

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) Assistive Technology Service Provider (ATSP) Guidance

Summary

Supporting disabled students to access and succeed in higher education (HE) remains a priority for government. The purpose of DSA-funded support is to enable disabled students to demonstrate their academic ability as well as enabling their independence. Students who are eligible for DSA can access a range of support to help them access their studies. This includes 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.

All students who are eligible for DSA are expected to attend a Study Needs Assessment (SNA) interview, where the student discusses with their Needs Assessor (NA) the type and level of support required. The report produced as a result of the Needs Assessment – the Needs Assessment Report (NAR) – is the basis of any DSA support provided. When completed and agreed the NAR is sent, along with any quotes for goods or services recommended, to the Student Loans Company (SLC) for approval.

Where Needs Assessors make recommendations for specialist equipment and/or assistive technology, they are required to provide clear and robust justification of the student's disability-related need for this. Consideration should also be given to the feasibility of utilising the student's existing equipment before recommending that new equipment is purchased through DSA. When recommending specialist equipment and/or assistive technology, Needs Assessors are required to build the recommended package of support within SLC's e-quote system. Any laptop or PC recommendations made by Needs Assessors must adhere to the DSA Computer Equipment Specifications, which are available at:

<https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres/>.

If SLC approve a recommendation for specialist equipment and/or assistive technology, they will use the e-quote system to generate prices from all ATSPs which are able to supply the recommended package. SLC will choose the ATSP supplier with the lowest quote that meets all of the student's needs. SLC will then issue an entitlement letter to the student (known as the DSA2) setting out what support will be funded through DSA and advising the student to contact the relevant supplier(s) to arrange delivery of their equipment and any relevant training. ATSPs should ensure that they have seen a copy of the DSA2 letter confirming that the equipment and/or assistive technology has been agreed by SLC before supplying this to the student; SLC can only pay invoices from ATSPs for items that have been approved by SLC following the student's needs assessment. ATSPs should supply the items at the price agreed; if this is not possible then the ATSP should refer the job back to SLC for re-quoting.

Assistive technology training is a DSA-funded non-medical help (NMH) role,

and quotations for assistive technology training are provided separately by needs assessors from any of the DfE listed NMH suppliers who provide this service. This list is available at: <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2020/september/10092020-guidance-for-nmh-suppliers/>.

This document provides guidance to ATSPs on the provision of DSA equipment and assistive technology and sets out the Department for Education's (DfE) expectations for the standards that ATSPs should meet. The Department monitors these standards in collaboration with SLC and may carry out unannounced audits at any time.

Note that students must usually contribute the first £200 towards the cost of a computer that is awarded through DSA (unless the computer is a replacement for a previous DSA-funded computer, or unless the student started their current period of study and was awarded DSA support in the 2015/16 academic year or earlier). The contribution is for computer hardware only, not for specialist software or for the training to use it. The £200 contribution is paid directly to the ATSP. SLC will state on the student's DSA2 letter if the £200 contribution is applicable.

Further details on the specialist equipment and assistive technology funded through DSA can be found on pages 59-69 of the full guidance chapter at: <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1852/guidance-dsa-consolidated-ay-2021-10.pdf>.

Please note that this guidance applies only to students who are funded by Student Finance England (SFE).

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.

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

Supply of equipment and training

5. The ATSP should provide the delivery option recommended in the student's needs assessment report.
6. The ATSP should deliver the order within 10 working days from the acceptance of the order by the student. The ATSP should also offer a set-up and familiarisation service to the student. This should take place either at the same time as the delivery or at a later date, as requested by the student. It is expected that where possible configuration of the student's computer equipment and software should be undertaken prior to delivery.
7. 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.
8. All assistive technology training provided to students should be given to students on their own equipment after it is delivered and set up.
9. A student may upgrade the equipment supplied, at their own expense, within the 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.
10. 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

11. 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).
12. 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.
13. 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.

14. 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.
15. Where relevant, reasonable efforts should be made to recover students' data.

Security

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

Equipment 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. Once arranged, the ATSP should provide information to the student about their insurance cover.
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.

Conflicts of Interest

20. DfE requires all ATSPs to maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date statement of interests and to submit it to DfE when requested. Further information on managing conflicts of interest in relation to DSA can be found at: https://www.practitioners.sl.c.o.uk/media/1837/conflicts-of-interest-ssin_july-2020_final.pdf.

ATSP Insurance

21. All ATSPs should hold employer's liability insurance (£5m in cover), public liability insurance (£5m in cover) and professional indemnity insurance (£1m in cover). DfE may request to see evidence of this insurance at any time.