

## **Disabled Students Allowance Frequently Asked Questions – July 2015**

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## Specialist Equipment

### £200 Student Contribution

Q. How does the process regarding the £200 student contribution work?

A. Where a DSA funded computer is recommended and agreed for new students in 2015/16, the student would need to contribute the first £200 towards the cost of the computer. This would need to be paid direct to the agreed ATSP (Assistive Technology Service Provider).

Q. Can HEPs offer support toward the cost of the £200 from their Student Opportunity Fund?

A. It is the decision of each HEP how they wish to use their own funding, including the Student Opportunity Fund.

Q. Is there an issue around delay given that, if HEPs do offer £200, students can only access the equipment once they are enrolled at university and on the course – what will happen between the start of the course and the delivery of AT equipment?

A. We appreciate there may be some students in this position, so they may have to wait until they enrol before they can obtain delivery of their equipment if the supplier requires upfront payment.

Q. Where can a student be referred to if they state that they cannot afford £200 and the HEP are unable to provide financial support? Is there an agreed referral process in such circumstances?

A. The Government is of the view that the majority of disabled students already have a suitable computer or will be able to fund a £200 contribution from their living cost loan, maintenance grant, or possibly from some other source, such as hardship funds and bursaries.

We appreciate there may be some students who will not have access to sufficient funds. There is no referral process in these circumstances.

Q. What is the planned process to confirm if students are already in possession of a laptop when they attend the assessment?

A. There has always been a requirement for Needs Assessors to determine if a student had an existing computer. The Pre-Assessment form and any pre information from the Assessment Centre to the student should include details regarding this.

### Entry Level Computers

Q. Is an entry level computer classed as being able to run MS Office, regardless of the performance of that computer?

A. An entry level computer is expected expenditure for all students. All working entry level computers are capable of running MS Office.

Q. Is the requirement for a DVR – used to record and download voice notes onto a computer – sufficient reason for a recommendation for a higher than entry level computer?

A. No, this is not a sufficient reason. Accompanying software for DVRs can be run on an entry level computer.

Q. Which pieces of software will be classed as 'low grade' i.e. not requiring more than an entry level computer? Can a list be provided?

A. It is expected that Needs Assessors have the knowledge (or can access this) to determine whether the software they are recommending will run on an entry level computer. Each piece of software will have specific system requirements. No list will be provided.

## High Spec Computers

Q. If the HEP can provide evidence that there is no way of making reasonable adjustments to courses / accessibility, will DSAs be made available for higher spec computers?

A. No, the DSA guidance does not allow for this exception. Higher spec computers can only be considered when the need is solely because of the student's disability.

Q. Some HEPs have higher spec computers (such as MACs) in computer labs / cluster suites. Where a student is unable to access these computers due to their disability, will DSAs be made available for higher spec computers?

A. Institutions must consider how their 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 institutional discretionary funding e.g. bursaries or loan arrangements.

Q. In what circumstances would SFE consider that a higher spec computer can be funded through the DSAs?

A. SFE can only consider funding higher spec computers where it is required solely because of the student's disability e.g. when their disability prevents them from being able to physically use a standard/entry level computer.

## Software

Q. Are there any circumstances where the DSAs would be used to fund course specific software?

A. No, as per the DSA guidance, this is something all students will require access to and therefore falls outside of the scope of DSAs funding.

Q. Has any guidance or instruction been issued to HEPs regarding their responsibilities in ensuring student access to course software?

A. No instructions have been issued. HEPs should consider as a matter of course how all their students will access the necessary course software, including their disabled students.

Q. Will Microsoft Office come as standard on the computer and therefore be included in the £200 student contribution.

A. No, this is a separate item.

## Equipment Upgrades

Q. Are students still able to use their own monies to upgrade the recommended equipment e.g. upgrade to a higher specification computer?

A. Yes, the upgrade process remains the same. If upgrading to a different computer, students would pay a £200 student contribution plus any additional cost over what SFE agreed to pay from the chosen quote.

## **Rental Equipment**

Q. Will rental equipment still be an option given the introduction of the £200 student contribution?

A. From 2015/16 rental quotes/equipment will no longer be required. Needs Assessors should explore with the HEPs whether they can loan any required Assistive Technology to students who require it in the final stages of their course.

## **Changing Supplier - Open Market**

Q. Are students still able to choose to obtain their equipment from the open market?

A. As per the DSA guidance, students are permitted to purchase their computer from the open market. The remainder of the equipment must be provided by a DSA QAG registered ATSP.

Q. If a student opts to buy a computer on the open market, what costs would DSAs pay towards this?

A. The maximum DSAs contribution in this situation will be the value of the computer on the chosen ATSP quote minus the £200 student contribution.

NB. As per the reimbursement process change in January 2012, SFE will not consider refunds where the purchase was made prior to the DSA2 Entitlement letter.

Q. Who would pay for any delivery and installation costs for recommended software that is to be provided by an ATSP and loaded onto the computer purchased on the open market?

A. These costs would be funded by DSAs and should be included in the quote within the Needs Assessment.

Q. What advice is given to students to explain these open market policies so that the student is in no doubt as to the spec / reimbursement policies?

A. The DSA2 Entitlement letter includes information and advises students to contact SFE so the details of their case can be discussed and appropriate advice given. We would also expect Needs Assessors to set out the facts so the student can make an informed choice if this is raised during the assessment. The needs assessor should recommend that the student receives a computer through the ATSPs for ease, as part of the one-stop shop arrangements.

Q. If a student opts to purchase their own computer on the open market, will Needs Assessors then be asked by SFE to provide updated quotes for equipment minus the computer? In order to save time & money, could a Needs Assessor submit additional quotes in the NAR (to cover if student opts to purchase their own computer?)

A. SFE is able to obtain the updated quotes from the supplier in this instance. If the student knew for certain at the time of the assessment that they wanted to use the open market and were fully aware of the conditions, the Needs Assessor could potentially provide these quotes but it is not mandatory.

Q. Where the student has purchased a computer from the open market, what checks will SFE do to ensure the computer is of a sufficient specification before reimbursing the student.

A. SFE will only reimburse the student once the invoice is received from the ATSP which confirms the installation of the software was successful, this will show that the computer was of sufficient specification and allow SFE to refund up to the value of what would have been paid had the student used an ATSP.

## Health Checks

Q. Are health checks still able to be requested?

A. Health checks should only be requested for existing students whose DSA-funded computer has developed a fault and is no longer under warranty. Equipment under warranty should be reviewed free of charge.

Q. How are Needs Assessors expected to inspect computers to verify if it is suitable? Are Needs Assessors expected to know technical data / have an awareness of technical specifications in order to know the age, condition and suitability of computers?

A. Assessment centres are expected to check the suitability of students' existing computers using the guidance provided on the DSA QAG website. Assessors do not need to have detailed technical knowledge in order to follow the guidance.

Q. What is the process if a student's computer breaks, particularly as more students are likely to be using a non DSA funded computer?

A. SFE will consider each case on its own merit. SFE generally include a paragraph in the DSA2 Entitlement letter to advise students to take out warranty/insurance when they have their own computer. This would need to be considered in any cases that fall into this scenario.

## Radio Aids

Q. What evidence is expected to be provided to prove that radio aids are not available from another source?

A. We would expect the Needs Assessor to confirm in their report details of any equipment the student already has access to and any attempts that have been made to obtain this equipment from elsewhere. No physical evidence is required.

## Other Computer Peripherals

Q. What is the latest position with the standard 'bundle'?

A. As per the latest Specification Matrix document (March 2014) the content of the bundles is as follows:

Desktop Bundle:

Wired Keyboard & Wired Mouse, External speakers (if not part of monitor), 6-way mains anti-surge extension, Powered 4 way USB hub

Laptop Bundle:

Wired Keyboard & Wired Mouse [Mac - compatible devices acceptable, but keyboard must have Apple layout and marked specialist keys], 6-way mains anti-surge extension, Powered 4 way USB hub, Kensington Easy Riser adjustable height laptop stand, Carry case [Rucksack / Briefcase]

Q. Does the bundle have to be provided in every instance and does it need to have disability related justification?

A. If the Needs Assessor or the student does not want/need the bundle then this should be noted in the NAR and SFE will accept this. If the bundle is to be provided it does not need full disability related justification.

## Non Medical Helper Allowance

### Appropriate Qualifications and HMRC Status

Q. Is it SFE's position now that any new NMH supplier that is not on an approved list will be required to provide evidence of a) HMRC and/or NINO evidence b) employment status c) appropriate qualifications or suitable experience?

A. There is currently no approved list of suppliers however the guidance confirms that DSA funding will not be available for individuals without an appropriate employment status, and they must have the appropriate qualifications. Therefore where SFE feel this is unclear, evidence may be requested.

Q. Is it only a request by a student to change NMH support provider that will instigate the checks in the above question?

A. No, this information may be requested for any supplier, not specifically where the student has instigated a change of supplier.

Q. There will be specific case scenarios where it may be highly appropriate (and cheaper) for family members to provide NMH support, is it necessary for these checks to be made?

A. Yes, SFE must ensure public funds are only paid to appropriate providers.

### Quote Selection and Exemptions

Q. Is it still SFE policy that, all things being equal, the more cost-effective of the 2 quotes will be selected?

A. Yes, SFE will select the most cost effective quote.

Q. Do SFE look at the cheapest quote 'package' from same NHM provider or will they select different elements of NMH support from different providers?

A. SFE will choose the most cost effective supplier of each NMH type.

Q. Can Needs Assessors recommend NMH suppliers that they know are 'ready to go', as opposed to those NMH providers that, whilst perhaps cheaper, are not 'business ready' and the student would face a wait while the 'winning' NMH provider recruits, trains and otherwise readies new staff?

A. Needs Assessors should be quoting for support providers who have availability to provide the requested support. Where a supplier cannot fulfil an order they should contact SFE so the supplier can be changed.

Q. What is the current state of play regarding HEPs who are exempt from 2 quotes?

A. Currently all NARs should contain 2 quotes for NMH. Where the institution has a current exemption that is being considered, the NAR should include that institutions single quote provider as one of the 2 quotes. SFE will still honour the one quote by selecting the HEP/Supplier that the HEP have a contract with. This exercise is still continuing and BIS will provide further information in due course.

Q. What if Needs Assessors are unable to provide a 2nd quote for rural areas.

A. SFE will consider these cases, however, since the introduction of mandatory two quotes in April 2015 SFE have not seen any instances of this.

Q. How are BIS and SFE planning to ensure that once exemptions are removed, Needs Assessors do not submit one quote from a preferred supplier and a second from a known high cost supplier?

A. BIS will be considering this as part of the ongoing project.

## **Notetaking**

Q. Does the change to how typed Notetaking is funded (½ Band Rate, ½ duration) require a new Role Descriptor within the NMH Service Reference Manual?

A. Currently there are no plans to add a new role descriptor for this.

Q. The DSA guidance states “assessor must take steps to identify workers that can take typed notes at the time”. What are the ‘steps’ that the assessor is expected to take?

A. The Needs Assessor should discuss the support with various suppliers to try to identify an appropriate supplier who can provide the correct support. Where such provision is not identified, a manual note-taker should be recommended with typing up time added where necessary.

## **Changing Supplier**

Q. Can students research and choose their own NMH provider?

A. Yes, however, if a student chooses their own provider on preference only, they would need to fund any additional costs incurred. The DSA2 Entitlement letter advises any student who wishes to change their provider to contact SFE so we can advise them of the conditions. Also any changes may be subject to the new supplier meeting the criteria as per the Appropriate Qualifications and HMRC Status questions above.

## **Interim Support**

Q. Can interim NMH support still be put in place by the HEP and will SFE fund this?

A. Rules surrounding interim support have not changed for 15/16 and remain the same as per previous years. SFE will consider funding interim support providing that support type is subsequently recommended in the Needs Assessment and agreed.

Q. Is it now expected that students will not need a consistent number of support hours per year throughout their university course? Are Assessors now expected to recommend, say, 30 hours in Year 1, 20 hours support in Year 2 and 10 hours support in Year 3?

A. DSA guidance for Specialist One to One Study Skills Support and Specialist Mentors asks Needs Assessors to evaluate this and consider this in their recommendations. SFE considers all NMH recommendations on a case by case basis and expects that specific justification is provided.

## General Allowance

### Consumables

Q. Although 'consumables' are referenced in section 8.3, the 'printing consumables fund' (i.e. paper and ink) is not specifically mentioned. Presumably, if justification is successfully made for a printer, it follows that the same justification permits provision of a printing consumables fund?

A. There is no 'printing consumables fund'. Printing consumables such as paper and ink would be covered by 'consumables'. Funding can be considered through DSAs, however, other solutions should be considered such as the AT that is provided, which could reduce the need for this allowance. Assessors should give their view on what level of funding may be required and how they have arrived at that estimate.

### Books

Q. DSA guidance is not abundantly clear in which circumstance a 'book fund' is permitted, and in which circumstances it is not permitted, please clarify.

Will it be expected that other avenues e.g. loans and book scanning; pursuit of ebooks etc are explored and recommended as a first 'port of call', with book funding more easily available as a subsequent/additional recommendation further down the line, should these avenues prove insufficient to meet the student's disability-related need?

A. There is no 'book fund'. Separate guidance will shortly be issued to assessors on how the provision of books should be considered. In brief, DSAs funding for non-core books may be considered but the default position is that the student should be advised to explore with their institution the availability of other formats and services to remove the need for hard-copy texts.

### Accommodation

Q If HEPs provide accommodation by 'blocks' (i.e. a block of ensuite rooms, a block of wifi enabled rooms, a block of shared-facility rooms, etc.), how is a student supposed to provide comparable costs within the same block? How much scope is there to define what a 'block' is?

A. The DSA Guidance confirms that comparisons can be taken from the same block /locality. SFE will review each case and are not specifically restricted to same block. Further guidance will shortly be issued to assessors on accommodation.

Q. Is it solely the responsibility of the student to provide the Needs Assessor with 'comparable' costs for HEP accommodations?

A. No, the Needs Assessor may work with the student and the HEP to determine how the accommodation was selected or allocated to the student and the relevant comparative costs.



## Travel Allowance

### Taxi Accounts

Q. If the Needs Assessor has recommended two taxi companies that are not on the approved list, will SFE automatically revert to taxi provider B if A cannot set up an account? Also what if provider B doesn't wish for an account?

A. In the unlikely event that both providers are unable to set up an account, SFE would ask the Needs Assessor for an additional quote. Most Needs Assessors would make every attempt to provide quotes for companies willing to set up an account.

Q. How will the administration and set-up costs of a taxi company new to the SLC approved list, of which they may not be aware, be factored into quotes supplied to the assessment centre and quoted in the NAR?

A. When requesting quotes, Needs Assessors are free to advise the quote is for an account which may affect the price of the quote provided. SFE will also call and email any new providers so this would be picked up at this point.

Q. Is there an issue around needing to provide 2 approved taxi account quotes in areas where there may not be two companies? (e.g. rural areas such as North and South Wales). Even if free to quote 2 new taxi firms (not on current approved list), getting quotes from 2 taxi firms could still be a problem in more rural areas.

A. SFE will consider these exceptional circumstances as and when they happen.

Q. Where only a single account-providing firm can be identified at a particular location, will SFE accept a single taxi quotation from an account-providing firm? Where no account-providing firm can be identified at a particular location, will SFE accept two quotations from non-account-providing firms?

A. If two quotes cannot be provided then we would consider this, however we already work with many suppliers who are able to set up accounts and the UK coverage is quite substantial. Our list is also being added to on a regular basis when new firms are validated.

### Disability Living Allowance (DLA) / Motability Car

Q. In circumstances where the student has a Motability Car but is unwell and a family member drives the student to their HEP, is there any option available for the family member to be paid an hourly rate?

A. No, mileage rates only are payable from DSAs.

Q. In circumstances where the student is not in receipt of DLA and whose condition would ordinarily be sufficient for taxi travel, can a family member or friend be paid as a driver in lieu of payment for a taxi? Paying the family member would probably be cheaper than the cost for a taxi.

A. No, taxi fares can only be paid to appropriately licensed taxi firms. In this scenario, only mileage could be paid.

## Additional Recommendations

Q. Who can make recommendations for new or increased support?

A. From 2015/16 SFE are only able to accept recommendations from Needs Assessors. This applies to both new and continuing students.

Q. Will this new process not cause delays if all requests have to go through a Needs Assessor?

A. We do not envisage any issues, but this is something that will be monitored. Needs Assessors have a dedicated email inbox which is generally worked by SFE in 24-48 hours.

Q. If additional NMH hours are required due to changes within the HEP, course modules/lectures for example, wouldn't a Disability Advisor at the HEP be best placed to provide the recommendation?

A. It is appreciated that Disability Advisors have key information that will be required, but as per the 15/16 guidance, they would need to contact the Needs Assessor and ask them to submit the request for additional hours.

Q. Will the Request for Additional NMH Hours form still be available to the Needs Assessor and is this mandatory or could an email suffice?

A. SFE are considering whether there is any value in keeping this form. Needs Assessors are able to make additional recommendations as they do now, either with addendums to NARs or by email.

## Miscellaneous Queries

Q. Do mileage and parking rates for 2015/16 apply to both new and continuing students?

A. The DSAs do not pay for parking. Mileage rates are set per academic year and apply to both new and continuing students.

Q. Will invoices for Equipment and AT Training be paid for 2015/16 prior to the student enrolling/registering on the course?

A. Yes, as per previous years SFE will pay these invoices.

Q. With the planned changes for NMH in 2016/17, will Needs Assessors still be making recommendations for these types in the Needs Assessment?

A. 2016/17 has not been finalised at this time so SFE are unable to comment.

Q. How will Late Applications work in 2015/16 given the changes to who can make recommendations?

A. The position for 2016/17 has not been finalised. This will be announced in due course.

Q. Can students with Irlen Syndrome / Visual Stress be accepted for DSA if this is their only condition? If so, what evidence would be accepted?

A. Yes, SFE will accept applications for this condition on its own. Although not an exhaustive list, SFE will consider Visual Stress/Irlen Test Screening – by Optometrist, Optician, Orthoptist, Ophthalmologist or other qualified Irlen Screener or diagnostician.