. Typed notes should be invoiced as manual note-taking (typed). This is a band 2 activity. Where the notes have been taken by hand and typed later, the invoice should set this out clearly as manual note-taking (written) + typing up fee. The subsequent typing up of notes is not a band 2 activity and therefore an appropriate reduction in the amount charged for typing up after the session is therefore expected. Typing up charges should be no more than half the amount charged for the actual note-taking session.

Note – we do not expect note-taking charges to rise in response to this instruction and the cost of note-taking will be monitored to ensure charges remain appropriate. Further, a charge from NMH suppliers for typing up notes where the hourly rate currently includes typing up will not be accepted.

Note – No generic recommendations should be made by or imposed on assessors by the HEI or NMH provider.

5.4 BAND THREE - Specialist Enabling Support

This support demands specific expertise and specialist training in a particular access area. This support includes: making use of specialist expertise and training in a particular access area in order to facilitate a student's access to learning using specialist skills and/or equipment to represent the language of delivery into another more accessible format, and using specialist skills to enable students to navigate themselves independently around the educational environment.

5.4.1 Communication Support Workers

This support is provided to translate sign language into voice and vice versa although not at the level of competence required by a trained and qualified British Sign Language (BSL)/English Interpreter. The support worker is required to work flexibly with an individual deaf student in workshop and seminar situations as well as providing general one to one support. This does not include academic support.

5.4.2 Electronic Note-takers

This support activity is predominantly for hearing and visually impaired students. The primary requirement of this support is to simultaneously remove barriers to live access to the content of the teaching session, seminar etc. and the ability to take handwritten notes for review and revision purposes. The note-taker will make a comprehensive although non-verbatim, live, typed record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, off-campus events etc. in the student's preferred style and format. This may include the information appearing simultaneously on the student's computer using either Speedtext or Stereotype specialist software. The laptop could also be linked to Braille reading equipment. The notes can be sent to the student within a specified time frame or will be saved by the student at the end of the session if using the specialist software described above.

For disabled students there are now many forms of assistive technology (for example, recording devices) that can provide some support in this area and may be considered as an alternative. Assistive technology may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where a particular barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the student's note taking needs.

Assistive software responses should be considered as an alternative to such support where appropriate.

5.4.3 Specialist Transcription Service

This support is provided to transcribe lecture notes, seminar notes, oral dictation or audio files into an alternative format accessible to the student.

5.4.4 Mobility Trainer

The Mobility Trainer provides a professional assessment of the campus location and then carries out a time limited programme of training. This training is particularly applicable for blind or visually impaired students who will require an individually developed programme based on agreed assessment of needs and who will need to learn with their coach safe routes around the campus, either making use of a long cane or with a guide dog.

This kind of training may also be applicable to other students whose disability means they have particular difficulty with orientation, for example students who have significant difficulty with orientation because of acquired brain damage.

This support is not related to the delivery and access to course information.

For on-going support around campus a sighted guide might be a more appropriate response (see 5.2.6)

5.5 BAND FOUR - Specialist Access and Learning Facilitators

This support requires advanced specialist skills, training and/or qualifications concerning how particular disabilities affect a student's access to learning and how to address these access issues. These support workers will make use of specialist skills and training in order to: understand the particular barriers to learning experienced by individual disabled students, work with the student in order to identify strategies to help address these barriers, monitor the effectiveness of these strategies, work to enhance student's autonomy within their learning context and interpret the language of delivery, giving real-time access, into another language accessible to the student

5.5.1 Specialist Mentors

Specialist mentors provide highly specialist, specifically tailored, one to one support which helps students address the barriers to learning created by a particular impairment, e.g. mental-health conditions, or autistic spectrum disorders. This could include a range of issues, for example, coping with anxiety and stress situations, how to deal with concentration difficulties, time management, prioritising workload and creating a suitable work-life balance. Specialist Mentors should not act as advocates or counsellors. Their role is to help students recognise the barriers to learning created by their impairment and support them in developing strategies to address these barriers, particularly at times of transition, e.g. when starting at university or when planning to move on from it. For some students this support will need to be

on-going while for others it might be gradually phased out or only be required at certain points of their course.

DSAs study needs assessors should carefully evaluate the stages of the course where the student will require this support and agree a reducing level of support to enable independence where appropriate.

5.5.2 Specialist One to One Study Skills Support

This one to one support addresses the issues which some students might have in acquiring, recalling and retaining information in written and spoken language as well as the range of memory, organisational, attention and numeracy difficulties that students with specific learning difficulties often face when working in an HE context.

This purpose of this support is to develop the student's skills and to develop independent learning. DSAs study needs assessors should carefully evaluate the stages of the course where the student will require this support and agree a reducing level of support to enable independence where appropriate.

5.5.3 British Sign Language Interpreters

BSL interpreters are interpreters for students who are deaf and whose first or preferred language is BSL. The interpreter will attend lectures, seminars and tutorials with the student and will interpret from English to BSL or vice versa. Interpreters will use their skills and knowledge of BSL and English and their understanding of the differences between the two, in order to receive information in one language and pass it on in another. BSL interpreters are required to be qualified to level 4 (old qualification) or level 6 (new qualification)

5.5.4 Language Support Tutor for deaf students

This support is to provide one to one specialist English language enhancement to deaf students – either those whose first language is BSL or those who communicate orally. This does not include academic support.

5.5.5 Assistive Technology Training

This activity provides support over and above the practical installation and familiarisation support given to students on receiving a new piece of software. Its purpose is to provide a substantial programme of training for the student in how to use the range of assistive technology and specialist software or hardware, in relation to their studies.

Institutions should consider how students can access on-going assistive technology training support once initial training has been undertaken and completed.

Where online training is available, and is fully accessible using assistive technology, institutions should consider bulk-buying licences to enable their disabled student body to access on-going training free-of-charge.

Section 6 – The major items of specialist equipment allowance

DSAs funding can provide specialist equipment to enable students to overcome the barriers to learning that arise due to their disability. Specialist equipment and assistive technology should encourage independent, autonomous learning. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of utilising the student's existing equipment, before recommending that new equipment is purchased through DSAs.

Student leaves a course after receiving equipment

If a student receives DSAs for equipment whilst on their course and then withdraws from or abandons the course, there is no provision within the Regulations for recovery of the equipment, regardless of the length of time the student spent on the course, apart from the situation outlined below. This is because the award was made with statutory authority and the purpose for which the equipment was supplied had already materialised.

Equipment supplied before the student starts the course / delivered after the student has left the course

A DSAs study needs assessment may be provided before a student has started their course to ensure that any equipment or other support they need can be arranged and delivered for the beginning of term. In some cases it may be appropriate to supply DSAs-funded equipment before the start of term where training on the equipment is necessary before the student starts their course. However, if the student subsequently does not start the course, this will constitute an overpayment for the purposes of regulation 119 (full-time students), regulation 135 (full-time distance learning students) regulation 156 (part-time students) and regulation 168 (postgraduate students).

Similarly, a student may start their course, then abandon it and then receive DSAs funding or equipment after they have abandoned the course (possibly because SFE had not been notified that the student had left the course). This will constitute an overpayment for the purposes of regulation 119(7) (full-time students), regulation 135(8) (full-time distance learning students), regulation 156(7) (part-time students) and regulation 168(6) (postgraduate students).

SFE can accept the return of the equipment to the supplier, a monetary repayment or a combination of both against the overpayment. For example, where the student has received two items of equipment through DSAs and it is possible to return one item to the supplier and secure a full refund but it is not possible to return the other item, the student should only have to pay for the second item of equipment.

It should be clearly explained to students who are supplied with equipment before the start of their course that they may be liable for the cost of the equipment if they do not subsequently begin the course.

6.1 Computers

Computers are now considered to be a mainstream participation cost for all students. Therefore DSAs will not be available for the first £200 cost towards a computer (which is the minimum cost that any student is likely to incur when buying a computer).

DSAs are also only paid to eligible students for the purpose of assisting with the additional costs which a student is obliged to incur in connection with undertaking a course because of their disability. Therefore, funding for computers will only be provided, and subject to the £200 contribution, where the computer is required solely because of their disability.

It is the responsibility of institutions to consider how a student will access their course and part of that will be a consideration of the communal equipment available to their student body. Consideration should be given to providing the most commonly used types of assistive software as standard on networked computers and the provision of quiet rooms where necessary for the effective use of some software (e.g. speech to text). Consideration should also be given to ensuring the functionality of assistive software is active and that networked computers have roaming profiles with the facility to set student's personal preferences. Flexible arrangements for use should be considered, including priority use and longer time slots. Institutions may also consider what support they might provide on an individual basis, for example through bursaries to low-income groups.

DSAs study needs assessors must always consider the suitability of a student's existing equipment before recommending that a student receives DSAs-funded computer equipment.

Entry-level computers

Some disabled students may only require an entry-level computer to support their studies, as a higher specification computer is not required to run their software. In this context an entry-level computer is one which is used for internet browsing, word processing, spread-sheets and the least technically demanding assistive software packages. Such computers may not have the capacity to run assistive software effectively at the same time. As entry level computers are considered to be a mainstream participation cost for all students and cost £200 or less, DSAs funding will not be available for entry level computers.

Standard computer

Other students require a computer with a higher specification than an entry-level computer. This is termed as a standard computer in the DSAs context. The specification for a standard computer for DSAs purposes is set out as a 'Classic/WKH' in the DSA-QAG Computer Specification Matrix.

DSAs funding is also available for insurance and warranty cover for standard computers.

DSAs study needs assessors should not recommend a standard computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSAs study needs assessors must not recommend a standard computer where an entry-level computer will meet the needs of the student. Where a standard computer is identified as a necessity, additional costs, over and above the cost of an entry-level computer (i.e. £200) will be provided through DSAs. DSAs assessors should identify the lowest specification available computer that meets the student's needs.

DSAs study needs assessors should refer to separate guidance on establishing whether a student's existing computer is suitable for running their assistive software effectively. DSAs funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers in this instance.

High cost computers

DSA will only be available for high cost computers e.g. non-PC laptops and desktops, PC computers with larger memory, faster processors and/or graphics cards where such a computer is required solely because of the student's disability – and they will no longer be funded through DSAs where the need is solely due to the way in which the course is delivered.

Institutions must consider how its students, including disabled students, will access the appropriate equipment, when electing to run courses requiring access to a non-PC platform, or other higher cost equipment. Institutions should make appropriate provision for access for all students to such IT equipment. Provision might be made in the form of communal facilities or individual access through institution discretionary funding e.g. bursaries or loan arrangements.

Where a high cost computer is required solely due to the student's disability, funding for the additional costs, over and above the cost of an entry-level computer i.e. £200, will be provided through DSAs. DSAs funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers in this instance.

The student's specific need must be appropriately evidenced. DSAs study needs assessors should not recommend a high-cost computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSAs study needs assessors should identify the lowest specification computer that meets the student's needs.

Low weight computers

Some students may have a specific disability related need for a low-weight laptop computer i.e. one that weighs up to 1.5kg. Where a low-weight laptop is required, additional costs, over and above the cost of an entry-level

computer (i.e. £200) will be provided through DSAs. DSAs funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers.

The student's specific need must be appropriately evidenced. DSAs study needs assessors should not recommend a low-weight computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSAs study needs assessors should identify the lowest specification computer that meets the student's needs.

Tablet devices

Where devices such as tablets are essential to meet the specific needs of the student, DSAs funding will be provided. However, it is expected that a standard computer will provide the increased processing power with which to operate the full range of assistive software, compared to devices such as tablets. Therefore we expect a standard computer to be the most appropriate provision for the student should they require this software, unless their specific needs mean that exceptionally additional devices are required to support their study.

If the student does not need the assistive software which requires extra processing power then it is expected an entry level computer, or a device with equivalent functionality like a tablet, would meet the student's needs. It is expected that an entry-level computer will provide the same functionality as a tablet in the majority of cases and will no longer be funded through DSAs.

6.2 Other equipment

DSAs funding is available for other equipment where the provision of the individual item is required for the student solely due to their disability.

The list below indicates a range of support that is available through DSAs. The list is not exhaustive. Nor should it be taken that the list represents items that all disabled students should receive. Any recommendation should fully evidence why the individual item is required in the particular circumstances of the case. In all cases, the lowest specification item that meets the needs of the student should be recommended by assessors.

- Scanners
- Printers
- Standard computer peripherals
- Specialist screens/monitors (the standard screen/monitor size is set at 15" for laptops and 19" for desktop computers)
- Ergonomic equipment and furniture
- Audio capture equipment

6.3 Assistive and Standard Software

DSAs funding is available for assistive and standard software where the provision of the individual item is required for the student solely due to their disability.

- Assistive software
- Standard software (but only where it is essential for the effective use of assistive software alongside it. Otherwise standard software is considered a mainstream participation cost and outside the scope of DSAs)

6.4 Course Specific Software

All students will need to access course specific software and therefore it falls outside the scope of DSAs funding. Institutions will need to consider how all of their students will be able to access course specific software.

6.5 Wheelchairs / mobility scooters

The responsibility for providing wheelchairs and mobility scooters rests with the National Health Service (NHS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (e.g. through Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP)). The need for a wheelchair or mobility scooter is unlikely to be a solely study related need.

6.6 Radio aids for deaf students

Where a radio aid is needed to enable a hearing impaired/deaf student to access their studies, and it is unavailable from another source, then DSAs funding will be considered.

Section 7 – The DSAs Travel Allowance

The travel allowance (regulation 41(2)(c)) may be used to pay the reasonable additional costs of travel to and from the institution which are incurred because of a disability.

7.1 Attending the institution

The travel allowance is calculated as the excess between public transport costs and the mode of travel the student is required to use because of their disability e.g. a taxi. For example, if a student needs to travel by taxi rather than by public transport because of mobility or visual difficulties, then the DSAs will cover the additional expenditure that represents.

Some students may be required as a result of a disability to use a private car to travel to and from the institution. In this instance, the amount of travel allowance should be any excess between public transport costs and the cost of the same journey by car. The cost of a journey by car is calculated by using the mid-point range of AA motoring costs which includes an element for wear and tear on the car. For 2015/16 this is set at 24p per mile. Suitable parking facilities should be arranged by the institution as a reasonable adjustment.

Generally, where the student has opted to use a mobility element of their Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to lease a Motability car, they will be expected to use that car to attend their institution and travel costs will be calculated using the AA motoring costs of 24p per mile (as above). Suitable parking facilities should be arranged by the institution as a reasonable adjustment. Exceptions may arise where the car cannot be driven by the student themselves. In such instances the study needs assessor must consider the cheapest travel options, taking into account the availability of the Motability car where possible (e.g. for travel to the local bus or train station).

The study needs assessor will need to be satisfied that the travel expenditure is related to the student's study and arises in each case solely by reason of a disability to which the student is subject. A disabled student may still qualify for Travel Grant (regulations 48 - 55) in the same way as any other student (see the 'Assessing Financial Entitlement' guidance).

Travel allowance is not available to enable the student to attend appointments, or other travel needs, that are personal needs e.g. hospital appointments, travel to home address. This is the case irrespective of whether the travel is required because the institution is not in the locality of the appointment or student's home address.

7.2 Attending a work-placement

The site of a student's work placement will be treated as being the same as the institution for the purposes of journeying to and from the site at the start and end of the day.

Institutions and the employer providing the work placement should consider additional travel needs, for example off-site meetings during the day, as part of their reasonable adjustments.

Assistance provided through other government funding for the purposes of attending a work placement e.g. the social work travel bursary, should be taken into account when calculating the excess costs that can be funded through DSAs

7.3 Attending a field trip

The site of a student's field trip will be treated the same as being the same as the institution for the purposes of journeying to and from the site at the start and end of the day.

7.4 Taxi firm accounts

DSAs funding for taxi fares only relates to appropriately licensed taxi providers. Students are required to set up an account with an appropriate taxi firm and payments will be made direct to the company, on receipt of an invoice. Students may need to make ad-hoc taxi journeys from time to time with a company that they do not hold an account with. These will be treated exceptionally and be reimbursed on receipt of a valid itemised company receipt.

Section 8 – The DSAs general allowance

This section sets out information on the type of support that is funded through the general allowance and details where support will be provided in more limited circumstances. Throughout this section exceptions are identified. These should not be taken as an exhaustive list. Where no exceptions are currently identified, exceptions will still be considered on a case-by-case basis.

8.1 DSAs study needs assessments

DSAs funding is available for the initial DSAs study needs assessment and the cost of travel to the DSAs study needs assessment.

The cost of a DSAs study needs assessment is drawn from this allowance. The sector has recently agreed a fee framework which sets out the level of service a student can expect to receive as part of the initial assessment fee. The one-off fee paid in respect of the DSAs study needs assessment will cover any contact the student has with the assessment centre for the duration of the course. The DSAs study needs assessment fee will be paid, even if the study needs assessor identifies that no support is required by the student. No additional fee will be payable for ad-hoc reviews for the duration of the course.

The DSAs study needs assessor will consider the nature of the student's disability and the impact of that disability on the student's ability to access their chosen course. The assessor will set out any recommendations for DSAs funded support and indicate where support may be required that falls outside the scope of DSAs within a Needs Assessment Report. The Report will be sent simultaneously to Student Finance England and the institution's disability service, if the student has given consent to do so. Staff at the institution should not assume that support has been agreed until the DSA2 entitlement letter has been issued.

Once a student has started their course, it may become apparent that additional or different support may be needed. Students should contact their assessment centre to discuss varying the support recommended. Assessment centres will also be asked by SFE to consider requests made by the institution to vary the support recommended. Additional DSAs-funded support will only be agreed by SFE once the view of the assessor has been received and taken into account.

EXCEPTIONS

Subsequent DSAs study needs assessments will only be funded from DSAs where SFE has given express authorisation for a further DSAs study needs assessment to proceed. Students are advised to contact their study needs assessor if they require further help or advice during their course of study.

8.2 Living Accommodation

DSAs are available towards the additional costs of accommodation where the additional costs are incurred solely because of the student's disability.

The cost of the accommodation will be compared to other non-specialist accommodation in the same block of accommodation/locality to determine the reasonable additional cost. Where the student has opted for en-suite accommodation in a unit where all the accommodation is en-suite and available to all students, then no additional costs apply and therefore DSAs will not generally be available.

8.3 Consumables

Funding for general living costs, including books, equipment etc. is already provided through the Maintenance Grant for full-time undergraduate students. Part-time and Postgraduate students do not receive a maintenance grant, as they are expected to self-fund their courses.

Assistive technology solutions should always be considered to remove reliance on hard copy materials. Where additional hard-copy materials are required then the additional costs can be funded through DSAs on receipt of the appropriate receipts. The provision of alternative format books (see below) should reduce reliance on hard copy materials and therefore reduce the need for individual printing and scanning.

8.4 Books

Funding for general living costs, including books, equipment etc. is already provided through the Maintenance Grant for full-time undergraduate students. Part-time and Postgraduate students do not receive a maintenance grant, as they are expected to self-fund their courses.

Core books are a standard expense faced by all students and DSAs funding is not available for core books. Non-core books are optional for students and will not generally be considered essential for DSAs purposes. However, books will continue to be funded where they are essential and the needs of the student cannot be met through other solutions – examples of alternative solutions are set out below.

Institutions should consider how to meet the needs of disabled students to access wider reading or when essential access to non-core books is identified, for example through the provision of e-books if they are fully accessible to the student, alternative format publications, long library loans etc.

For a free source of accessible textbooks and images already provided by publishers go to:

<https://load2learn.org.uk/>

For help finding key contacts for publishers in order to source electronic formats of textbooks for disabled students go to:

<http://www.publisherlookup.org.uk/index.php>

The e-book platforms to which institutions subscribe should be as accessible as possible (e.g. enable adjustments to font size and display colour; enable text to be read by text-to-speech tools) see useful guidance at:

<http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/keyinitiatives/libraries> .

When producing reading lists, it would be good practice for institutions to consider how accessible the textbooks on those lists are.

This would mean identifying books on the reading list that:

- Are readily available in electronic format on the e-book platform(s) to which the institution subscribes.
- If not available or accessible using assistive technology through the institution's e-book platforms: a) could be obtained directly from publishers, or b) would need to be scanned in-house.

Where reading lists contain books that are neither available nor accessible using the institution's e-book platforms, it would be good practice for institution's library services to obtain files direct from the publisher in a timely manner.

It would be good practice for institutions to make assistive technology tools, such as text-to-speech, available on all institution computer workstations so that wherever the student accesses electronic texts they have the option of having speech support.

Where books are not available in an alternative format institutions should provide long library loans or fully accessible scanned versions where appropriate (where copyright regulations allow).

Leeds Beckett University – a case study

Over a number of years, Leeds Beckett University has developed a process for acquiring and testing accessible format texts on behalf of print impaired students registered with the University's Disability Services.

With an increasing number of students requiring accessible format texts, in 2007/08 the University began to approach publishers to request alternative formats of print books, and developed a robust procedure for keeping track of the requests made and files received.

The service has grown from 27 requests to publishers in 2007/2008 to 306 in 2013/14.

The process begins with the Learning Support Officer meeting the student to

assess their needs and obtain a reading list. The Copyright Officer then contacts the relevant publisher for each item and uploads all correspondence to a database, including licence agreements. Any alternative format files provided by the publisher are stored on a secure server for testing. An accessible copy is then sent to the student whilst a back-up copy is retained (if permitted by the publisher).

If no file is supplied, in-house scanning would be considered, but only if the title was essential reading for the student.

Information about the ease (or otherwise) of obtaining alternative format files from specific publishers is provided to academic staff, to encourage them to consider this when putting together their reading lists.

Leeds Beckett is also working on a set of preferred licensing terms to be included in any subscription agreement for e-book platforms being considered for purchase, with accessibility being a key factor.

8.5 Internet connection/costs

DSAs funding is not generally available for this support

The wide availability of internet access through institutions, student accommodation and other venues has removed the necessity of providing individual personal internet access. Distance learning students, disabled and non-disabled, are expected to have internet access to enable them to enrol for distance learning courses e.g. Open University courses.

8.6 Special diets (for those living with allergies)

DSAs funding is not generally available for this support

A student who requires a special diet will generally face the additional cost of such a diet irrespective of the fact they are studying. Therefore funding generally falls outside the scope of DSAs.

8.7 Fridges (for students needing to store medication)

DSAs funding is available for the purchase of a small personal fridge, where it is essential that medication is stored in a fridge and communal facilities are not suitable.

Section 9 – Other

9.1 Appeals

Disabled students have legal protection under the Equality Act 2010 from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.

Institutions have a legal duty under the Equality Act to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled students. If a student requests a reasonable adjustment from their institution, and the institution determines that the adjustment is not reasonable, the student can make an appeal through the institution's normal channels. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome to their appeal they may escalate their appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE (OIA), once the internal appeals procedures are exhausted <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>. If the OIA determines that there has been a failure on the part of the institution and upholds the student's appeal, then the institution would need to respond to the OIA.

Institutions are being asked to improve the appeals process for students who have requested an adjustment which has been rejected. Institutions should seek to minimise any delay for disabled students seeking adjustments. The OIA has recently issued a good practice framework in relation to timescales.

Students who wish to appeal against an award of DSAs funding should raise a formal appeal by contacting the SLC:

- Email: formal_appeals@slc.co.uk
- Online Customer Appeal form
http://www.slc.co.uk/media/860466/sfe_appeals_form_1516_d.pdf

Further information can be found at
<http://www.slc.co.uk/media/270043/appeals.pdf>

9.2 Reimbursements

Reimbursements will not generally be provided for support or equipment provided or purchased before a DSAs application has been received / DSAs study needs assessment was carried out / SFE approval has been provided.

Students should not be advised by disability advisers or assessors to commit to expenditure, before SFE approval is received on the assumption that a reimbursement will be made. Exceptions will be considered for costs of travel to the course from the date the application for DSAs is received, if the travel costs are subsequently recommended by the assessor. The cost of previously owned/purchased equipment will not be reimbursed.

Reimbursement for NMH provided by an institution may be considered, but it is expected that a reasonable adjustment in such cases may be more appropriate. In any event, only support that is subsequently recommended by the study needs assessor will be considered for funding through DSAs.

9.3 Procurement of NMH

The current process of exemption from the two quote process is under review. Institutions with a current exemption to the 2-quote process should not enter into any new arrangements or extend existing arrangements with suppliers. No new applications for exemption to the 2-quote process are being accepted.

9.4 VAT and Disabled Students' Allowances

Under VAT law, equipment and appliances are VAT zero-rated if:

- i. they are designed *solely* for use by a disabled person;
- ii. the supply is to a disabled person for their personal or domestic use; and
- iii. the equipment is relevant to a person's disability.

If the supplier has received advice/confirmation from the 'designer and/or manufacturer' that the goods are '*designed solely for use by a disabled person*' (condition 'i' above) and the supplier is satisfied that conditions ('ii' & 'iii' above) for VAT relief are met, they should not charge VAT on the goods at *the time of supply*. Before zero-rating the goods, a supplier should ask a purchaser to complete an 'eligibility declaration' contained in VAT Notice 701/7/2002 *Reliefs for disabled people*.

The services of adapting goods that have not been designed solely for use by disabled people, to suit the condition of a disabled person can also be zero-rated. The goods themselves however remain standard-rated and the value of those goods and of the zero-rated services of adaptation can be apportioned when calculating the VAT chargeable.

For the purpose of VAT relief, a disabled person is:

- a person with a physical or mental impairment which has a long term and substantial effect on their ability to carry out everyday activities;
- a condition which the medical profession treats as a chronic sickness (for example, diabetes); or
- a person who is terminally ill.

Computer Equipment that may be zero-rated when supplied to a disabled person for personal or domestic use

In general, computer equipment is only zero-rated if it is designed solely for use by a disabled person. Examples of equipment which might qualify for zero-rating include special items of furniture, Braille embossing printers and speech synthesisers. A central processor can **by concession** be zero-rated if it has software installed which enables a disabled student to use the computer effectively or to carry out tasks effectively when otherwise they could not do so and is sold as part of a computer system.

When a computer system is purchased that contains both elements on which VAT is chargeable as well as zero-rated, the supplier may decide **by concession** to apply a 'composite rate' of VAT to the whole system. Suppliers who decide to apply a composite rate of VAT for computer packages may do so after consulting HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Please refer to Section 9 of VAT Notice 701/7/2002 *Reliefs for disabled people*.

General purpose goods and services such as standard recording or computer equipment (standard printers, keyboards, VDUs or software) are not eligible for VAT relief even when purchased for, or by a disabled person. There is no provision for VAT relief on taxi fares and VAT will be chargeable in the usual way.

Under VAT notice 701/7/2002, the following are listed as services which might be zero-rated to a disabled person: installation of qualifying goods, adaptation of general goods, repair and maintenance of qualifying goods, **some** building alterations, and goods supplied in connection with **qualifying** services and letting of goods on hire or lease.

9.5 Devolved administrations

Students from England studying at institutions in the devolved administrations and who are eligible for student support from SFE will have the same DSAs entitlement as students studying in England.

All other arrangements, including appealing against decisions will be subject to the arrangements in place within the relevant administration / institution. Organisations in the devolved administrations that are responsible for students and student complaints include:

Student Award Agency for Scotland – Scotland
Student Finance Wales
Office of the Independent Adjudicator – England and Wales
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

ANNEX A - Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

“Specific learning difficulty” is often used as an umbrella term to cover the following:

- Dyslexia
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyspraxia or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)
- Attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD or ADHD)

As with any disability, no two individuals experience the same combination of difficulties and some students may exhibit signs of more than one SpLD.

There are two forms of SpLD

- a) Developmental SpLD – a neurologically based problem with particular aspects of learning despite appropriate educational opportunity and intellectual ability.
- b) Acquired SpLD – is characterised by a loss of skills as a result of a neurological trauma, illness or brain disease.

The following characteristics have been noted in connection with SpLDs;

- a marked inefficiency in the working or short-term memory system which may result in, for example, problems with reading comprehension and written composition;
- inadequate phonological processing abilities (innate difficulty linking sound and symbol) which affects the acquisition of fluent reading and spelling skills;
- difficulties with motor skills or coordination which might affect tasks which involve simultaneous use of several skills;
- problems with visual processing which can affect reading (for example, causing the print to appear distorted or the reader to lose their place excessively) and handwriting (for example losing track of place when copying. This can be termed visual stress);
- reading problems which may include slow reading speed, difficulty extracting sense from written material without substantial re-reading, inaccurate reading, omission of words;
- writing problems which may include poor handwriting and slow writing speed, omission of words, spelling problems, difficulties categorising information and sequencing ideas;
- difficulties with mathematical skills and concepts: can also be seen in difficulties with abstract concepts of time and direction, following sequential instructions, sequencing events affects, ability to acquire arithmetical/mathematical skills;
- lack of structure in oral presentations, seminars and discussion and difficulties with word retrieval;
- short attention spans and a high level of distractibility; and

- poor organisation making time management very difficult.

Screening for SpLDs

Screening for SpLDs usually precedes a diagnostic assessment and the purpose is to determine whether a full diagnostic assessment would be warranted. Screening for SpLDs does not constitute a diagnostic assessment and therefore a screening for SpLDs as the sole evidence of a SpLD will not be accepted. There is no requirement for a student to undergo a screening for SpLDs when providing their evidence for HE purposes.

Full diagnostic evidence of SpLDs

A Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) Working Group was set up in 2003 to review the arrangements for identifying and assessing SpLDs in higher education students. The Working Group was asked to produce a report recommending a framework to guarantee the quality of assessments which diagnose specific learning difficulties. The final report has been published and is available on the Student Finance England practitioners' website at: http://practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=133,4210339&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL#section7

The SpLDs Working Group asked a committee to take a lead in implementing a number of the report's recommendations. This committee is the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC). A sub-committee of SASC, the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC), will review periodically the list of suitable tests contained in the SpLDs Working Group report and consider new tests for inclusion.

The framework recommended in the report has been adopted by the SFE. The table below sets out the criteria a diagnostic assessment must meet depending on when it was carried out.

Diagnostic assessments carried out before September 2006	Accept diagnostic assessments carried out by psychologists and suitably qualified specialist teachers. Specialist teachers who assess dyslexia should hold AMBDA (Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association) or a qualification from an advanced training course which assesses adults for dyslexia and is recognised by the British Dyslexia Association's Accreditation Board.
Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2006 and August 2007	Accept diagnostic assessments carried out by psychologists and suitably qualified specialist teachers as above. Diagnostic reports to be in the format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's report. Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in

	the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See p45
Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2007 and August 2008	<p>Accept diagnostic reports from psychologists and specialist teachers. Specialist teachers must hold a current practising certificate in assessing specific learning difficulties issued by their relevant professional association (for example, the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS), Dyslexia Action or the British Dyslexia Association). Psychologists must hold a current practising certificate issued by their relevant professional association (for example, the British Psychological Society).</p> <p>Diagnostic reports to be in the report format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines</p> <p>Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See p45</p>
Diagnostic assessments carried out from September 2008	<p>Procedures as from September 2007 above plus the following.</p> <p>All training for assessing specific learning difficulties to incorporate the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines.</p>
From 2012	Psychologists will be registered with the HCPC (the Health and Care Professions Council, formerly the Health Professions Council) as practitioner psychologists.

Further information on identifying specific learning difficulties through assessment can be found in the regularly updated guidance issued by SASC and its SpLD Test Evaluation Committee see www.sasc.org.uk. New guidance relating to the assessment of ADHD and updated guidance on Dyspraxia is now available.

Diagnostic assessments conducted from the age of 16 are appropriate for the purposes of DSAs eligibility. If the diagnosis was carried out before the age of 16, the student will require a review diagnostic assessment. The diagnostic

assessment should focus on those areas where there are likely to be difficulties that impact on study, in particular working memory, information processing and phonological awareness. It should include exploring effects on literacy skills, (speed and accuracy in reading and writing individual words and prose, also incorporating reading comprehension). The report should identify strengths, current strategies and anticipated difficulties that impact on study at HE level.

Once the diagnostic report has been accepted there is no requirement for a student to undergo a new diagnosis later in the course. A diagnostic report accepted for a first course should also be acceptable for subsequent courses, including postgraduate courses.

Further testing may be indicated if many years have passed since the last assessment (e.g. assessment at 40 following diagnosis at 16).

A post-16 diagnostic assessment should be based on tests recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group's guidelines and updated by SASC and its SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See 'SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) and the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee' p 45. This post-16 assessment is part of the diagnosis and the cost should be met by the student, although an application may be made to the institution's discretionary funds to meet the cost. This assessment should be carried out by a qualified specialist assessor as noted in the table above.

The Diagnostic report should state that because the student has a specific learning difficulty they should receive extra support to compensate for these difficulties. The study needs assessment will then determine the nature of the support that is required. The judgement on eligibility made by a qualified professional should be accepted unless it can be shown that the supporting evidence is inadequate to have reasonably formed a view; for example, the evidence is out of date or very cursory. In such circumstances further information should be sought.