

**STUDENT SUPPORT INFORMATION NOTE
(SSIN)**

Arrangements for students funded under the
Education (Student Support) Regulations

DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCES (DSAs)

To: Student Finance administrators and practitioners in institutions of higher education, further education or specialist colleges providing HE, and alternative providers;

DSA assessors, assessment centres and suppliers;

The Disabled Students' Allowance Quality Assurance Group;

Student Finance advisors, and

The Student Loans Company

**SSIN 08/19
November 2019**

Dear Colleagues,

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) - new arrangements for assistive technology service providers, providers of needs assessments, and non-medical help providers following the closure of DSA-QAG

The Disabled Students' Allowance Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG) has announced that it will be closing on 20th December 2019. This SSIN outlines the new (and in some cases interim) arrangements that will be in place following the closure of DSA-QAG.

Information for students

DSA-QAG currently provides a search tool for needs assessment centres on the DSA-QAG website, which will not be available following DSA-QAG's closure. Instead, the Student Loans Company (SLC) will direct students to a list of the available needs assessment centres in the DSA1 letter that students receive informing them that they are eligible for DSAs.

Information for needs assessors

The search tool for non-medical help (NMH) providers on the DSA-QAG website will not be available following DSA-QAG's closure. Instead, needs assessors should refer to the list of suppliers for DSA-funded NMH which will be published shortly at: <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres/>

The rates charged for NMH by each supplier will no longer be published (note that the cost bands for NMH roles remain in operation and are provided at Annex 1). Needs assessors should source quotes for NMH directly from suppliers on the list referenced above. This can be done in conjunction with confirming that the supplier has the capacity to deliver the support recommended. Needs assessors should continue to provide two quotations for NMH support along with their recommendation as currently.

NMH providers who wish to make updates to the information published on the list (e.g. contact details), or who wish to be removed from the list, should contact SLC at: dsa_requests@slc.co.uk.

The moratorium on new NMH providers will continue until further notice. Existing providers who wish to add new roles should contact DfE at Disabled.STUDENTALLOWANCES@education.gov.uk.

Quality assurance and audit

Assistive Technology Service Providers

A tender for the supply of assistive technology and training will shortly be launched by SLC. For Assistive Technology Service Providers (ATSPs), the arrangements outlined below will be in place for the interim period between the closure of DSA-QAG and the new contract arrangements coming into force.

In that interim period, the Department expects all ATSPs to continue to adhere to the key principles and standards underlying the Quality Assurance Framework for ATSPs previously operated by DSA-QAG. These are summarised at Annex 2. During this period DfE will monitor the performance of ATSPs in collaboration with SLC and may carry out spot checks on ATSPs. DfE reserves the right to take action as appropriate in response to any concerns.

Providers of needs assessments

SLC will be launching a tender exercise to identify preferred suppliers who will provide SFE students with their needs assessments. We expect the new contracts to be in place for autumn 2020. For providers of needs assessments, the arrangements outlined below will apply for the interim period between the closure of DSA-QAG and the new contract arrangements coming into force.

During this interim period all providers of needs assessments are expected to continue to adhere to the key principles and standards underlying the Quality Assurance Framework for Assessment Centres previously operated by DSA-QAG. These are summarised at Annex 3. During this period DfE will monitor the performance of providers in collaboration with SLC and may carry out spot checks on providers. DfE reserves the right to take action as appropriate in response to any concerns.

Non-medical help (NMH) providers

Full details of the new auditing and quality assurance arrangements for NMH providers will be communicated shortly by DfE. All NMH providers will be expected to continue to adhere to the key principles and standards underlying the Quality Assurance Framework for NMH Providers previously operated by DSA-QAG during any interim period. This includes in particular ensuring that all NMH support workers meet the requirements of the Qualification and Professional Body Membership Matrix for the roles in which they are delivering support.

Complaints

DSA-funded students should raise any complaints with the supplier of their service in the first instance. Where the student and supplier are unable to resolve matters the student should now be directed to SLC. Details of SLC's complaints procedure can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/student-loans-company/about/complaints-procedure>.

Whistleblowing

If you wish to raise concerns about a supplier or a student committing fraud in relation to receiving DSA-funded support, please contact SLC at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-report-suspected-fraud-to-the-student-loans-company>.

If you have other concerns, or if it is not appropriate to contact SLC, please contact DfE at:

Disabled.STUDENTALLOWANCES@education.gov.uk.

Conflicts of interest

All providers will still be required to complete Conflicts of Interest (Col) returns annually. Where these were previously submitted to DSA-QAG, they will now be submitted directly to DfE. We will notify ATSPs, providers of needs assessments, and NMH providers of the need to complete their returns within a one-month window, and we currently expect to do so in early 2020. DfE will also update and reissue the existing guidance on conflicts of interest for clarity. As now, we expect any material changes which take place in between annual returns to be provided to DfE via a revised Col return.

Sanctions will continue to be applied to those providers who do not submit a Col return. They will be suspended from our list of providers until a satisfactory return has been received by DfE.

Contact points for queries

Please direct any queries about the quality assurance and audit arrangements, or about conflicts of interest, to DfE at:

Disabled.STUDENTALLOWANCES@education.gov.uk.

Please direct any general queries regarding the DSA product and service to the relevant mailbox for the service you deliver:

NMH Suppliers	-	dsa_team@slc.co.uk
Needs Assessment Centre	-	access_centre@slc.co.uk
Disability Advisers	-	disability_adviser@slc.co.uk
ATSPs	-	dsa_team@slc.co.uk

Disabled Students' Allowances Team,
Higher & Further Education,
Department for Education,
Sanctuary Buildings,
Great Smith Street,
London, SW1P3BT



Department
for Education

Annex 1 – Cost bands for NMH support

Band	Role	Cost range
3	Communication Support Worker	£35 - £44
3	Communication Support Worker working with British Sign Language user	£35 - £44
3	Lip speaker	£35 - £44
3	Specialist Notetaker for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students - Includes Electronic Note Taking	£35 - £40
3	Specialist Notetaker for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students - Speech to Text Reporter	£35 - £40
3	Specialist Notetaker for Deaf/Hard of Hearing students – Respeaking	£35 - £40
3	Specialist Notetaker for Visually Impaired students - including Braille	£35 - £40
3	Specialist Transcription Service	£25 - £32
3	Mobility Trainer	£35 - £42
4	Specialist Mentor - Mental Health Difficulties	£50 - £66
4	Specialist Mentor - Autism Spectrum Conditions	£50 - £66
4	Specialist one-to-one Study Skills and Strategy Support - Specific Learning Difficulties	£50 - £72
4	Specialist one-to-one Study Skills and Strategy Support - Autism Spectrum Conditions	£50 - £72
4	British Sign Language interpreter including Interpreter for deaf or deafblind students.	£50 - £57
4	Specialist Support Professional for Students with Sensory Impairment - hearing impaired	£50 - £72
4	Specialist Support Professional for Students with Sensory Impairment - Vision impaired	£50 - £72
4	Specialist Support Professional for Students with Sensory Impairment - Multi-sensory Impaired	£50 - £72

Annex 2 – Key principles and standards for ATSPs

General

1. The ATSP should, as far as reasonably practical, provide a “one-stop solution” to the student where the ATSP sources all items of equipment approved under DSA, assembles it, and delivers it to the student.

Accessibility

2. The ATSP’s website should conform, as a minimum, to the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)¹.
3. The ATSP should provide documentation to students in accessible formats as required.

SFE queries

4. The ATSP should respond to queries from SFE within 3 working days, to avoid unnecessary delays to a student’s DSA application.

Quotations

5. The ATSP should provide quotations based on the equipment specification matrix (which can be found at <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres-1/>) within 1 working day of receipt of a clear and complete quotation request from an assessor.

Supply of equipment and training

6. The ATSP should provide the delivery option recommended in the student’s needs assessment report.
7. The ATSP should deliver the order within 10 working days from the acceptance of the order by the student.
8. Where the ATSP is providing the equipment and training, the training on assistive software should commence within 10 working days of delivery, unless a later date is requested by the student. Where the ATSP is to supply assistive technology training only, the training should commence within 10 days from either the point at which the student contacts the ATSP or the point at which the student receives their equipment, whichever is the latest, unless a later date is requested by the student.
9. All assistive technology training provided to students should be given to students on their own equipment after it is delivered and set up.
10. A student may upgrade the equipment supplied, at their own expense, within the

¹ <http://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>

options made available to them by the ATSP. It is the responsibility of the ATSP to ensure that the suggested alternative product will not compromise the original intent, and that an equal or higher level of warranty, insurance and after-sales service is applied to any equipment upgraded.

11. The ATSP must ensure that all software applications are registered to the individual student and not generally installed; an auditable record of which licences codes have been assigned to which student must be maintained.

Repair and maintenance

12. The ATSP should provide an ongoing technical support and repair service for equipment and software provided by the ATSP to the student, delivered by appropriately qualified staff. This should include comprehensive computer and peripherals maintenance and support for the duration of the course (subject to a 4-year maximum).
13. The ATSP should provide a “help desk” service, operating as a minimum from 9.00–17.00, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). Where a student contacts the help desk by email, the ATSP must respond within a 2-hour period from receipt of the email.
14. If the problem cannot be resolved within 24 hours by remote support, the ATSP will conduct an onsite visit to repair the equipment within 2 days. If the equipment cannot be repaired on site, the ATSP must collect it within 2 days. If the problem cannot be rectified within 3 working days of collection, appropriate loan equipment must be provided.
15. The first instance of a virus must be fixed by the ATSP without a fee. For further instances of viruses the ATSP may require the student to pay a fee if the virus was not contracted through course work.

Security

16. The ATSP must provide a free licence security suite for the duration of the course, to include anti-virus, spyware and malware.

Insurance

17. The ATSP should arrange insurance cover for the duration of the student’s course through an FSA-registered insurance broker. The policy should cover all of the hardware supplied and include: zero excess policy; accidental damage, fire, theft and third-party malicious damage; and full reinstatement of all hardware and software to at least the standard originally supplied. It should not be limited to a single claim.
18. The ATSP must provide loan equipment if the insurance company agrees that there is a valid claim and if replacement or repair will take more than 10 days from authorisation to issue.

Audit

19. The ATSP should retain appropriate evidence that the above principles and standards have been met, in case required for audit purposes.

Annex 3 – Key principles and standards for providers of needs assessments

Accessibility

1. The assessment centre should have an accessible website which conforms, as a minimum, to the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0)².
2. Assessments should take place in a confidential and appropriate environment. Equipment relevant to supporting the student's needs should be available during the interview.
3. The building should be accessible to students, including those with physical and sensory impairments, and have at least one accessible toilet compliant with BS 8300.

Assessments

4. The assessment centre interview should take place within a maximum of 15 working days from the student's first point of contact, unless a later appointment is requested by the student.
5. The needs assessment report must be completed using the template available at: <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres-1/>
6. If assistive technology is recommended, the needs assessment report should include 3 quotations for equipment. Quotations should be sourced from organisations on the list of current suppliers for DSA-funded assistive technology and training, which can be found below:
 - Assistive Solutions
 - Barry Bennett Ltd
 - Concept Northern
 - Hamer Technology Limited
 - Iansyst Ltd
 - Invate Ltd
 - Microlink PC Ltd
 - Remtek Systems Ltd
 - Sight and Sound Technology
 - Wyvern Business Systems
7. If ergonomic equipment is required, the needs assessment report should include 1 quotation for ergonomic equipment. This can be sourced from any supplier.
8. If non-medical help is required, the needs assessment report should include 2 quotations for non-medical help. Quotations should be sourced from organisations on the list of current suppliers for DSA-funded non-medical help, which will be

² <http://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/>

published, which will be published shortly at:
<https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres-1/>.

9. The final report should be sent to SFE within 10 working days of the date of assessment, or within 15 working days of the date of assessment for a student who requests a draft copy of the report prior to submission to SLC.

Assessors

10. All staff who work on a one-to-one basis with students must have as a minimum a basic disclosure check which is carried out at least every three years.
11. Assessors should possess the knowledge, skills and experience to assess students appropriately, including areas of specialism such as dyslexia, visual impairment and hearing impairment. An assessment centre must be able to provide a suitably experienced assessor to cover any disabilities that might be presented by the student.