

**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 higher education providers;
DSA assessors, assessment centres and suppliers;
Student Finance advisors, and
The Student Loans Company

**SSIN 03/21
March 2021**

Dear Colleagues,

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) - Diagnostic Assessments for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

This SSIN provides an update to SSINs 04/20¹, 08/20² and 10/20³ regarding the evidence that can be accepted from students with SpLDs to demonstrate eligibility for DSA.

Since the imposition of Covid-19 restrictions in March 2020, students have found it difficult to access the usual face-to-face diagnostic assessments for SpLDs. At the time the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) produced guidance concluding that a full diagnostic assessment could not be carried out remotely, but that it was possible for assessors to produce a professional interim evaluation of need based on a remote screening and diagnostic interview.

While under normal circumstances the Department requires a full diagnostic assessment of an SpLD to be submitted as evidence of eligibility for DSA, we did not wish there to be a delay in students accessing the support they needed through DSA. We therefore decided that DSA applicants who did not already have a full diagnostic assessment for an SpLD would temporarily be able to submit an evaluation of need carried out in line with the SASC guidance, and that SLC would accept this as evidence of eligibility for DSA. This temporary policy initially ran until 31 August 2020 and was then extended to 31 December 2020 and again to 31 March 2021.

¹ <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1840/ssin-0420-sasc-diagnostic-assessment.pdf>

² https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1754/sasc-diagnostic-assessment_august-2020_final.pdf

³ https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1859/spld-diagnostic-assessment_november-2020-ssin_final.pdf

The Department has now reviewed this policy again on the basis of new guidance produced by SASC and other representations received from the sector. SASC has concluded, in particular, that full remote diagnostic assessments of an SpLD are now possible. Given this, the Department has decided that it is now reasonable once again to require a full diagnostic assessment of an SpLD to be submitted as evidence of eligibility for DSA, and no longer to accept evaluations of need. This means that:

- SLC will, with immediate effect, accept as evidence of eligibility for DSA a full diagnostic assessment of an SpLD undertaken either face-to-face or remotely (or by a combination of both methods). These diagnostic assessments should as usual follow the format provided by SASC for DSA purposes.
- There will be a transitional period during which SLC will accept evaluations of need undertaken up to and including **30 June 2021**. As previously, students who have their eligibility for DSA agreed on the basis of an evaluation of need will not be expected to provide a full diagnostic assessment later on to confirm their eligibility, unless they make a new application for DSA (for example, if they are currently on an undergraduate course and later on apply for DSA for a postgraduate course). All remote evaluations of need must contain the wording of the 'specific statement' as advised in the SASC guidance⁴ to be acceptable.

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⁴<https://sasc.org.uk/SASCDocuments/Physical%20Distancing%20and%20SpLD%20Assessment%20SASC%20Guidance%20May2020.pdf>