

# Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) Guidance

## Higher Education Student Finance in England AY 21/22 – Version 2.0

### Summary

Supporting students to access and succeed in HE 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 'HEP' covers any institution which provides HE courses which are designated for HE student support purposes, including further education colleges providing HE and alternative providers, unless otherwise indicated.

HEPs have the primary legal duty to support disabled students in their HE studies, mainly through 'reasonable adjustments', as set out in the Equality Act 2010. The government provides funding for individual disabled students in addition to those reasonable adjustments through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). Under the Care Act people aged 18 or over who have a statutory Care and Support Plan delivered by a Local Authority may continue to receive this whilst studying in HE.

All students should be able to access the support they need to ensure that they are able to demonstrate their full academic potential at HE level, through appropriate academic achievement. Our aim is to ensure that HE students receive the support they need, through their local authority, their HEP and through government, to remove disability-related barriers to learning. This is our aim for all HE students, including disabled students.

### Disclaimer

This guidance is designed to assist with the interpretation of the Student Support Regulations as they stand at the time of publication. It does not cover every aspect of student support nor does it constitute legal advice or a definitive statement of the law. Whilst every endeavour has been made to ensure the information contained is correct at the time of publication, no liability is accepted with regard to the contents and the Regulations remain the legal basis of the student support arrangements for the AY 20/21. In the event of anomalies between this guidance and the Regulations, the Regulations prevail. Please note the Regulations are subject to amendment.

This guidance is applicable to students domiciled in England only.

**Further Information**

| <b>Annex</b> | <b>Content</b>                         |
|--------------|--|
| A            | Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) |
| B            | DSA Exceptional Case Process Map       |
| C            | Arrangements for assessment reviews    |

**Abbreviations**

| <b>Abbreviation</b> | <b>Full</b>   |
|---------------------|---|
| ADD                 | Attention Deficit Disorder                          |
| ADHD                | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder            |
| ASD                 | Autism Spectrum Disorder                            |
| AT                  | Assistive Technology                                |
| ATSP                | Assistive Technology Service Providers              |
| AY                  | Academic Year                                       |
| BSL                 | British Sign Language                               |
| CMS                 | Courses Management Service                          |
| CTSI                | Chartered Trading Standards Institute               |
| DfE                 | Department for Education                            |
| DfE (NI)            | Department for Education (in Northern Ireland)      |
| DL                  | Distance Learning                                   |
| DLA                 | Disability Living Allowance                         |
| DSA                 | Disabled Students Allowance                         |
| DSA-QAG             | Disabled Students Allowance Quality Assurance Group |
| DVR                 | Digital Voice Recorder                              |
| DWP                 | Department for Work and Pensions                    |
| ECP                 | Exceptional Case Process                            |
| EHC                 | Education, Health and Care                          |
| ENT                 | Electronic Notetaker                                |
| FM                  | Frequency Modulation                                |
| FT                  | Full-Time   |
| FTDL                | Full-Time Distance Learning                         |
| FY                  | Financial Year                                      |
| GDBA                | The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association            |
| GP                  | General Practitioner                                |
| HE                  | Higher Education                                    |
| HEP                 | Higher Education Providers                          |
| HMRC                | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs                   |
| ICT                 | Information and Communications Technology           |
| ITT                 | Initial Teacher Training                            |
| LCL                 | Long Course Loan                                    |
| MSI                 | Multi Sensory Impairment                            |
| NAR                 | Needs Assessment Report                             |
| NHS                 | National Health Service                             |
| NHSBSA              | National Health Service Business Services Authority |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| NI    | National Insurance                         |
| NIPSO | Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman |
| NMH   | Non-Medical Helper                         |
| OfS   | Office for Students                        |
| OIA   | Office of the Independent Adjudicator      |
| OU    | Open University                            |
| PC    | Personal computer                          |
| PG    | Postgraduate                               |
| PGCE  | Postgraduate Certificate in Education      |
| PGHC  | Postgraduate Healthcare                    |
| PIP   | Personal Independence Payment              |
| PT    | Part-Time                                  |
| RRML  | Reduced Rate Maintenance Loan              |
| SAAS  | Student Awards Agency for Scotland         |
| SASC  | SPLD Assessment Standards Committee        |
| SFE   | Student Finance England                    |
| SFNI  | Student Finance Northern Ireland           |
| SFW   | Student Finance Wales                      |
| SLC   | Student Loans Company                      |
| SpLDs | Specific Learning Difficulties             |
| SPSO  | Scottish Public Services Ombudsman         |
| SSP   | Specialist Support Professional            |
| STEC  | SpLD Test Evaluation Committee             |
| STTR  | Speech to Text Reporting                   |
| UG    | Undergraduate                              |
| UK    | United Kingdom                             |
| VAT   | Value Added Tax                            |

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|          |  |           |
|----------|--|-----------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>SUPPORTING DISABLED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION (HE)</b>                 | <b>6</b>  |
| 1.1      | INTRODUCTION   | 6         |
| 1.2      | THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF DSA   | 7         |
| 1.3      | THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDANCE   | 7         |
| 1.4      | LOCAL AUTHORITY EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE (EHC) PLANS                       | 8         |
| 1.5      | THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT  | 9         |
| 1.6      | THE ROLE OF HEP DISABILITY SERVICES  | 9         |
| 1.7      | THE ROLE OF THE DSA STUDY NEEDS ASSESSOR                                     | 9         |
| 1.8      | THE ROLE OF SFE  | 11        |
| 1.9      | PROVIDERS OF NEEDS ASSESSMENTS   | 11        |
| 1.10     | CONFLICTS OF INTEREST  | 12        |
| 1.11     | THE EQUALITY ACT   | 13        |
| 1.12     | MONITORING   | 14        |
| 1.13     | ANTICIPATING REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS  | 14        |
| 1.14     | RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL REQUIREMENTS  | 15        |
| 1.15     | EXAMPLES OF REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND GOOD PRACTICE                         | 15        |
| 1.16     | THE EQUALITY ACT AND WORK PLACEMENTS   | 15        |
| <b>2</b> | <b>DSA – TECHNICAL GUIDANCE ON ELIGIBILITY AND ENTITLEMENT</b>               | <b>16</b> |
| 2.1      | GENERAL ELIGIBILITY FOR DSA  | 16        |
| 2.2      | TIME LIMITS FOR APPLYING FOR DSA   | 17        |
| 2.3      | DEFINITION OF DISABILITY   | 17        |
| 2.4      | EVIDENCE OF A DISABILITY   | 18        |
| 2.5      | STUDENTS DIAGNOSED AFTER THE START OF THEIR HE COURSE                        | 19        |
| 2.6      | ENGLISH STUDENTS STUDYING IN SCOTLAND, WALES AND NORTHERN IRELAND            | 19        |
| 2.7      | PRISONERS  | 20        |
| 2.8      | MEANS-TESTED NHS BURSARIES   | 20        |
| 2.9      | DSA FOR FT UG STUDENTS (REGULATIONS 40, 40A AND 41)                          | 20        |
| 2.10     | DSA FOR PART-TIME UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS (REGULATION 147)                    | 25        |
| 2.11     | DSA FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS (REGULATIONS 158 – 168)                        | 29        |
| 2.12     | STUDENTS ON OVERSEAS PLACEMENTS  | 35        |
| 2.13     | COSTS INCURRED DURING VACATION PERIODS                                       | 36        |
| 2.14     | SOCIAL SERVICES  | 36        |
| <b>3</b> | <b>THE DSA APPLICATION PROCESS</b>   | <b>37</b> |
| 3.1      | DSA APPLICATION AND AWARD PROCESS  | 37        |
| 3.2      | APPLICATIONS FOR DSA SUPPORT   | 37        |
| 3.3      | THE STUDY NEEDS ASSESSMENT INTERVIEW   | 38        |
| <b>4</b> | <b>DSA NON-MEDICAL HELPER (NMH) SUPPORT</b>                                  | <b>39</b> |
| 4.1      | THE NMH SERVICES FRAMEWORK   | 39        |
| 4.2      | STUDENTS WISHING TO CHANGE NMH PROVIDER                                      | 39        |
| 4.3      | NMH COSTS  | 40        |
| 4.4      | USING THE NMH SUPPORT ROLES  | 40        |
| 4.5      | EXCEPTIONS   | 40        |
| 4.6      | EXCEPTIONAL CASE PROCESS (ECP)   | 40        |
| 4.7      | HEP ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS   | 41        |
| 4.8      | NMH QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK  | 41        |
| 4.9      | NMH EXCESSIVE HOURS  | 41        |
| 4.10     | NMH AND LOCAL AUTHORITY CARE PLANS   | 42        |
| 4.11     | USING SELF-EMPLOYED NMHS   | 42        |
| 4.12     | ADMINISTRATION CHARGES FOR ARRANGING NMH                                     | 42        |
| 4.13     | CANCELLATION CHARGES WHEN STUDENTS FAIL TO ATTEND A PRE-ARRANGED NMH SESSION | 43        |

|          |   |           |
|----------|---|-----------|
| 4.14     | PAYMENT OF INVOICES .....   | 46        |
| 4.15     | TYPES OF NMH SUPPORT .....  | 46        |
| <b>5</b> | <b>SPECIALIST EQUIPMENT SUPPORT .....</b>   | <b>63</b> |
| 5.1      | STUDENT LEAVES A COURSE AFTER RECEIVING EQUIPMENT .....   | 63        |
| 5.2      | EQUIPMENT SUPPLIED BEFORE THE STUDENT STARTS THE COURSE / DELIVERED AFTER THE STUDENT HAS LEFT THE COURSE | 63        |
| 5.3      | EXCEPTIONS .....  | 64        |
| 5.4      | COMPUTERS .....   | 64        |
| 5.5      | INTERNET CONNECTION .....   | 70        |
| 5.6      | DEVICES FOR PRINTING AND/ OR SCANNING .....   | 70        |
| 5.7      | AUDIO CAPTURE EQUIPMENT .....   | 71        |
| 5.8      | OTHER EQUIPMENT .....   | 71        |
| 5.9      | ASSISTIVE AND STANDARD SOFTWARE .....   | 72        |
| 5.10     | COURSE SPECIFIC SOFTWARE .....  | 73        |
| 5.11     | WHEELCHAIRS / MOBILITY SCOOTERS.....  | 73        |
| 5.12     | RADIO AIDS FOR DEAF STUDENTS .....  | 73        |
| <b>6</b> | <b>DSA TRAVEL SUPPORT .....</b>   | <b>73</b> |
| 6.1      | ATTENDING THE HEP .....   | 73        |
| 6.2      | ATTENDING A WORK PLACEMENT .....  | 74        |
| 6.3      | ATTENDING A FIELD TRIP .....  | 75        |
| 6.4      | TAXI FIRM ACCOUNTS .....  | 75        |
| <b>7</b> | <b>DSA GENERAL SUPPORT .....</b>  | <b>75</b> |
| 7.1      | DSA STUDY NEEDS ASSESSMENTS.....  | 75        |
| 7.2      | LIVING ACCOMMODATION .....  | 76        |
| 7.3      | CONSUMABLES.....  | 77        |
| 7.4      | BOOKS .....   | 77        |
| 7.5      | SPECIAL DIETS (FOR THOSE LIVING WITH ALLERGIES).....  | 78        |
| 7.6      | FRIDGES (FOR STUDENTS NEEDING TO STORE MEDICATION) .....  | 79        |
| <b>8</b> | <b>OTHER .....</b>  | <b>79</b> |
| 8.1      | APPEALS AND COMPLAINTS .....  | 79        |
| 8.2      | EXCEPTIONAL CASE PROCESS (ECP) .....  | 79        |
| 8.3      | REIMBURSEMENTS.....   | 82        |
| 8.4      | DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS .....  | 83        |
| 8.5      | VAT .....   | 83        |
| <b>9</b> | <b>ANNEXES .....</b>  | <b>84</b> |
| 9.1      | ANNEX A - SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (SPLDs).....   | 84        |
| 9.2      | ANNEX B - DSA EXCEPTIONAL CASES PROCESS MAP.....  | 88        |
| 9.3      | ANNEX C – NEEDS ASSESSMENT REVIEWS .....  | 90        |
| 9.4      | ANNEX D - UPDATES LOG .....   | 95        |

# 1 Supporting disabled students in Higher Education (HE)

## 1.1 Introduction

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Disabled students should begin their HE journey confident that any barriers to their learning have been identified, understood and that appropriate steps have been taken to reduce their impact. The learning environment should be as inclusive as possible, so that the need for individual interventions is the exception, not the rule. HEPs should engage in a continual improvement cycle developing inclusive practice, with the aim of reducing the number of individual interventions required. Therefore, DSA funding should be considered the apex of support, underpinned by an inclusive environment, and individual reasonable adjustments where required.

This guidance relates to England domiciled students applying for DSA. The document provides guidance on:

- DSA for FT students,
- DSA for PT students,
- DSA for DL students, and
- DSA for PG students.

References to “the Regulations” means the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 (2011/1986) as amended by:

- the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (2012/1653),
- the Education (Student Support and European University Institute) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 (2013/1728),
- the Universal Credit (Consequential, Supplementary, Incidental and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2013 (2013/630),
- the National Treatment Agency (Abolition) and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (Consequential, Transitional and Savings Provisions) Order 2013 (2013/235),
- the Further and Higher Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (2014/2765),
- Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 (2015/1951),
- the Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2016, Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2017,
- the Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2018, the Education (Student Fees Awards and Support etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2019,
- the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support etc.) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2020, and
- the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support Etc.) (Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2020.

## 1.2 The purpose and scope of DSA

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DSA is available to contribute to the additional costs that a student is obliged to incur in relation to their studies because of their disability. 'Obligated to incur' means that the support is essential to enable the student to access their studies. DSA is intended to supplement the provision of reasonable adjustments made by the HEP but is not available in place of reasonable adjustments. Expenditure being considered for DSA purposes must be reasonably incurred and appropriate to the individual needs of the student. DSA is not intended to assist with disability-related expenditure that the student would incur if they were not following their course of study, nor are they intended to cover study costs that any student may incur. Local Authority social services may well continue to provide assistance towards personal care costs, as well as some requirements relating to specialised accommodation, that will be incurred irrespective of whether or not the student is attending their course (see [section 1.5](#)).

This document sets out the framework for HE students domiciled in England.

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

## 1.3 The purpose of this guidance

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This guidance is for use by DSA study needs assessors and the SFE DSA team when considering the support that may be funded through DSA. Staff in HEPs may also find the information helpful when considering how best to support their disabled students and signposting students to available DSA support.

HEPs are obliged to provide support to disabled students as set out in the Equality Act 2010. A HEP should anticipate and respond to the needs of its disabled students where it is reasonable to do so. This DSA guidance does not set out what a HEP should do to meet that legal obligation, but it does indicate where HEPs are expected to have a primary role in supporting students with disabilities and where provision of DSA support is appropriate. The decision on how to satisfy their obligation to provide support to disabled students is for the HEP to determine. Advice is available from alternative sources such as Advance HE <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/managing-reasonable-adjustments-higher-education>

This guidance sets out the type of support that may be funded for students through DSA. In particular it sets out the provision of certain NMH support (see [section 4](#)), and certain computer and peripheral equipment (see [section 5](#)).

The DSA study needs assessor will consider what DSA funded support is essential for the individual student. This reflects the regulatory requirement that funding through DSA will only be provided for additional costs a student is obliged to incur as a result of attending their course. The DSA study needs assessor will have regard to this guidance and the Regulations when determining what DSA funded support to recommend for the student, including where

it is indicated that the primary source of support is expected to be via the HEP. The Secretary of State requires SLC to deliver DSA according to the Regulations and the guidance set out here.

The DSA study needs assessor should also be aware of the requirement for local authorities to provide the DSA study needs assessor with current assessment information for young people with special educational needs who have been supported through an EHC plan while at school and/or college, where requested by the student<sup>1</sup> (see [section 1.4](#)).

## **1.4 Local Authority Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans**

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Some disabled students will enter HE having had an EHC plan while at school or college.

The 0-25 Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice makes clear that local authorities should plan the transition into HE 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 HE, the health and social care support they remain entitled to will continue. Provisions in the Care Act mean that a person aged 18 or over who has eligible needs for care and support will 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 has entered HE and their EHC Plan is no longer maintained.

In addition, Local Authorities must :

- make young people aware of support available to them in HE through their local offer, including DSA 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, subject to the young person's consent, with the HEP that a young person will be attending and also with their DSA 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 DSA, and with the HEP that they are planning to attend, so that other provision may be made as appropriate, in line with the HEP's own policies
- set out in an easily accessible and public "local offer" the support available to young people in HE, particularly DSA and the process and timescales for making an application for DSA

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<sup>1</sup> 0-25 SEND 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>



## 1.5 The role of the student

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The time-limits governing applications for student support are set out in [section 2](#) along with other eligibility criteria. The application process is set out in [section 3](#) and students are advised to apply for DSA as soon as possible to ensure that all parties involved in identifying and providing support are aware of the student's needs. The student is encouraged to contact the disability services at their chosen HEP to disclose their disability at the same time as completing their DSA application form to ensure reasonable adjustments can be considered.

## 1.6 The role of HEP disability services

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Those working in disability services within HEPs will have a well contextualised understanding of their disabled student body and have a key role in ensuring support is delivered effectively. Students may contact disability advisers before making an application for DSA. However, many students will choose to apply for DSA without speaking to a disability adviser, particularly those who are applying early and have not had their HEP confirmed.

The starting point for the disability adviser, if contacted, is the effective provision of reasonable adjustments, both for students who may claim DSA and for those who don't. The student should be advised to claim DSA if it appears that an identified need may not be met through provision of a reasonable adjustment and for which funding through DSA is available. Disability advisers will also be an important point of liaison during the study needs assessment process, when the details of DSA support packages are being established.

Disability advisers have an understanding of their HEP environment and will have access to academic teaching staff and to detailed course information. They should have an up-to-date knowledge of the level and type of support offered by the HEP as reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act, or more generally as part of the HEP's support for disabled students or students in general, to help inform the student about any barriers they might face, and provision they can access to reduce barriers. HEPs should also have this information readily accessible to relevant stakeholders, including students and needs assessment centres, through their regular information advice and guidance.

If contacted by a student, disability advisers must not advise the student to purchase equipment or services on the assumption that funding through DSA will be made available. Eligibility for DSA can only be determined by SFE and entitlement to funding through DSA will be based on the recommendations of a DSA study needs assessor.

## 1.7 The role of the DSA study needs assessor

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The role of the DSA study needs assessor is to:

- consider the nature of the student's disability
- consider the learning environment of the student
- consider the impact of the student's disability on their ability to undertake their course

- analyse the student's previous educational experience and the effectiveness of any strategies
- identify appropriate solutions to enable barriers to be overcome
- explain to the student that support may also be available from their HEP and to encourage the student to discuss their additional needs with the disability adviser at the HEP

DSA study needs assessors make recommendations, they do not make final decisions on eligibility or entitlement to DSA. Decisions on eligibility and entitlement are a Secretary of State function which has been delegated to SLC (including SFE). Eligibility criteria are set out in the Regulations. SFE will have regard to the recommendation of the DSA study needs assessor when considering the entitlement to and level of DSA support.

Through discussions with the student and using the information or medical evidence provided by their GP, consultant etc (and information in any specialist diagnostic assessment report, statement etc. where appropriate), the DSA study needs assessor should identify what type of support is essential to enable the student to undertake their chosen course.

The DSA 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 DSA study needs assessor will set out any recommendations for DSA funded support and indicate where support may be required that falls outside the scope of DSA within a NAR. The NAR will be sent to SFE and to the student. The student will be advised to pass a copy of the relevant section of the NAR to their HEP's disability adviser, in order to discuss what adjustments might be appropriate.

A NAR should be readable as a standalone document which clearly demonstrates:

- the impact of the student's condition on their ability to undertake their course
- an understanding of the requirements and demands of the student's chosen course at their preferred HEP
- an understanding of the teaching practices for the student's chosen course at their preferred HEP
- an analysis of all the support strategies available to the student
- a clear decision-making process for the support strategies ultimately recommended
- a commitment to the provision of cost-effective solutions for each student within the parameters of DSA funding as set out by DfE

The study needs should consider the barriers that need to be addressed and set out the strategies that are necessary to overcome the barrier in the NAR.

DSA study needs assessors should set out clearly in the report what recommendations they are making for DSA-funded support. Any recommendations for DSA support will require clear and robust evidence-based justification.

DSA study needs assessors must only recommend support from suppliers that deliver DSA-funded services, qualified to provide the type of support recommended and have the requisite capacity to provide the support. Where a supplier does not have the capacity to provide the support, the student should be referred back to the DSA study needs assessor, the supplier must not select alternative provision.

DSA support cannot be recommended where support is available from another source, (for example, the HEP, the NHS, Local Authority).

If the DSA study needs assessor identifies a need for support that is indicated as being the primary responsibility of the HEP or which falls outside the scope of DSA funding, these should be noted throughout the report and a summary provided which the student can share with their HEP for consideration under reasonable adjustments.

The DSA study needs assessor should not state how any support that may be required from the HEP should be delivered or the level required – that is for the HEP to determine taking into account the individual needs of the student.

DSA study needs assessors must not advise the student to purchase equipment or services on the assumption that funding through DSA will be made available. Eligibility for DSA can only be determined by SFE and entitlement to funding through DSA will be based on the recommendations of a DSA study needs assessor.

## **1.8 The role of SFE**

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SFE is a SLC service, providing financial support on behalf of the UK Government to students from England entering HE in the UK. SFE are required to deliver DSA within the framework set by the Student Support Regulations and guidance. SFE may contact DfE 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 DSA awards, taking into account the recommendations of the DSA study needs assessor. SFE will challenge DSA NARs where DSA 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 DSA recommendations are not sufficiently justified according to the guidance and the impact identified during the DSA study needs assessment. Challenges will be brought to the attention of the needs assessment centre manager for monitoring purposes.

## **1.9 Providers of needs assessments**

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Students can refer to <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-assessment-centre> in order to find a list of nearby needs assessment centres. This site allows users to access a list comprising of those centres in, or near to, a supplied post code.

Existing needs assessment providers who wish to open new branches or outreach centres, and individuals or organisations who wish to register as new providers, should refer to the guidance at <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1838/assessment-centre-moratorium.pdf>.

Details of the current auditing and quality assurance arrangements can be found at <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1760/dsa-qag-closure-information-ssin-08-19.pdf>.

Providers of needs assessments may also wish to refer to the information available at <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres/>.

Scottish needs assessment centres should be validated by the Scottish Government's Disabled Student Advisory Group in order to provide services for SFE funded students. Needs assessment centres in Northern Ireland do not currently require accreditation. Centres based in Wales that are registered with DfE can offer assessment services for SFE-funded students.

## 1.10 Conflicts of Interest

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Public funds should be used fairly, transparently, and for the purpose intended. Anyone making decisions about the administration, distribution or use of DSA 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.

Furthermore, due to the potential conflicts of interest, DSA funding will not be available to any company, partnership or other organisation that is owned or controlled by the student being supported, or in which the student has a financial interest or personal investment.

In addition to this, students will not be permitted:

- To deliver DSA-funded support to friends or family members, due to the potential conflict of interest and the difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries
- To receive DSA funded support from friends or family members, due to the potential conflict of interest and the difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries
- To deliver DSA funded support, if they have been assessed as 'needing' similar DSA funded support by a DSA study needs assessor

Managing conflicts of interest appropriately is essential for protecting the integrity of the DSA process.

Guidance on conflicts of interest is available at

[https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1837/conflicts-of-interest-ssin\\_july-2020\\_final.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1837/conflicts-of-interest-ssin_july-2020_final.pdf)

It is a requirement of registration as a suppliers of DSA-funded goods and services that Conflicts of Interest declarations and returns are completed annually as requested by DfE.

## **1.11 The Equality Act**

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As independent and autonomous bodies, HEPs 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. HEPs are prohibited by law, through the Equality Act 2010, from discrimination against students with protected characteristics which includes disability.

Under the Equality Act 2010 HEPs 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 HEP to determine what steps it would be reasonable for them to take.

## 1.12 Monitoring

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Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011, HEPs are required to publish information as to their compliance with the general public sector equality duty. This requires HEPs 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 HEPs which attract public funding, including alternative providers with courses designated for student support purposes, are expected to comply with the UK Quality Code for HE published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The Quality Code sets out expectations which HEPs 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 HEP considers how to improve them. HEPs that attract public funding are required to be reviewed periodically by the QAA to ensure they are meeting those expectations.

Under the quality code, HEPs 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.

## 1.13 Anticipating reasonable adjustments

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

HEPs are expected to consider what anticipatory adjustments should be made to accommodate disabled students. However, it is recognised that for some students these adjustments will not be sufficient, and for these DSA support will need to be accessed.

### **1.14 Responding to individual requirements**

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It will not always be possible for HEPs 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 a HEP becomes aware of the requirements of a disabled student it should consider what reasonable adjustments it can make to meet their specific individual requirements.

In the past, the provision of DSA may have removed the need for reasonable adjustments in some cases. However, DSA funding is not a replacement for reasonable adjustments. HEPs should not take the continued provision of DSA as setting the limit to their reasonable adjustments. The expectation is for HEPs 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 DSA. From AY 16/17, an expectation was placed on HEPs to take primary responsibility for certain areas of support. DSA remain available by exception only. See below for detail.

### **1.15 Examples of reasonable adjustments and good practice**

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DfE has published guidance from the sector led Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group to support all HEPs in expanding their inclusive teaching and learning practice (available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-teaching-and-learning-in-higher-education>) which those involved in strategic planning within HEPs may wish to have regard to. Each HEP will have its own response to how to best support its body of disabled students and case studies are offered as examples, not a statement of what each HEP should be doing in a particular area. However, DSA will be considered on the basis that HEPs will take the primary role in providing certain types of support and DSA will only be considered for such support by exception only.

There are many sources of information on managing reasonable adjustments, for example, [Advance HE](#).

### **1.16 The Equality Act and work placements**

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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 HE 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.

## 2 DSA – technical guidance on eligibility and entitlement

### 2.1 General eligibility for DSA

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The personal eligibility criteria for receiving FT and PT student support, including DSA, are set out in Regulations and are covered in the SFE’s ‘Assessing Eligibility’ guidance.

To qualify for DSA support an eligible student is required to meet the definition of disability as outlined in [section 2.3](#) below.

Note that where a continuing student who was awarded DSA support for their current period of study prior to AY 14/15 does not meet the definition of disability under the Act they will continue to receive the support put in place through their study needs assessment until the end of the relevant course.

DSA is not subject to:

- an age limit
- previous study calculations
- income assessment

However from AY 18/19 students studying pre-registration PGHC courses ceased to be eligible for DSA if they are already registered in the profession they are intending to study.

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

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

Students who are eligible for student support under paragraph 2A, 9, 9A, 9C, 9D or 10ZA of Schedule 1 of the Student Support Regulations but not under any other paragraph of that Schedule, are not eligible for DSA.

DSA is not available for:

- Disability related expenditure that the student would incur even if they were not attending a HE course
- 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 for example, mobility allowances, NHS support
- Treatment for a disability
- Diagnostic assessments or provision of evidence for any type of disability or health condition
- Temporary illness or injury – support from their HEP or the NHS is appropriate here
- General learning difficulties – HEP academic support is appropriate here

## **2.2 Time limits for applying for DSA**

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Where students have not applied for the main student support package they must apply for DSA on an annual basis. However, FT students who continue to apply for the main student support package do not need to reapply each year. PT and PG students need to reapply each year, as do those FT UG students who do not apply for Core support.

Generally a time limit for applications is set at nine months from the start of the AY (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 AY.

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 AY or towards the end of their course. Students are permitted to apply for DSA 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 DSA that are made after the end of the AY will generally not be considered retrospectively for that year. The application will ordinarily be administered as being an application for the AY within which the application has been received.

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 HEP support, such as exam support, study support or revision skills, and loan equipment.

## **2.3 Definition of disability**

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For DSA, 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 DSA. 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 (Equality Act 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 DSA 'day-to-day activities' includes education. See guidance at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/85010/disability-definition.pdf](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.

## 2.4 Evidence of a disability

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For most applicants, there should be little difficulty establishing their eligibility for DSA. 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 DSA.

DSA is 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 HEPs and/or the NHS, as appropriate. Nor is DSA intended to provide assistance to students with general learning difficulties.

Students can become eligible for DSA at any point during their course, not just at the start of their first year. Some students become disabled or have a disability identified after their course has started. Others may decide to disclose their disability only after their course has started. Additionally, equipment needs for some disabled students may only arise later in the course. Applications for support may be made outside the statutory time limit of nine months if the application is submitted as soon as is reasonably practicable (regulation 9(2)(d)), see [section 2.2](#) above.

A student wishing to apply for DSA is required to submit medical/diagnostic evidence in order for eligibility to DSA to be determined. Medical evidence can be in the form of a diagnostic assessment (for students with certain SpLDs), the Disability Evidence Form (not valid evidence in respect of SpLDs), or evidence from a GP, consultant, or other qualified medical practitioner or appropriate specialist.

Medical evidence should state the nature of the student's disability and must 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.

The Disability Evidence Form is available via the following link [https://media.slc.co.uk/sfe/2122/ft/sfe\\_dsa\\_disability\\_evidence\\_form\\_2122\\_o.pdf](https://media.slc.co.uk/sfe/2122/ft/sfe_dsa_disability_evidence_form_2122_o.pdf)

Students with an SpLD, 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). DSA

funding is not available for diagnostic assessments for any type of disability or health condition, but HEPs may be able to offer assistance to students requiring a diagnostic assessment.

Cases may arise where the evidence that the student has a disability is deemed insufficient by SFE. In such cases, the student will be invited to provide further evidence, perhaps in the form of a diagnosis undertaken by a professional body. In making such an invitation, it must be made clear to the student that as this cost cannot be met through DSA they will normally be liable to meet the cost of providing the necessary evidence. Again, HEPs may consider providing help with these costs.

Once satisfactory evidence is received, the student will be notified to book a DSA study needs assessment to identify the appropriate course-related support. The cost of the DSA study needs assessment is covered by DSA funding. 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 DSA 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 DSA study needs assessment of their course needs, and different recommendations may be made.

Any cost a student incurs obtaining the necessary diagnosis, expert evidence or opinion cannot be met from their DSA. This is because such costs are not incurred by the student to determine the type of support they will need to attend or undertake their course, they are incurred to substantiate their eligibility for DSA.

## **2.5 Students diagnosed after the start of their HE course**

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Students who become disabled or are diagnosed with a disability, including an SpLD, after the start of their HE course of study may qualify for DSA support, and can apply for DSA once they have received their diagnosis, diagnostic assessment and have submitted medical evidence confirming their disability to SFE. Applications should be made within the regulatory time limits or as soon as reasonably practicable – see time limits above.

## **2.6 English students studying in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

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Some English students who intend to study in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland may attend a DSA study needs assessment in England before they start their course. SFE will direct students to available needs assessment centres.

It may arise that attending a DSA needs assessment before the course start is unfeasible, for example where a student who is domiciled in England but studies in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland requires a DSA study needs assessment during term time. In these circumstances, SFE will continue to accept DSA study needs assessments carried out by

centres accepted by SAAS (in Scotland) and SFNI (in Northern Ireland). Students studying in Wales are referred to an online list of DSA study needs assessors hosted by SLC.

SAAS operate a 'Toolkit of Quality Indicators for Needs Assessments' under which institutions and centres become validated as DSA study needs assessors recognised by SAAS. A list of centres validated by SAAS to undertake DSA study needs assessments can be found on the SAAS website at [www.saas.gov.uk](http://www.saas.gov.uk).

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

## **2.7 Prisoners**

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FT students who are prisoners and who began a designated course before 1st September 2012 are potentially eligible for DSA but will not generally qualify for other grants for living and other costs under Part 5 of the Regulations (regulation 109(8) & (9)). No DSA (including DSA for PG courses) will be available to any prisoner who starts a course on or after 1st September 2012. The responsibility to provide assistance for disabled prisoners will lie with the Prison Service.

## **2.8 Means-tested NHS bursaries**

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Under regulation 38(4)(a), students are not eligible for grants for living and other costs for any AY 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 <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/nhs-bursary-students> for information about the financial support available through the NHS Bursary Scheme. Or they can phone the NHS Student Bursaries Helpline on 0300 330 1345.

As part of the NHS bursary reforms, from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2017 most Nursing, Midwifery and allied health professions (AHP) students studying in England now have access to the same student finance system as other UG students, including DSA.

## **2.9 DSA for FT UG students (Regulations 40, 40A and 41)**

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### **2.9.1 Maximum DSA for FT UG students**

DSA support for FT UG students is split into 4 individual needs categories:

- Non-medical helper (NMH)
- Specialist equipment
- Travel
- General

From AY 21/22 the regulated maximum DSA support available to all new and continuing eligible FT UG DSA students is a single maximum DSA allowance for each AY of their course.

The maximum amount of DSA support available for FT UG students in AY 21/22 is £25,000.

A student's actual DSA entitlement under each individual needs category is assessed based on their specific needs as determined by the NAR process – see [section 3](#) for detail. DSA support can only be used for its sole purpose as recommended in the NAR and set out in the student's assessed DSA entitlement. It cannot be used as expenditure for any other means. For example, support awarded under the specialist equipment category to purchase a computer cannot be used to purchase any other type of equipment or used as expenditure under another category.

There is no provision to pay more than the maximum allowance set out in the Regulations. It is not possible, therefore, to use unspent DSA from a previous AY or anticipate DSA entitlement for a future AY to pay more than the maximum allowance in the current AY.

In addition DSA support cannot be used to retrospectively reimburse any personal expenditure a student has incurred in a previous AY.

Examples:

**Gerry** is a FT UG student who is starting his course in AY 21/22. His NAR identifies that he requires a high level of NMH support due to his disability. Based on the recommendations in his NAR the cost of Gerry's NMH is £22,000. He is entitled to DSA of £22,000 which fully covers the costs of his NMH support. Gerry doesn't require specialist equipment or support towards disability related travel costs.

Gerry's NAR also recommends £600 general entitlement to cover the cost of his NAR.

The total support Gerry requires is less than the total maximum available DSA support of £25,000 so Gerry can get enough DSA support to fully fund his needs.

Gerry's DSA support is as follows:

| Needs Category       | Maximum Available | NAR Recommendation | Assessed Entitlement | Student Expenditure |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper   | -                 | £22,000            | £22,000              | £22,000             |
| Specialist Equipment | -                 | -                  | -                    | -                   |
| General              | -                 | £600               | £600                 | £600                |

|              |                |                |   |                |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|---|----------------|
| Travel       | -              | -              | - | -              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>£25,000</b> | <b>£22,600</b> | - | <b>£22,600</b> |

**Jenny** is studying on a FT UG course. Her NAR identifies that she will require a high level of NMH for each year of her course. Based on the recommendations in the NAR she is assessed as entitled to NMH support of £20,000 per AY. The NAR also recommends specialist equipment costing up to £10,000. General entitlement of £600 is recommended to cover the cost of her NAR.

Jenny is able to use her DSA support up to the capped assessed entitlement under each of the NMH, specialist equipment and general categories however she cannot spend more than the maximum total AY allowance of £25,000. Jenny chooses to use £10,000 to pay for all the specialist equipment she requires. The NAR fee of £600 is also paid. This means that she has remaining entitlement of £14,400 to cover any NMH costs.

Jenny's DSA entitlement is calculated as follows:

| <b>Needs Category</b> | <b>Maximum Available</b> | <b>NAR Recommendation</b> | <b>Assessed Entitlement</b> | <b>Student Expenditure</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper    | -                        | £20,000                   | £20,000                     | £14,400                    |
| Specialist Equipment  | -                        | £10,000                   | £10,000                     | £10,000                    |
| General               | -                        | £600                      | £600                        | £600                       |
| Travel                | -                        | -                         | -                           | -                          |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>£25,000</b>           | <b>£30,600</b>            | -                           | <b>£25,000</b>             |

### 2.9.2 Travel costs exception

FT UG students who have reached their maximum annual allowance but have high annual travel costs due to their disability can, subject to the recommended amount of DSA support for travel in their NAR, access additional DSA support above the regulated maximum to pay for their additional travel costs (i.e. DSA support for travel costs is uncapped). This is intended to mitigate any risk of students impacted by high travel costs being unable to pay those costs therefore being unable to complete their course and achieve a qualification.

Where students have reached the maximum annual DSA expenditure of £25,000 any expenditure for disability related travel costs that result in their total DSA spend to exceed £25,000 will be disregarded.

Example:

**John** is studying on a FT UG course. His NAR identifies that he requires a high level of NMH support due to his disability. Based on the recommendations in his NAR the cost of John's NMH is £23,000. He is assessed as entitled to NMH support of £23,000.

The NAR also recommends £600 general support to cover the cost of the NAR. John is not recommended any specialist equipment support.

Due to John's disability he has specific travel needs and is recommended travel support costing £12,000. Despite exceeding his full DSA allowance John qualifies for the additional travel support as an exception.

John's DSA support is as follows:

| <b>Needs Category</b> | <b>Maximum Available</b> | <b>NAR Recommendation</b> | <b>Assessed Entitlement</b> | <b>Student Expenditure</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper    | -                        | £23,000                   | £23,000                     | £23,000                    |
| Specialist Equipment  | -                        | -                         | -                           | -                          |
| General               | -                        | £600                      | £600                        | £600                       |
| Travel                | -                        | £12,000                   | £12,000                     | £12,000*                   |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>£25,000</b>           | <b>£35,600</b>            | -                           | <b>£35,600</b>             |

\*Travel support taking the total expenditure above £25,000, i.e. travel expenditure of £10,600, is disregarded.

### 2.9.3 Sandwich courses and work placements

Students on part-year paid or unpaid placements where the periods of FT study in the AY are 10 weeks or more in aggregate are potentially eligible for DSA. For example, DSA travel support could pay for additional disability related travel costs to and from the HEP.

When a student is going on a work placement as part of their course, the DSA 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 HEP 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, for example, 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 DSA, in any AY of a sandwich course where the periods of FT 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 RRML 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 DSA (even where the periods of FT study in the AY are less than 10 weeks in aggregate) - see 'Assessing Eligibility' guidance.

Disabled students who receive a wage or salary during a work placement may be eligible for help via Access to Work, available via the Department for Work and Pensions.

#### **2.9.4 Students who become eligible during the course**

Under regulation 41(8), a student may qualify for full DSA support from, and including, the date on which they become an eligible student due to one of the reasons noted below:

- the student's course becomes a designated course
  - under regulation 5(10),
  - because the course is provided by or on behalf of an English HEP which becomes a registered provider, or
  - because the course becomes a Welsh designated FT course, a Scottish designated FT course or a Northern Irish designated FT course,
- the student or the student's spouse, civil partner or parent is recognised as a refugee, a person granted stateless leave or becomes a person granted humanitarian protection.
- the student becomes a family member (as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 1) of an EU national,
- the student acquires the right of permanent residence (in practice this will also include where the student acquires settled status under the EU Settlement Scheme),
- the student becomes a person described in paragraph 6(1)(a) of Schedule 1,
- the student becomes the child of a Swiss national, or
- the student or the student's parent is awarded Section 67 leave.

However, students will **not** retrospectively qualify for DSA support for any period falling before the date on which they became an eligible student.

#### **2.9.5 Non-medical help (NMH) support**

NMH support is intended to provide funding for additional human support which the student requires, because of a disability, to undertake their course on an equal basis to other students. HEP reasonable adjustments, including technical adjustments, must be taken into account before a recommendation for DSA funding is made.

For details of the types of NMH support that DSA funding is available for refer to [section 4](#).

#### **2.9.6 Specialist equipment support**

Specialist equipment support is intended to provide funding for additional major items of specialist equipment which the student requires, because of a disability, to undertake their course effectively. HEP reasonable adjustments must be taken into account before a recommendation for DSA funding is made.

For details of the equipment that specialist equipment support is available for, see [section 5](#).



All equipment purchased with the help of this specialist equipment support usually is and remains the property of the student.

### **2.9.7 Travel support**

Travel support may be used to pay the additional costs of travel to and from the HEP which are incurred because of a disability.

For details of the costs that travel support is available for see [section 6](#).

### **2.9.8 General support**

General support may be used for miscellaneous course related expenditure not covered by the other DSA support categories. The cost of a DSA study needs assessment is drawn from general support.

For details of the costs that general support is available for see [section 7](#).

## **2.10 DSA for part-time undergraduate students (Regulation 147)**

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### **2.10.1 Maximum DSA for PT UG students**

DSA support for PT UG students is split into 4 individual needs categories:

- Non-medical helper (NMH)
- Specialist equipment
- Travel
- General

From AY 21/22 the regulated maximum DSA support available to all new and continuing eligible PT UG DSA students is a maximum single DSA allowance for each AY of their course.

The maximum amount of DSA support available for PT UG students in AY 21/22 is £25,000.

A student's actual DSA entitlement under each individual needs category is assessed based on their specific needs as determined by the NAR process – see [section 3](#) for detail. DSA support can only be used for its sole purpose as recommended in the NAR and set out in the student's entitlement. It cannot be used as expenditure for any other means. For example, support awarded under the specialist equipment category to purchase a computer cannot be used to purchase any other type of specialist equipment or be used as expenditure under another category.

There is no provision to pay more than the maximum single allowance set out in the Regulations. It is not possible, therefore, to use unspent DSA from a previous AY or anticipate DSA entitlement for a future AY to pay more than the maximum allowance in the current AY.

In addition DSA support cannot be used to retrospectively reimburse any personal expenditure a student has incurred in a previous AY.

Example:

**Mohamed** is studying on a PT UG course. His NAR identifies that he requires specialist equipment and NMH support. Based on the recommendations in his NAR Mohamed is assessed as entitled to NMH support of £10,000 and £10,000 specialist equipment support.

Mohamed's NAR also recommends £600 general support to cover the cost of his needs assessment.

The total support Mohamed requires is less than the total maximum available DSA support of £25,000 so Mohamed can get enough DSA support to fully fund his needs.

Mohamed's DSA support is as follows:

| <b>Needs Category</b> | <b>Maximum Available</b> | <b>NAR Recommendation</b> | <b>Assessed Entitlement</b> | <b>Student Expenditure</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper    | -                        | £10,000                   | £10,000                     | £10,000                    |
| Specialist Equipment  | -                        | £10,000                   | £10,000                     | £10,000                    |
| General               | -                        | £600                      | £600                        | £600                       |
| Travel                | -                        | -                         | -                           | -                          |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>£25,000</b>           | <b>£20,600</b>            | -                           | <b>£20,600</b>             |

**Heather** is studying on a PT UG course. Her NAR identifies that she requires a high level of NMH. Based on the recommendations in the NAR she is assessed as entitled to NMH support of £20,000. The NAR also recommends specialist equipment costing up to £10,000. General entitlement of £600 is recommended to cover the cost of her NAR.

Heather is able to use her DSA support up to the capped assessed entitlement under each of the NMH, specialist equipment and general categories however she cannot spend more than the maximum total allowance of £25,000. Heather chooses to use £7,000 to pay for specialist equipment. The NAR fee of £600 is also paid. This means that she has remaining entitlement of £17,400 to cover any NMH costs.

Heather's DSA entitlement is calculated as follows:

| <b>Needs Category</b> | <b>Maximum Available</b> | <b>NAR Recommendation</b> | <b>Assessed Entitlement</b> | <b>Student Expenditure</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper    | -                        | £20,000                   | £20,000                     | £17,400                    |
| Specialist Equipment  | -                        | £10,000                   | £10,000                     | £7,000                     |

|              |                |                |      |                |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|------|----------------|
| General      | -              | £600           | £600 | £600           |
| Travel       | -              | -              | -    | -              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>£25,000</b> | <b>£30,600</b> | -    | <b>£25,000</b> |

### 2.10.2 Travel costs exception

PT UG students who have reached their maximum annual allowance but have high annual travel costs due to their disability can, subject to the recommended amount of DSA support for travel in their NAR, access additional DSA support above the regulated maximum to pay for their additional travel costs. This is intended to mitigate any risk of students impacted by high travel costs from being unable to pay their travel costs therefore being unable to complete their course and achieve a qualification.

Where students have reached the maximum annual DSA expenditure of £25,000 any expenditure for disability related travel costs that result in their total DSA spend exceeding £25,000 will be disregarded.

Example:

**Kevin** is studying on a PT UG course. His NAR identifies that he requires a high level of NMH. Based on the recommendations in the NAR Kevin is assessed as entitled to NMH support of £20,000. The NAR also recommends specialist equipment costing up to £10,000. General support of £600 is recommended to cover the cost of the NAR.

Kevin is able to use his DSA support up to the assessed entitlement under each of the NMH, specialist equipment and general categories however he cannot spend more than the maximum total allowance of £25,000. Kevin uses the £7,000 to pay for specialist equipment and £600 to pay for the NAR. This means that he has a remaining entitlement of £17,640 to cover NMH costs.

Kevin's NAR also sets out specific travel requirements costing up to £5,000. Although he has utilised the maximum DSA entitlement of £25,000 he is able to access further DSA support for his travel needs as an exception.

His DSA support is as follows:

| <b>Needs Category</b> | <b>Maximum Available</b> | <b>NAR Recommendation</b> | <b>Assessed Entitlement</b> | <b>Student Expenditure</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper    | -                        | £20,000                   | £20,000                     | £17,400                    |
| Specialist Equipment  | -                        | £10,000                   | £10,000                     | £7,000                     |
| General               | -                        | £600                      | £600                        | £600                       |
| Travel                | -                        | £5,000                    | £5,000                      | £5,000*                    |
| <b>Total</b>          | <b>£25,000</b>           | <b>£35,600</b>            |                             | <b>£30,000</b>             |

\*Where the total expenditure has reached £25,000 then spend against travel, i.e. the travel spend of £5,000, is disregarded as an exception.

### **2.10.3 Eligibility**

Students who beginning a PT course on or after 1 September 2012 must be studying at a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the AY to be eligible for PT DSA (regulation 147(4)).

From AY 14/15 onwards DSA for students undertaking a PT course with the OU which commenced on or after 1 September 2012 is administered by SLC.

Under regulation 147 an eligible PT student qualifies for DSA to assist with the additional expenditure that the Secretary of State is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake a designated PT course because of a disability.

Under the AY 17/18 armed forces exemption, students who were overseas could not be DL as a result of their disability as the primary reason for DL is that they are posted overseas with the military. However from AY 18/19, DfE confirmed that armed forces personnel serving outside their domicile on the first day of the first AY of their course but within another country within the UK could be categorised as DL due to their disability (thus can be treated as 'in attendance' and apply for full support).

The PT DSA scheme closely follows that for FT students. However there are some differences and these are explained below.

### **2.10.4 Designated PT courses**

To be eligible for support, including DSA, a student must be undertaking a designated PT course. The criteria for course designation in respect of PT support, including PT DSA, are set out in the 'Support for part-time students' guidance.

### **2.10.5 Non-medical helper (NMH) support**

For details of NMH support see [section 2.10.5](#) and [section 4](#).

### **2.10.6 Specialist equipment support**

For details of specialist equipment support see [section 2.10.6](#) and [section 5](#).

### **2.10.7 Travel support**

For details of travel support see [section 2.10.7](#) and [section 6](#).

### **2.10.8 General support**

For details of general support see [section 2.10.8](#) and [section 7](#).

## 2.11 DSA for postgraduate students (regulations 158 – 168)

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### 2.11.1 Maximum DSA for PG students

DSA support for PG students is split into 4 individual needs categories:

- Non-medical helper (NMH)
- Specialist equipment
- Travel
- General

The regulated maximum DSA support available to all new and continuing eligible PG DSA students is a maximum single DSA allowance for each AY of their course.

The maximum amount of DSA support available for PG students in AY 21/22 is £25,000.

A student's actual DSA entitlement under each individual needs category is assessed based on their specific needs as determined by the NAR process – see [section 3](#) for detail. DSA support can only be used for its sole purpose as recommended in the NAR and set out in the student's DSA entitlement. It cannot be used as expenditure for any other means. For example, support awarded under the specialist equipment category to purchase a computer cannot be used to purchase any other type of equipment or used as expenditure under another category.

There is no provision to pay more than the maximum single allowance set out in the Regulations. It is not possible, therefore, to use unspent DSA from a previous AY or anticipate DSA entitlement for a future AY to pay more than the maximum allowance in the current AY.

In addition DSA support cannot be used to retrospectively reimburse any personal expenditure a student has incurred in a previous AY.

Example:

**Lucia** is starting on a PG course. Her NAR identifies that she requires a high level of NMH support due to her disability. Based on the recommendations in the NAR Lucia is assessed as entitled to NMH support of £20,000. Due to Lucia's disability her NAR sets out specific travel requirements costing up to £3,000.

Lucia's NAR also recommends general support of £600 to cover the cost of her needs assessment.

The total support Lucia requires is less than the total maximum available DSA support of £25,000 so Lucia can get enough DSA support to fully fund her needs.

Lucia's DSA entitlement is calculated as follows:

| Needs Category       | Maximum Available | NAR Recommendation | Assessed Entitlement | Student Expenditure |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper   | -                 | £20,000            | £20,000              | £20,000             |
| Specialist Equipment | -                 | -                  | -                    | -                   |
| General              | -                 | £600               | £600                 | £600                |
| Travel               | -                 | £3,000             | £3,000               | £3,000              |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>£25,000</b>    | <b>£23,600</b>     | -                    | <b>£23,600</b>      |

### 2.11.2 Travel costs exception

PG students who have reached their maximum annual allowance but have high annual travel costs due to their disability can, subject to the recommended amount of DSA support for travel in their NAR, access additional DSA support above the regulated maximum to pay for their additional travel costs. This is intended to mitigate any risk of students impacted by high travel costs from being unable to pay their travel costs therefore being unable to complete their course and achieve a qualification.

Where students have reached the maximum annual DSA expenditure of £25,000 any expenditure for disability related travel costs that result in their total DSA spend to exceed £25,000 will be disregarded.

Example:

**Cara** is studying on a PG course. Her NAR identifies that she requires a high level of NMH support due to her disability. Based on the recommendations in the NAR Cara is assessed as entitled to NMH support of £24,000. The NAR recommends £600 general support to cover the cost of her NAR.

Cara has specific travel needs and is recommended travel support costing £5,000. Despite exceeding the full DSA allowance Cara is able to access additional travel support as an exception.

Cara's DSA support is as follows:

| Needs Category       | Maximum Available | NAR Recommendation | Assessed Entitlement | Student Expenditure |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Non-Medical Helper   | -                 | £24,000            | £24,000              | £24,000             |
| Specialist Equipment | -                 | -                  | -                    | -                   |
| General              | -                 | £600               | £600                 | £600                |
| Travel               | -                 | £5,000             | £5,000               | £5,000*             |
| <b>Total</b>         | <b>£25,000</b>    | <b>£29,600</b>     | <b>£29,600</b>       | <b>£29,600</b>      |

\*Travel support taking the total entitlement above £25,000, i.e. travel support of £4,600 is disregarded.

### 2.11.3 Eligibility

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

Under part 12 of the Regulations an eligible PG student qualifies for DSA to assist with the additional expenditure that the Secretary of State is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake a designated FT or PT PG course because of a disability.

PG students studying by DL are eligible for DSA, but only if the course is undertaken in the UK, this excludes those falling under the Armed Forces category from AY 18/19. Students undertaking courses on a DL basis are deemed to be studying at their home address. Therefore, to receive DSA, PG distance learners must remain living in the UK whilst undertaking their course.

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

- a) are, in connection with the course-
  - eligible to apply for any allowance under the Nursing and Midwifery Student Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2007); or
  - eligible to apply for an allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by a Research Council
  - eligible to apply for any allowance, bursary or award of a similar description made by their HEP which includes any payment for the purpose of meeting additional expenditure incurred by the student by reason of disability;
  - in receipt of the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) bursary for students on PG social-work courses which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability; or
  - in receipt of any allowance, bursary or award of a similar description made under section 116(2)(a) of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (as amended) which includes payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred by the student by reason of 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
- d) have shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support

Prior to AY 20/21, PG students eligible for any of the above bursaries, regardless of whether they were awarded the funding, were ineligible for DSA. This has now been amended to allow for those students eligible for, but not in receipt of NHSBSA bursary or of any allowance, bursary, or award of a similar description made under section 116(2)(a) of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (as amended) to be eligible for PG DSA.

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

As a result of the changes to pre-registration PGHCs from AY 18/19, PGHC students wishing to study in the same field in which they are professionally registered are ineligible for DSA due to their being professionally registered in that subject.

#### **2.11.4 PG courses designated for DSA**

Note that from AY 18/19 pre-registration PGHC courses were no longer designated for PG support under regulation 161 and are therefore designated under regulation 4.

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

- a first degree or higher qualification should be an entry requirement to the course
- a course duration of at least one AY
- where the course commences on or after 1 September 2012, if the course is PT, it must be of a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the AY and ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than four times the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent FT course
- where the course commenced before 1 September 2012, if the course is PT, it must be ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than twice the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent FT course
- the course is wholly provided by an authority-funded<sup>2</sup> HEP in the UK, provided by a publicly funded HEP in the UK on behalf of an authority-funded educational HEP or by an authority funded HEP in conjunction with an overseas HEP
- the course is not an ITT course or a course taken as part of an employment-based teacher training scheme.

FT and PT Legal Practice and Bar Vocational courses provided by authority funded HEPs are designated PG courses under the Regulations as the entry requirement to such courses is a first degree or higher.

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<sup>2</sup> 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.



The regulatory framework for HEPs has changed in line with the new Higher Education Research Act 2017. The Act created a new body called the OfS who are responsible for certain functions surrounding HEP regulation (such as quality) financial sustainability, governance and regulatory monitoring of registered English HEPs from 1 August 2019.

From 1 August 2019, English HEPs who wish to access student finance support must register with the OfS – HEPs that previously had courses specifically designated for student support will no longer need to apply for specific designation if they register with the OfS.

Designation is linked to registration with the OfS, in that all registered HEPs will be automatically designated for student support. However, the Secretary of State will retain the ability to designate or de-designate for student support purposes outside of this system.

From AY 19/20, HEPs will no longer be categorised as Publically/Authority funded or Privately funded and the categories of registration with the OfS are:

- Approved (fee cap) with an Access and Participation Plan
- Approved (fee cap) without an Access and Participation Plan
- Approved

From AY 19/20, the OfS are also able to specifically designate HEPs for teach out where they are not registered with the OfS.

Eligible students on courses that are designated during the AY will qualify for DSA from the date of the award of designation.

Students on PG ITT courses are potentially eligible for DSA under the FT or PT scheme. They are not therefore eligible for the PG DSA.

Regulation 162 provides for DSA 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 PT course begins on or after 1 September 2012 and where a student intends at the outset to complete a PT PG course in not more than four times the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent FT course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the AY during which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe (see example below).

**Example:** A student states an intention to study PT for a PhD for 12 years. The equivalent FT PhD would take three years. The student is awarded the DSA in years one to eleven of the course as the PT study is at least 25% of a FT course. However during the 11<sup>th</sup> year the student's pattern of PT 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 FT course and means the student cannot receive any further DSA support. Their eligibility will cease from when the intensity drops below 25%.

It is for the HEP to decide whether a PG course is FT or PT and whether a PT course takes more than twice (where the course begins before 1 September 2012) or four times the period ordinarily required (where the course begins on or after 1 September 2012) to complete a FT course leading to the same qualification.

The period of eligibility may be terminated where the eligible PG 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.

#### **2.11.5 Transfer of eligibility**

Regulation 163 provides for eligible PG students to transfer their eligibility to another PG 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 HEP recommends a transfer in writing and that the importing HEP agrees to the transfer. If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any DSA amount awarded for the first course is taken into account for the second course as the period of eligibility has not been broken. Students transferring courses may continue to receive support without the necessity of a further DSA study needs assessment unless their disability has changed or the course is substantially different.

#### **2.11.6 Students moving directly from UG to PG study**

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

There is a possibility that the majority of PG students in receipt of DSA will have received DSA as an UG.

Where the support already in place is not sufficient, the HEP should consider what reasonable adjustments may be needed.

Additional funded-reviews can be arranged for certain changes of circumstances. Further guidance on when a funded-review, single fee review or a rolling over of existing support is available – see [Annex C](#). The DSA study needs assessment fee will be paid, even if the DSA

study needs assessor identifies that no support is required by the student. No additional fee will be payable without the prior approval of SFE.

### **2.11.7 PG students completing dissertations after their course ends**

A student retains their status as an eligible PG for a period equal to that which is ordinarily required to complete the relevant designated PG 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 PG 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 PG 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.

Where the PT PG course began on or after 1 September 2012, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean the overall duration of the PT course will be more than four times the time needed to complete the FT equivalent course, the PT course will cease to be designated and the student will not qualify for further DSA support.

In the case of PT PG designated courses regulation 159(9) provides that where the course began on or after 1 September 2012, an eligible student will not qualify for PG DSA where the course intensity of study in the AY for which the support is requested is less than 25%.

## **2.12 Students on overseas placements**

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As a result of the UK's exit from the EU, support on an Erasmus+ programme is no longer available to new students from AY 2021/22. However, funding for new students may be provided from AY 21/22 under a UK domestic alternative arrangement known as the 'Turing Scheme'.

Note that some support via Erasmus+ may still be available to continuing disabled students on an Erasmus+ programme where it was approved on or before 31 December 2020.

For detailed guidance on what support can be funded through DSA for students on overseas placements, please see SSIN 05/21 at [dsa-support-for-overseas-placements ssin final august-2021.pdf \(slc.co.uk\)](#).

## **2.13 Costs incurred during vacation periods**

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Study skills support, assistive technology support or assistive technology installation and training provided during the long vacation may be considered through DSA, 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 LCL or extra weeks' maintenance loan.

## **2.14 Social Services**

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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 The DSA application process

#### 3.1 DSA application and award process

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Step 1: Students undertaking a HE course apply to SFE to receive DSA. Their application must be supported by evidence from their GP or specialist about their disability, and students with SpLDs need to provide an assessment of their disability.



Step 2: Once SFE has confirmed eligibility, a student's support requirements are assessed by interview (Needs Assessment Interview) at a separate needs assessment centre. A NAR detailing the specific support the student needs is provided to SFE and to the student.



Step 3: SFE considers the NAR, seeking clarification from the DSA study needs assessor where it judges it is necessary. It then processes the NAR, calculates the student's entitlement and confirms the type and level of support that will be funded by DSA. The student then contacts the supplier direct to obtain the equipment and/or NMH support.



Step 4: The supplier provides support direct to the student and invoices SFE for goods or services supplied. There is no contract or other formal agreement between the supplier and DfE or SFE. Although the support is the students, SFE usually pay the support to the supplier direct.

Note: Due to the number of accredited needs assessment centres in the UK, it is likely that students will be able to choose one near to their home or university, as preferred.

#### 3.2 Applications for DSA support

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Eligible disabled students from England can apply for DSA support as soon as SFE launches the application process. Students should complete their DSA application and submit it to SFE along with the appropriate medical evidence. SFE may request further information from the student if needed.

There are two DSA paper 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. Students who have applied to SFE for core

student support and who are studying on UG courses can apply for DSA online. All applications ask students to give their consent to the release of information about their DSA application to third parties such as disability advisers and needs assessment centres.

Students may wish to speak to the disability adviser at their chosen HEP before making an application to discuss and consider what reasonable adjustments may be available. The disability adviser may also assist the student with an application for DSA if it appears that additional support is required. Students must not be advised to purchase equipment prior to receiving authorisation to do so from SFE on the assumption that the costs will be covered by DSA, as reimbursements are not available.

Some students may choose not to apply for DSA as they will receive sufficient support through their HEPs.

Applications for DSA for the current AY should be made within the statutory time limit of nine months from the start of the AY or as soon as reasonably practicable to do so. Applications received after the nine month time limit will be managed on a case by case basis and additional evidence may be requested to support a late application (see [section 2.2](#)).

### **3.3 The study needs assessment interview**

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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 DSA and will be advised to contact a needs assessment centre at the first possible opportunity in order to arrange a DSA study needs assessment. [Section 1.10](#) provides details of who is authorised to carry out needs assessments.

When notifying students that they will need to undergo a DSA study needs assessment, SFE will inform the student what is involved in the assessment and that if they do not attend the DSA study needs assessment they will not be able to receive any DSA support they may require.

Funding through DSA covers the cost of only one full DSA study needs assessment, other than in exceptional circumstances. Guidance on when a funded review assessment, a review within the original fee or a rolling over of support is appropriate is available at [Annex C](#). Students should be advised that they will not receive DSA funding for a second DSA study needs assessment without prior approval from SFE.

Any assessments arranged without prior approval from SFE will not be funded through DSA.

A DSA NAR 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 must be obtained before releasing the DSA NAR or any other disability-related information to a third party. A copy of the NAR should be sent to the student and SFE by the needs assessment centre, once the content has been agreed.

The DSA study needs assessment will help SFE determine what type and level of support the student might require, as well as the amount of DSA to which the student is entitled. DSA study needs assessors should consider any relevant 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 and/or local authority. Similarly, the DSA study needs assessor will cover the disabilities and/or SpLDs approved as eligible by SFE, taking account of the medical evidence submitted in relation to the approved condition(s).

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

## **4 DSA Non-Medical Helper (NMH) support**

Since AY 16/17, less specialist roles of NMH support are expected to be provided by the HEP under their legal obligation to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled students. Exceptions may be considered on a case by case basis.

Note that students who started their current period of study, and were awarded DSA prior to AY 16/17 may continue to receive DSA support for such NMH roles.

### **4.1 The NMH services framework**

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The various NMH support activities have been grouped into four bands, based on type of activity. Within the bands, individual support activities are set out and include a brief description of the support activity, the skills and qualifications required to deliver that support, the applicable cost range and maximum cost, and where the primary responsibility for providing the support lies. The majority of DSA-funded support lies within bands 3 and 4 which relate to more specialist help.

A list of mandatory qualifications and professional body membership required for those delivering DSA funded NMH support is currently published at [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

### **4.2 Students wishing to change NMH provider**

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Requests to change NMH provider must be submitted by the student. Students must have accessed or tried to access the support from their NMH provider, and SFE will only allow students to change their NMH provider if:

- The student has expressed dissatisfaction with their current NMH provider and has been unable to resolve the issues with the NMH provider or
- The current NMH provider is unable to meet the student's requirements to deliver the support, for example, date and time / format of delivery of support.

Note: Where a student is commencing a HE course and is already in receipt of NMH support from a registered NMH supplier SFE may, in exceptional circumstances, agree to that NMH provider continuing to provide support, but SFE approval must be sought in all cases.

### **4.3 NMH costs**

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DSA funding will not generally be payable for more than the maximum amount of the cost range (plus VAT, where applicable). The cost ranges set out in this document are exclusive of VAT. These cost ranges apply to DSA funded support only.

### **4.4 Using the NMH support roles**

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The activity titles used in this document must be the ones referred to by NMH providers when completing a NAR and communicating with SFE. DSA study needs assessors, HEPs and NMH providers must use the support activity titles set out in this section when making recommendations or submitting invoices for payment.

Some support workers will only deliver one type of support. However, where a range of support is delivered by a single NMH that is qualified to deliver more than one type of support, the invoice should stipulate clearly the hours provided for each type of support and the charges should fall within the cost range for that particular type of support.

### **4.5 Exceptions**

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Where this section refers to DSA funding being available by exception only, this means the support will be considered on an individual, case by case basis. Any general exceptions that are identified in the future will be stated within the individual roles.

### **4.6 Exceptional Case Process (ECP)**

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The ECP is intended to provide support to DSA eligible students who are in dispute with their HEP over reasonable adjustments. It provides interim funding to pay for support which will enable the student to study whilst the dispute is being decided. It applies to students eligible to receive DSA support from SLC who are studying on a HE course. Students can be studying at a university, a college providing HE courses, or an alternative provider of HE.

The ECP can be triggered once the student enters into a formal dispute with their HEP. The Exceptional Case team will consider whether the support falls within the scope of DSA, and if so, whether interim support should be provided. In rare occurrences, where the needs of the



student are very exceptional, the ECP team may deem that DSA funding should be awarded for the duration of the course. However, it is not the purpose of interim funding available through the ECP to replace reasonable adjustments that should be made by a HEP. See [Annex B](#) for more details.

#### **4.7 HEP academic adjustments**

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DSA is not available for counselling, coaching or the costs of extra academic tuition, subject specific coaching or support in the main subject area(s) being studied. HEPs should meet any costs arising from these activities as part of providing the course.

Similarly, where a HEP 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 costs associated with it doing so.

#### **4.8 NMH quality assurance framework**

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It is important that students receive good quality support that is provided by individuals who are qualified to provide the right level and type of support. It is also important that those delivering support recognise and respect the boundaries between the DSA funded support a student may receive to access their studies, and academic support, advocacy, coaching, or counselling that should only be provided by a student's HEP. DSA NMH services should also be provided by support workers who have the appropriate employed or self-employed status.

Any supplier wishing to provide DSA funded NMH services is required to register to do so and agree to comply with the DfE's requirements for auditing, as well as reporting and managing conflicts of interest..

Details of the auditing and quality assurance arrangements for NMH providers are available at <https://www.practitioners.sl.c.o.uk/exchange-blog/2020/september/10092020-guidance-for-nmh-suppliers/>

The current list of suppliers for DSA-funded NMH is available at <https://www.practitioners.sl.c.o.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres/>

This guidance sets out the support roles and the corresponding cost range. DSA will not be available to pay for support outside of those roles. Similarly it will not be available where costs exceed those in the cost framework, other than by exception and where it is agreed in advance with SFE. However, the cost range principally limits the maximum fee, there is no lower limit setting out the minimum fee chargeable.

#### **4.9 NMH excessive hours**

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It is important to note that disability type can have an impact on the amount of NMH that an individual student requires. The number hours of NMH support per day is taken in account with regards to the various Regulations on working hours.

DSA will not pay for hours of support where this is more than that shown on the DSA2 entitlement letter. However, a student can get further recommendations for additional hours if required via a re-assessment.

SLC will monitor the weekly and yearly amounts of NMH support recommended and drawn-down for individual students, and will challenge any which appear excessive.

#### **4.10 NMH and local authority care plans**

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The provision for NMH DSA support 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. DSA funding is not available for personal care costs.

#### **4.11 Using self-employed NMHs**

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NMHs who are self-employed are responsible for their own tax and NI contributions etc. Using a self-employed NMH would mean that students, or any other body, are not the employer of the NMHs. For the purpose of tax and NI 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 NMH 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.

DSA funding will not be available for individuals without an appropriate employment status - they must be registered with HMRC to pay tax and NI on their earnings.

#### **4.12 Administration charges for arranging NMH**

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In the context of DSA, HEPs may arrange and administer NMH support and HEPs may incur extra costs in providing this service. Such costs might include recruiting potential NMH, advertising for helpers, selecting suitable candidates, training unqualified NMHs 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. DSA cannot be used as a contribution towards the infrastructure, general administration and pastoral costs of the HEP. That is, DSA must not be used to cross-subsidise the infrastructure of HEPs' disability services.

HEPs governing bodies are responsible for the proper stewardship and value for money of public funds, and the amount HEPs claim for DSA administration needs to be relevant and proportionate, and to have been incurred by the HEP specifically in providing the DSA service to the DSA 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. HEPs may be asked to submit information on how any on-costs in relation to the DSA 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. HEPs and NMH 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 DSA. Any HEP may be asked to submit details of how their administrative costs have been calculated with the first claims each year. Furthermore, rates need to remain consistent for the duration of a student's course.

A fundamental review of costs should be undertaken by HEPs 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 DSA are made in accordance with guidance and should query costs which do not appear to them to be reasonable.

#### **4.13 Cancellation charges when students fail to attend a pre-arranged NMH session**

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As a general rule NMH provision will only be paid for through DSA if the student has booked their support sessions with their NMH provider and attended the sessions. 'Booked,' in this context, 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.

DSA 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 NMH 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 NMH 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 DSA as it is understood that the student booked the session expecting to attend (subject to the repeated cancelled 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 DSA, in cases 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, DSA funding will not be provided for NMH provision that is repeatedly not being used once booked, or cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice, or where students indicate that they no longer need or want NMH support. For the purposes of DSA funding, the standard of "repeatedly" is considered to be more than two sessions which have been missed per term. DfE consider that it is unlikely that most students would need to cancel their NMH session with less than 24 hours' notice more than twice per term.

DSA funding will not be provided where the HEP is responsible for cancelling the lecture/tutorial etc. that the session was booked for. The HEP must take responsibility for notifying the student that the lecture/tutorial etc. is cancelled to enable the student to cancel the session with the NMH provider.

All cancelled sessions will be carefully considered by SFE before payment. Where more than two sessions have been cancelled at short notice per term SFE will ensure that all parties understand their responsibilities and reasons for missed sessions are being investigated and documented.

#### **4.13.1 NMH 'sessions'**

A 'session' will be deemed to be the entire day.

Therefore a NMH 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.

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 1 cancelled session for the purposes of DSA funding.

All the notetaking support booked for that day will be classed as 1 cancelled session for the purposes of DSA funding.

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

The student has been agreed assistive technology training, but none was booked on this particular day, therefore any allocation of workshop assistant support remains unaffected.

#### **4.13.2 What action should the support worker or service provider take when a session is cancelled?**

At the first cancelled 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.

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

Generally the AY falls into three terms/semesters. However, some courses have non-standard delivery models that do not fall into 3 periods.

For ease of reference, we elaborate on the understanding of "terms," as will be used here. These will be defined as: 1 September - 31 December, 1 January - 30 April and 1 May - 31 August. The start of the AY is not relevant for this purpose.

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

#### **4.13.4 NMH support following cancelled sessions**

SFE will not suspend support after two cancelled 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 cancelled sessions occurring beyond the first two per term, other than in exceptional circumstances.

#### **4.13.5 The role of the HEP disability adviser in managing missed sessions**

Where there is consent to share information with the HEP, 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.

DfE/SFE 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. DSA study needs assessors should indicate on the NAR if they identify that this is likely to occur.

#### 4.14 Payment of invoices

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In most instances NMH 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.

There is an expectation that support will in most cases be delivered in sessions of around an hour's duration. However, there will be occasions when slightly shorter or longer sessions are delivered and, in those cases, invoices should be rounded to the nearest 15 minutes.

#### 4.15 Types of NMH Support

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##### 4.15.1 BAND 1 - Support Assistants

Staff that carry out these activities must have the skills and competence to work effectively, at the direction of the student, in their own particular context.

From AY 16/17, these activities are the primary responsibility of the HEP, with the exception of sighted guide, which remains a primary responsibility of DSA. However, where DSA funding is available by exception, funding will be provided under the upper cost range that apply to each activity and within the scope set out within each role.

Note that students who started their current period of study, and were awarded DSA, prior to AY 16/17 may continue to receive DSA support for such NMH roles.

The role of a support assistant is generally to provide support in the following areas:

- Providing practical support around the campus
- Providing practical support in the library, laboratory or workshop/studio etc.
- Reading aloud
- Scribing
- Text checking (pointing out errors but not providing corrections)

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Practical Support Assistant
- Library Support Assistant
- Reader
- Scribe
- Workshop/Laboratory Assistant
- Sighted Guide
- Proof Reader

#### **4.15.1.1 Practical Support Assistants £15-24**

This role provides 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, ICT 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 autism 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.

Skills required: Some experience/understanding of providing support for disabled adults, thorough knowledge of the campus and good interpersonal skills.

Qualifications/training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support, generic NMH training and those whose support activity includes supporting wheelchair users will also need to have had specific health and safety training relevant to the physical demands of their activity.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the practical support needs of the student.

In any event, DSA 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.

#### **4.15.1.2 Library Support Assistant: cost range £15-24**

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.

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.

Skills required: Good working knowledge of the library.

Qualifications/training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support, generic NMH training required and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the library support needs of the student.

#### **4.15.1.3 Reader: cost range £15-£35**

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.

Skills required: Clear reading voice and sufficient skills to cope with the demands of the text including any technical jargon.

Qualifications and training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support, generic NMH training and some understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the 'reader' needs of the student.

#### **4.15.1.4 Scribe: cost range £15-£27**

A scribe is used to write down or type what a student dictates. This is directed notes and should not be confused with general notetaking which may occur in a lecture, seminar etc.

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.

Skills Required: Clear handwriting and/or accurate keyboarding skills, good spelling and punctuation, sufficient skills to cope with the area of work being followed by the student including any technical jargon and an understanding of the boundaries of this activity including personal integrity and an awareness that the scribe's activity is to write down exactly what the student says and not to make any amendments or changes to content.



Qualifications and Training: GCSE English Language grade C or above. No mandatory professional body membership has been identified for this support. Generic NMH training and some understanding of the HE context are considered.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the 'scribe' needs of the student.

#### **4.15.1.5 Workshop/Laboratory Assistant: cost range £15-£26**

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

Skills Required: Knowledge and experience of the particular educational setting, for example, laboratory or workshop.

Training/qualifications: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support, generic NMH training, sufficient knowledge in the requisite practical area and health and safety training relevant to the particular workshop context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the workshop/laboratory support needs of the student.

#### **4.15.1.6 Sighted Guide: cost range £15-£25**

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.

Skills required: Thorough knowledge of the campus and good interpersonal skills.

Qualifications/training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support. Generic NMH training, sufficient knowledge in the requisite practical area and health and safety training relevant to the particular workshop context.

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.1.7 Proof Reader/Text Checker £15-£28**

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 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 HEPs 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.

**Skills Required:** Fast reader but also good attention to detail, an understanding of the area of work being followed by the student including any technical jargon and an understanding of the boundaries of this activity including personal integrity and an awareness that the proof reader's role is to support the student to learn to recognise their own mistakes and is not to make any amendments or changes to content.

**Qualifications/Training:** GCSE English language grade C or above. No mandatory professional body membership has been identified for this support. Generic NMH training, specialist training relevant to the demands of the activity and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the proof reading/text checking needs of the student.

#### **4.15.2 BAND 2 – Enhanced Support Assistants**

These are activities which demand an enhanced level of skill, knowledge and training to Band 1 activities.

From AY 16/17, these activities are the primary responsibility of the HEP. However, where DSA funding is available by exception, funding will be provided under the upper cost range that apply to each activity and within the scope set out within each role.

Note that students who started their current period of study, and were awarded DSA, prior to AY 16/17 may continue to receive DSA support for such NMH roles.

The role of an enhanced support assistant is generally to provide support in the following areas:

- 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 for example library support, workshop support etc.
- Supporting a disabled student during examinations

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Study Assistant
- Examination Support Worker
- Notetaker

#### **4.15.2.1 Study Assistant: cost range £20-£29**

This role does not refer to the specialist 1-to-1 skills support which is provided under band 4 support.

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 for example library support, workshop support etc.

**Skills required:** An enhanced level of skill and experience of working with disabled students, an understanding of the barriers which disabled students may have in accessing learning, but not the specialist experience and knowledge of those working at Band 4, 1 to 1 Study Skills Support or Specialist Mentors, knowledge of the way the HEP/organisation works and the demands of studying in HE, excellent interpersonal skills and clear understanding of issues of confidentiality.

**Qualifications/training:** No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support. Generic NMH training, specialist training relevant to the demands of the activity and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding is available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the study assistant support needs of the student.

#### **4.15.2.2 Examination Support Workers: cost range £20-£28**

Examination Support Workers may assist with reading out the examination paper, writing down student answers using exactly the words used by the student and for some students, for example those on the autism spectrum who might get very focussed on a particular question, giving a prompt as to when it is time to move on to another.

**Skills required:** Clear reading voice, excellent spelling and grammar, clear handwriting and/or good and accurate keyboard skills, ability to cope with any specialist vocabulary or technical jargon and a clear understanding of the activity and high level of personal integrity in order to not make any additions or amendments to student's answers.

**Training/qualifications:** No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support, generic NMH training, competent knowledge of English, specific subject expertise where relevant for example to cope with technical jargon and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding is available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the examination support needs of the student.

In any event, the cost of any arrangements that HEPs may need to make to enable a disabled student to take examinations (for example providing physical access to the examination hall or allowing the examinations to be taken and invigilated somewhere else) will not be considered within the scope of DSA.

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

#### **4.15.2.3 Notetakers: cost range £20-£28**

This support is provided for students who require notes to be taken on their behalf, for example because they have a physical 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.

Skills required: Clear and legible handwriting at speed if providing handwritten notes, accurate spelling and grammar skills, familiarity with subject specific vocabulary and technical language and disability awareness.

Qualifications/training: A Level 2 or 3 qualification in notetaking is required, a standard of education to at least second year degree level is expected, the undertaking and completion of specialist notetaker training (may be in-house training) which includes the formal assessment and evaluation of skills and suitability and the successful achievement of that assessment and evaluation. Other training, including at a HEP, delivered by an appropriately qualified trainer who can demonstrate a relevant qualification in notetaking and which leads to a final skills assessment and certificate. Other formal UK notetaking qualifications should be considered

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the need for capturing information from lectures, seminars etc. or for providing notetaking support for the student.

There is a wide range of ways to deliver information to students which may reduce or remove the need for individual note-taking, which should be discussed with the student. There are 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.

In cases where DSA funding is provided for notetaking, the DSA study needs assessor will be asked to 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 and indicate the outcome of that discussion in the report for consideration by the HEP.

Where DSA funded notetaking is agreed by exception, DSA study needs assessors will be required to provide the following information, where possible: the actual number of note-taking hours required based on timetable or where this is not possible (for example, 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 HEP, discussion with the student etc.

Where typed notes are required by the student the DSA study needs 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.

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.

Notetaking 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 expected. Typing up charges should be no more than half the amount charged for the actual note-taking session (and half the time of the note-taking).

Example: A session of notetaking is arranged for a tutorial lasting an hour. The notes are taken manually and the charge is £20 per hour. The amount available for the subsequent typing up of the notes (if required to comply with the students specific needs) is £10 per hour, with only half an hour being the appropriate charge (for example an additional £5).

The typing up of written notes by the note-taker or a third party is not electronic notetaking or specialist transcription services and should not be recommended or charged as such.

#### **4.15.3 BAND 3 – Specialist Enabling Support**

These are activities which demand specific expertise and specialist training in a particular access area.

DSA funding remains available for these support roles, with the exception of specialist transcription services, which become the primary responsibility of the HEP for those students applying for DSA for the first time from AY 16/17 onwards. Where DSA funding is available by exception for specialist transcription services, funding will be provided under the upper cost range that apply to each activity and within the scope set out within each role.

The role of a specialist enabler is generally to provide support in the following areas:

- 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
- Using specialist skills to enable students to navigate themselves independently around the educational environment

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Communication Support Worker
- Electronic Notetaker
- Specialist Transcription Services
- Mobility Trainer

#### **4.15.3.1 Communication Support Workers and Lip Speakers: cost range £35-£44**

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 BSL/English Interpreter, or to convey a speaker's message to lip readers accurately using unvoiced speech. The support worker is required to work flexibly with an individual deaf student in workshop and seminar situations as well as providing general 1 to 1 support. This does not include academic support.

Skills required: Competent signing/lip speaking and experience of working with deaf learners in an HE context and an understanding of how deafness affects learning.

Qualifications/Training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site at [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.3.2 Specialist Notetakers for Deaf and Visually Impaired Students: cost range £35-£40**

There are a range of Specialist Note Taking options which can be provided for sensory impaired students. DSA study needs assessors should discuss with the student which option will be most appropriate for them to gain access to their course. This is different to Notetakers (see [section 4.15.2.3](#)) and Specialist Transcription Services (see [section 4.15.3.3](#))

This support activity is predominantly for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and for visually impaired students. The primary requirement of this support is to make a comprehensive set of notes to meet the needs of the student for access, review and revision purposes.

The notetaker may be either a manual notetaker (handwritten notes or handwritten notes that are later typed) or a trained ENT. The note-taker will make a comprehensive although

non-verbatim, typed or hand-written record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, off-campus events etc. in the student's preferred style and format.

ENT: requires the NMH provider to be the laptop owner. Using a student's laptop will negate their insurance and relies on the student bringing a laptop with them which may be inappropriate and/or unnecessary.

Some students may wish to receive the information simultaneously on their own computer using, for example, NoteED or Stereotype software, in these cases the second laptop could belong either to the student or the NMH service provider.

For some students, ENT may be delivered remotely, using live captioning services.

For visually-impaired students 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.

Note: This activity is not to be confused with that of Specialist Transcription.

For visually-impaired students there are now many forms of assistive technology 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 first where a particular barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the student's note taking needs.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site at [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)  
DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.3.2.1 Electronic Notetaking (ENT)**

ENT systems involve a trained operator usually using a standard laptop and specialist software (NoteEd®, Speedtext® or Stereotype®) which enables them to provide summary notes (so accuracy is not a % figure) at approximately 120 words per minute.

#### **4.15.3.2.2 Speech to Text Reporting (STTR)**

STTR involves a trained operator using a specialist chorded keyboard system and software to enable them to listen to speech and transcribe the text verbatim. The text is displayed on a screen at 200-300 words per minute with an accuracy of 97-99%. This support is available for deaf students but should only be recommended where:

- a verbatim record is needed to enable the student to interact or to follow a session (a tutorial where it is important to capture discussions in real-time), and
- the student has a high fluency in English

Students who use BSL are unlikely to require STTR or ENT in lectures, as they will be concentrating on the BSL delivery of the lecture. However, they will still require notes to be delivered by specialist notetakers trained to take notes for deaf students.

STTR is not a standard recommendation for deaf students and will be considered on a case by case basis.

Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.3.3 Specialist Transcription Service: cost range £25-£32**

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

Skills required: Familiarity with a range of specialist office packages and equipment and knowledge of how to transcribe into various alternative formats.

Qualifications/training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support and relevant specialist ICT training.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP for those students applying for DSA for the first time from 16/17 onwards. DSA funding remains available by exception only. HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the specialist transcription needs of the student.

#### **4.15.3.4 Mobility Trainer: cost range £35-£42**

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.

For on-going support around campus a sighted guide might be a more appropriate response.

Skills required: A worker who has the requisite qualification and proven experience in training blind or visually impaired people, or those who have significant orientation difficulties



because of other impairments, to find their way independently and safely around a new environment.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

If a student already has a guide dog then GDBA takes responsibility for mobility training in a new environment.

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### 4.15.4 BAND 4 – Specialist Access and Learning Support

These activities require 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

Functions undertaken by Specialist Access and Learning Support Workers require the 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
- Work with the student to continually monitor the effectiveness of these strategies
- Work to enhance student's autonomy within their learning context or
- Interpret the language of delivery, giving real time access, into another language accessible to the student.

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Specialist Mentor
- Specialist 1 to 1 Study Skills Support
- BSL Interpreter
- Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for students with sensory impairments and
- Assistive Technology Trainer

#### **4.15.4.1 Specialist Mentors: cost range £50-£66**

Specialist mentors provide highly specialist, specifically tailored, 1 to 1 support which helps students address the barriers to learning created by a particular impairment. This support is primarily provided for students with mental-health conditions, ADD/ADHD or ASDs. The support could address 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 and are expected to provide support that focuses on enabling the student to access their academic studies, rather than on the management or treatment of a specific condition. 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, for example, 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. Mental Health mentors particularly should not act as mental health advisors or counsellors: these are roles which should be provided via a student's HEP or the NHS.

DSA 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.

Skills Required: In depth knowledge and experience of the particular disability, understanding of the particular demands of study in HE and close working relationship with other support service both inside and outside the HEP and recognition of when there is a need to refer to other services.

Training/Qualifications: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.4.2 Specialist 1 to 1 Study Skills Support: cost range £50-£72**

This specialist 1 to 1 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 SpLDs or an ASD often face when working in an HE context. This support is primarily provided for students with an SpLD, ADD/ADHD or an ASD.

This support should aim to develop students' skills and to develop independent learning. It should be tailored to a student's individual needs and professionals delivering the support should set out clear goals and timescales for achieving these goals. A reducing level of support to enable independence should be agreed, where it is appropriate.

Skills Required: Substantial experience of working with students with the relevant disability for example SpLD or ASD on a 1 to 1 basis, also experience of working with these disabilities in an educational/learning environment and a good working knowledge of assistive technologies and related AT study skills strategies would be desirable.

When working with students with SpLDs an in depth understanding of the effects of SpLDs on language and learning in a HE context.

When working with people on the autism spectrum, an in-depth knowledge and understanding of autistic thinking and learning is needed.

An awareness of the strengths which students with SpLDs and those on the autism spectrum can bring to a learning situation and the skills to help students to make use of these strengths and overcome barriers to learning.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

The National Autistic Society website identifies some appropriate courses: <https://www.autism.org.uk>.

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.4.3 British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreters: cost range £50-£57**

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 1 language and pass it on in another.

Skills Required: Interpreters should be trained and have experience of working in a HE setting and they should also have some knowledge of the academic area being followed by the student.

Qualifications/Training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.4.4 Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for students with sensory impairments: cost range £50-72**

This support is bespoke support for the individual needs of students with a sensory impairment which reflects their method of communication, educational history and experience. The SSP should have specialist knowledge of the support that was provided to the student prior to their entry into HE and can build on those strategies to frame the support provided in the new learning environment.

Support may include developing research strategies, composition strategies, working on presentations - structure and mode of presentation, organisation, time management, communication etc. – which should all facilitate strategies for independent learning.

This support is not subject specialist support but support to enable access to the course. The SSP is uniquely placed in a position which gives them an in depth understanding of the specific requirements of the student. Therefore, the SSP should provide bespoke advice to the HEPs disability officers and teaching staff on what adjustments could be made in order to create an inclusive learning environment for the student. This advice should be provided only if the student gives permission for this and when it is required.

Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

##### **4.15.4.4.1 Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for deaf or hard of hearing students**

The support provided by the SSP is bespoke so that it reflects the individual needs of the student and their personal learning style. In addition, to the all of the above, specialist support uses appropriate communication strategies to enable access and understanding of carrier language (this is not subject specific vocabulary), to work on planning work load and structuring assignments, to support access to research sources and to support preparation for assignments.

Additionally, as students with sensory impairments face even more specific barriers to learning, the SSP should provide the HEP with specific advice on making adjustments to disability officers and teaching staff, with the permission from the student. This will be focused on helping the student access the course, all assessments and support the student needs to develop strategies to overcome barriers to learning. Specialist audiological advice regarding different personal FM systems or specific course needs, for example, an amplified stethoscope, should be provided to the HEPs as needed.

This support is not subject specific, rather it is support aimed at enabling access to study. This support will include appropriate modification to allow for language of assignments. For a student whose preferred communication is BSL, the SSP must have the level of BSL specified within the DSA assessment.

Mandatory Criteria: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.4.4.2 Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for students with Vision Impairment**

The support provided by the SSP is bespoke to individual student's specific vision impairment. They should support the student to develop strategies to overcome barriers to learning and should provide the HEP with bespoke advice on making adjustments that the student requires.

This advice should be given with the consent of the student. The SSP should regularly assess and monitor a student's functional vision and advise disability officers and teaching staff of any necessary changes, support and advise students and universities with regards to modifying any learning materials into accessible formats including, Braille and tactile diagrams, teach specialist skills (for example, Braille and accessing tactile diagrams). Alongside this SSPs should support students with the use of specialist equipment and ICT, and provide support regarding access to all assessments.

This support is not subject specific support but support to enable access.

Mandatory Criteria: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.4.4.3 Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for Students with Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI)**

Depending on the primary need of the student, tutorial support may be provided by a SSP for Deaf Students or a SSP for students with a Vision Impairment through liaison with colleagues specialising in MSI.

The support provided by the specialist is bespoke for the combined vision and hearing impairments of the student (including deafblind students). The specialist uses their knowledge of previously used strategies to ensure the utilisation of appropriate communication strategies to enable access and understanding of vocabulary. The specialist

supports planning work load and structuring assignments, access to research sources and support preparation for assessments.

In addition, the SSP should provide the HEP with bespoke advice on making adjustments to meet the needs of the student. The advice provided to members of the HEP should be given with permission of the student. In addition to, providing advice students and HEPs with regard to modification of any learning materials into accessible formats (including Braille and tactile diagrams). Alongside, supporting students with the use of specialist equipment and ICT and provides support and advice regarding access to all assessments.

This support is not subject specific support but support to enable access and will include appropriate modifying of language of assignments. For a student whose preferred communication is BSL, the SSP must have the level of BSL specified within the DSA assessment.

Mandatory Criteria: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are currently set out on the SFE Practitioners' site: [https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh\\_mandatory\\_qualifications\\_and\\_professional\\_body\\_membership\\_requirements.pdf](https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1844/nmh_mandatory_qualifications_and_professional_body_membership_requirements.pdf)

DSA funding remains available for this support.

#### **4.15.4.5 Assistive Technology (AT) Training: cost range £50-£65**

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. This support is time limited and is generally provided in the early stages of the course.

HEPs 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, HEPs should consider bulk-buying licences to enable their disabled student body to access on-going training free-of-charge.

Skills required: AT trainers require knowledge and skills in strategies to support learning and a broad understanding about the range of existing products and technological solutions to learning challenges. Knowledge and understanding of students' learning requirements is fundamental to this activity alongside an understanding of how to address learning challenges. These challenges might include organisational skills, planning and time management or concentration, or gaining access through, for example, vision or hearing. Solutions include AT, software programmes such as mind mapping, text to speech and speech to text, Microsoft Windows and Mac accessibility options and features to support learning

such as the use of Outlook for organisational skills and digital recorders to aid memory. They require significant experience of working in a training capacity with people with a disability and an understanding of the kind of work required by a student at HE.

Qualifications and training: There are no specific qualifications for DSA ICT training, although ICT trainers should have a thorough knowledge of assistive technologies.

DSA funding remains available for this support.

## **5 Specialist equipment support**

DSA 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 DSA.

### **5.1 Student leaves a course after receiving equipment**

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If a student receives DSA 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.

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

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A DSA 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 DSA 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 (FT students), regulation 135 (FTDL students) regulation 156 (PT students) and regulation 168 (PG students).

Similarly, a student may start their course, then abandon it and then receive DSA 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) (FT students), regulation 135(8) (FTDL students), regulation 156(7) (PT students) and regulation 168(6) (PG students).

SFE can accept the return of the equipment to the supplier, a monetary repayment or a combination of both against the overpayment. This is not to say that the supplier is always

obligated to accept returns or provide a full refund. For example, where the student has received two items of equipment through DSA 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.

DSA study needs assessors should clearly explain 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.

### 5.3 Exceptions

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Where this section refers to DSA funding being available by exception only, this means the support will be considered on an individual basis. Any general exceptions that are identified in the future will be stated within the individual support type.

### 5.4 Computers

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Computers are considered to be a mainstream cost for all students. As DSA is available for the purpose of assisting with the additional costs which an eligible student is obliged to incur because of their disability funding for computers will only be provided where the computer is required solely because of the student's disability. The cost of a basic (entry level) computer has been settled for DSA purposes at £200. Students must contribute the first £200 towards the cost of the computer. In circumstances where the student has received DSA funding towards a computer, and they require a replacement for that computer, the student would not be expected to contribute the first £200 towards the cost of the replacement computer.

The £200 contribution is for computer hardware only: students are not expected to contribute towards software or towards training to make proper use of that.

Note that the £200 student contribution does not apply to students who started their current period of study, and were awarded DSA support, before AY 15/16.

It is the responsibility of HEPs 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 (for example, STTR). 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. HEPs may also consider what support they might provide on an individual basis, for example, through bursaries or awards to low income groups.

If a student has an existing computer that is suitable for use with their assistive software for the remaining years of their course, they must use it rather than obtaining a new one through DSA. If a student has an existing computer but there is a good disability related reason for



them to obtain a new one via DSA (for example, if their existing computer is in a poor condition and no longer meets the student's requirements as outlined in their NAR) they are permitted to do so.

Students who use their own existing computer or do not obtain their computer from the ATSPs will need to obtain insurance and warranty cover for their computer for the duration of their course from the open market. This will be funded by DSA.

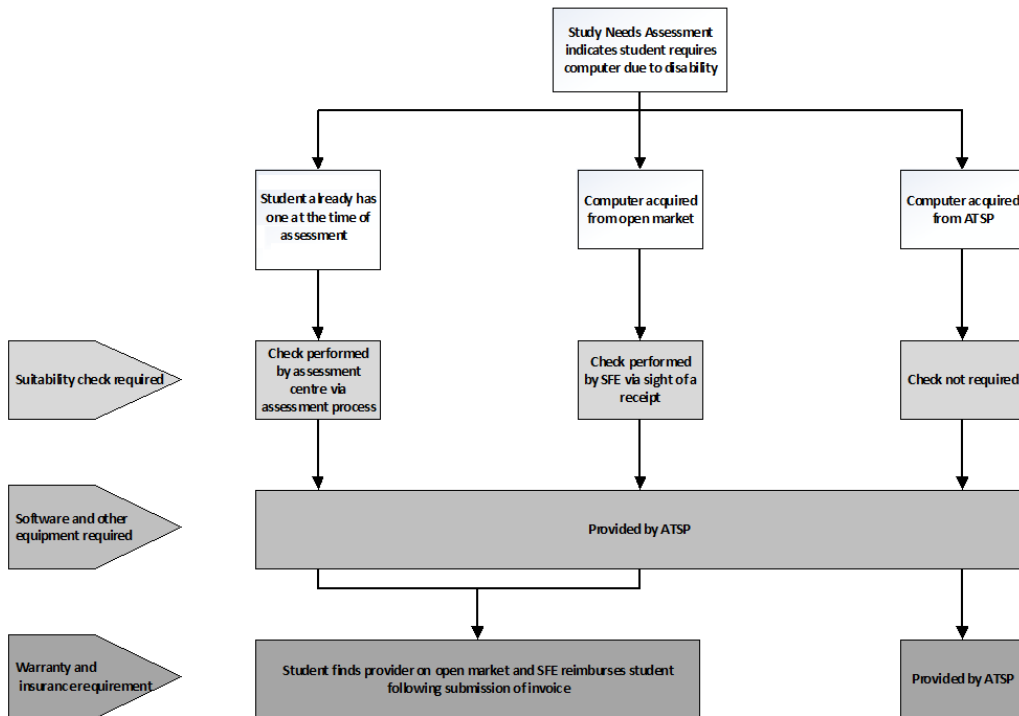
Students are permitted to obtain their computer from the open market (for example, from outside the ATSPs). All assistive software and other IT equipment (for example, DVRs) will be provided by the ATSPs, so students will not be permitted to obtain these from the open market.

Where a student has already contributed £200 towards the cost of a computer, but are then required to acquire an additional computer (if, for example, the original computer has ceased to meet the needs of the student due to breakage or a disability related need) the student may be entitled to the entirety of the cost for an additional computer.

Broken or faulty computers are typically expected to be covered by their warranty or insurance. However, in cases where the warranty or insurance cover has lapsed and the computer is judged to be beyond economical repair by the DSA study needs assessor or supplier, then the student may be awarded the full DSA funding for a new computer. In cases where a computer is still functional but additional disability related needs have surfaced, a student will only be entitled to the full cost of an additional computer if a DSA study needs assessor confirms the genuine disability related need for the computer.

#### **5.4.1 Summary of common scenarios for obtaining a computer**

In most cases where a student is assessed as having a computer disability related need the process will align with 1 of 3 scenarios. These are detailed below:



**The above chart is also outlined below:**

**Scenario 1:**

1. Student is recommended for a computer.
2. Student already has a computer at the time of the assessment
3. Needs assessment centre checks spec, age and condition of computer (see pages 4-6). If computer does not pass this check, go to Scenario 2 or 3.
4. If existing computer is suitable, the ATSP will provide the software and other equipment.
5. In the event of the supplier being unable to install the software due to issues with the computer, the supplier will contact the needs assessment centre, providing a quote for repair/resolution.
6. The DSA study needs assessor will discuss options with the student, and recommend to the supplier as appropriate.
7. The student has the choice of paying for repair/resolution, or opting for a new computer (funded by DSA with a £200 student contribution).
8. If student is using their own computer: Student obtains warranty and insurance for the duration of their course themselves via the open market. Paid by DSA.
9. If a student’s own machine breaks down, and is not covered by warranty and insurance, the student should contact SFE for advice and to discuss the most cost-effective option for resolution.
10. ATSP responsible for student queries that are solely concerning the software they have provided. All queries concerning the computer should be submitted by the student to the supplier of the warranty and insurance they obtained via the open market.

**Scenario 2:**

1. Student is recommended for a computer.

2. Student does not have a computer at the time of the assessment, or has one but there is a good reason (as determined by the student and subsequently validated by the DSA study needs assessor) for them to obtain a new one via DSA.
3. Student advises they wish to purchase their computer on the open market.
4. The needs assessment centre should provide the student with the specification their computer must meet to run their assistive software.
5. Student purchases their computer on the open market.
6. SFE will only reimburse the student (student submits evidence, such as a receipt) once the Assistive Technology Provider has confirmed that they have been able to install the software on the student's machine.
7. ATSP provides and installs software and other equipment.
8. Student obtains warranty and insurance for the duration of their course themselves via the open market. Paid by DSA.
9. ATSP responsible for student queries that are solely concerning the software they have provided. All queries concerning the computer should be submitted by the student to the supplier of the warranty and insurance they obtained via the open market.
10. Cost of computer (up to a maximum level and minus £200 contribution, if applicable) and warranty/insurance is paid by DSA.

Scenario 3:

1. Student recommended for a computer.
2. Does not have a computer.
3. ATSP provides computer, other equipment, software and warranty/insurance.
4. ATSP handles student's £200 contribution if applicable.

#### **5.4.2 Entry-level computers**

DSA funding is not available for entry level computers however, in exceptional cases, students who started their course, and were awarded DSA for that course, before AY 15/16 may qualify for DSA support towards the cost of an entry-level computer.

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, spreadsheets and the least technically demanding assistive software packages, for example, mind mapping software. Such computers may not have the capacity to run assistive software effectively at the same time. As noted above, entry level computers are a mainstream participation cost for all students and cost £200 or less.

#### **5.4.3 Standard computers**

DSA funding is available for a 'standard' computer, subject to a £200 student contribution.

Note that the £200 student contribution does not apply to students who started their current period of study, and were awarded DSA support, before AY 15/16.

Other disabled students may require a computer with a higher specification than an entry level computer in order to effectively use more demanding software – for example, speech-to-text software and/or text-to-speech software. This is termed as a standard computer in the DSA context. The specification for a standard computer for DSA purposes is set out as a 'Classic/WKH' in the Computer Specification Matrix. This information can be found on <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres/>.

DSA study needs assessors should not recommend a standard computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSA 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 (£200 for DSA purposes) will be provided through DSA. DSA study needs assessors should identify the appropriate computer type that meets the student's needs, for example, entry level / standard / high cost. DSA funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers.

DSA study needs assessors should refer to separate guidance (available at <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/exchange-blog/2019/november/guidance-for-assessment-centres/>) on establishing whether a student's existing computer is suitable for running their assistive software effectively.

#### **5.4.4 High-cost computers**

DSA funding is not generally available for high-cost computers although students who started their current period of study before AY 15/16 may qualify for DSA support for high cost computers. Students awarded DSA for a course starting in or after AY 15/16 may qualify for DSA support towards a high cost computer (with a £200 student contribution) if there is a specific disability related need.

DSA will not fund higher specification and/or higher cost computers (for example, Apple Macs, 'creative' spec PCs) if they are needed solely because of the way that the HEP has decided to run the course (for example, on an Apple Mac platform only). DSA funding is only available for high cost computers, such as 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. They are not funded through DSA where the need is solely due to the way in which the course is delivered.

If the student's existing computer is an Apple Mac and it passes the spec check, they will be allowed to use it to run their assistive software.

If their Apple Mac fails the spec check and their need for the Apple Mac is solely because of the way that the HEP has decided to run the course, they will be required to contribute £200 towards a new Windows PC computer provided by DSA.

If their Apple Mac fails the spec check and there is a specific disability related need for them to have an Apple Mac (which is authorised by SFE), they will be required to contribute £200 towards a new Apple Mac computer provided by DSA.

HEPs 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. HEPs 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 HEP discretionary funding such as 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 will be provided through DSA. DSA funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers in this instance.

The student's specific need must be appropriately evidenced. DSA study needs assessors should not recommend a high cost computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSA study needs assessors should identify the appropriate computer type that meets the student's needs, that is, entry level / standard / high-cost.

#### **5.4.5 Low weight computers**

DSA funding is available for low weight computers, subject to a £200 student contribution.

Note that the £200 student contribution does not apply to students who started their current period of study, and were awarded DSA support, before AY 15/16.

Some students may have a specific disability related need for a low weight laptop computer, for example, 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 will be provided through DSA. DSA funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers.

The student's specific need must be appropriately evidenced. DSA study needs assessors should not recommend a low weight computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSA study needs assessors should identify the appropriate computer type that meets the student's needs for example entry level / standard / high-cost.

#### **5.4.6 Tablet devices**

DSA funding is not generally available for tablet devices . Where devices such as tablets are essential to meet the specific needs of the student, DSA 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 it is expected that a standard computer will 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 not be funded through DSA.

#### **5.4.7 Insurance and warranties**

DSA funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for DSA funded computers. Students should also be advised that DSA funding is available for insurance and warranty for their existing computer, if the computer is required to meet their disability related needs and is of the appropriate specification. If a student's own machine breaks down, and is not covered by warranty and insurance, the student should contact SFE for advice and to discuss the most cost-effective option for resolution.

### **5.5 Internet Connection**

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Internet connection is not typically covered by DSA, other than in exceptional circumstances as it is viewed that the wide availability of internet access (HEPs/Accommodation) and the requirement for all students to have internet access does not justify DSAs covering individual personal internet access by default. Exceptions will be considered on a case by case basis.

### **5.6 Devices for printing and/ or scanning**

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DSA funding is available for devices for printing and/or scanning.

Where funding is made available, generally only multifunction printer/scanners will be considered.

Recommendations for separate individual printers or scanners will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, where there is a clear disability related need for separate items in place of a multifunction unit.

All recommendations for devices for printing and/or scanning must include full justification and evidence setting out why the provision of the item is required for the student to undertake their course solely due to their disability.

DSA study needs assessors should clearly evidence the need for hard copy materials and how that need is additional to that experienced by a non disabled student. DSA study needs assessors should also evidence why that additional need cannot be met through the HEP's services for example library services or reasonable adjustments.

DSA study needs assessors are advised to use the following three-step approach in evidencing need, and provide this in the report:

- I. Is there an additional 'need' due to their disability over and above that needed by their non disabled peers, both for printed materials and scanning?
- II. If the student does have additional needs for printed or scanned materials, can the need be met using library services?
- III. If the need cannot be met by library services, can the need be met by the HEP through other reasonable adjustments?

Where devices for printing and/or scanning are provided, DSA funding is available for ink and paper consumables which are additional to the needs of a non disabled student.

## **5.7 Audio capture equipment**

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DSA funding is available for audio capture equipment (for example, DVRs or microphones).

DSA study needs assessors should consider whether adequate personal recording of lectures and seminars could be achieved via a laptop or a smart phone, including with use of an app, before recommending DVRs. DSA study needs assessors should also consider if recordings are provided by the HEP.

DSA funding is available for smart phone apps if they are essential for audio capture, where the student will be using their existing smart phone instead of a DVR for this purpose and a free version of the app is not available. DSA is not available to cover the cost of the student's own device, or any insurance or warranty associated with that device.

All recommendations require full justification and evidence setting out why the provision of the individual item is required for the student to undertake their course solely due to their disability. Recommendations should demonstrate and evidence that full consideration of other strategies has been made before a DVR is considered. DSA study needs assessors should not expect to recommend DVRs and note taking for the same purpose.

## **5.8 Other equipment**

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DSA 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 DSA. The list is not exhaustive. Nor should it be taken that the list represents items that all disabled students should receive.

All recommendations require full justification and evidence setting out why the provision of the individual item is required for the student to undertake their course solely due to their disability.

DSA study needs assessors are advised to use the following three-step approach in evidencing need for each item:

- I. Is there an additional 'need' for the item due to their disability over and above that needed by their non disabled peers?
- II. If the student does have additional needs for an item, can the need be met using common facilities provided by the HEP?
- III. If the need cannot be met by common facilities provided by the HEP, can the need be met by the HEP through other reasonable adjustments?

In all cases, the lowest specification item that meets the needs of the student should be recommended by DSA study needs assessors. These items may include:

- Screens and monitors
- Keyboards and mice
- Specialist equipment for visually impaired people (for example, viewing equipment or Braille equipment)
- Magnifying equipment
- Ergonomic equipment and furniture
- Handheld dictionary and spelling equipment
- Scanning pens

DSA funding is available for laptop carry cases as a matter of course, up to a maximum price of £20 for those students being provided with a laptop computer. The laptop carry case should form part of the quote for equipment.

DSA funding is available for standard keyboards, standard size monitors and standard mice as a matter of course if they form part of a recommendation for a desktop computer.

DSA funding is available for headsets or other items as a matter of course where they are essential for the effective use of specific assistive software that has been recommended.

A 'bundle' of standard computer peripherals is not funded as standard. The need for each item must be individually evidenced. Note, however, the 'bundle' of standard computer peripherals remains available for students who started their current period of study, and were awarded DSA support, before AY 15/16.

## **5.9 Assistive and Standard Software**

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DSA 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 and the software is not available for free through site licences or other means. Most students should have access to standard Microsoft software packages (Word, Outlook, etc.) free of charge, currently through Office365.



DSA will fund:

- 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 DSA)

## **5.10 Course Specific Software**

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Funding is not available for course specific software as all students will need to access course specific software and therefore it falls outside the scope of DSA funding, as it is not additional expenditure incurred as a result of a disability. HEPs will need to consider how all of their students will be able to access course specific software.

## **5.11 Wheelchairs / mobility scooters**

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DSA funding is not generally available for wheelchairs/mobility scooters.

The responsibility for providing wheelchairs and mobility scooters rests with the NHS and DWP. The need for a wheelchair or mobility scooter is unlikely to be a solely study related need.

## **5.12 Radio aids for deaf students**

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DSA funding is available for a radio aid.

Funding is available if the student's needs cannot be met through other means and a radio aid has not been supplied through other sources, for example, the NHS.

DSA funding is only appropriate if the need for a radio aid is solely a study related need.

## **6 DSA travel support**

Travel support may be used to pay the reasonable additional costs of travel to and from the HEP which are incurred because of a disability.

### **6.1 Attending the HEP**

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DSA travel support is calculated as the excess between public transport costs and the mode of travel the student is required to use because of their disability. For example, if a student

needs to travel by taxi rather than by public transport because of mobility or visual difficulties, then the DSA 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 their HEP. In this instance, the amount of travel support should be any excess between public transport costs and the cost of the same journey by car. Since FY 15-16 this is set at 24p per mile. Suitable parking facilities should be arranged by the HEP as a reasonable adjustment.

Generally, where the student has opted to use a mobility element of their DLA or PIP to lease a motability car, they will be expected to use that car to attend their HEP 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 HEP as a reasonable adjustment.

Exceptions may arise where the car cannot be driven by the student themselves. In such instances the DSA study needs assessor must consider the cheapest travel options, taking into account the availability of the motability car where possible.

The DSA 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 support is not available to enable the student to attend appointments, or other travel needs that are personal needs, for example, hospital appointments, travel to home address. This is the case irrespective of whether the travel is required because the HEP is not in the locality of the appointment or student's home address.

DSA study needs assessors should discuss with students whether they are in receipt of any form of support towards travel costs from other government agencies or their local authority. This information will impact the assessment of travel cost assistance the student is awarded. Receipt of another means of support does not preclude a student from receiving DSA. However, it informs the decision as to what additional help the student might require.

## **6.2 Attending a work placement**

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

HEPs 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, for example, the social work travel bursary, should be taken into account when calculating the excess costs that can be funded through DSA.

### **6.3 Attending a field trip**

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

### **6.4 Taxi firm accounts**

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DSA 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 licenced company that they do not hold an account with. These will be treated exceptionally and will be reimbursed on receipt of a valid itemised company receipt. For the purposes of this guidance "ad-hoc" means up to 15 return journeys or up to 30 single journeys per AY.

## **7 DSA general support**

This section sets out information on the type of support that is funded through general support 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.

### **7.1 DSA study needs assessments**

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

The cost of a DSA study needs assessment is drawn from the general support category. Needs assessment centres have 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 DSA study needs assessment will cover much of the contact the student has with the needs assessment centre for the duration of the course.

From 1 January 2016 the maximum amount available for a full study needs assessment has been £660 (plus VAT where applicable). Although this was reviewed in early 2017, no change was made and this maximum amount still applies. Needs assessment centres charging above that rate will not be reimbursed any amount above this through DSA.

For students being assessed by needs assessment centres that were charging less than that rate on the date of notification (10 September 2015) the maximum amount available for their assessment will continue to be frozen at the amount charged by the needs assessment centre on the date of notification.

Additional funded reviews can be arranged for certain changes of circumstances. Further guidance on when a funded review, single fee review or a rolling over of existing support is available at [Annex C](#). The study needs assessment fee will be paid, even if the DSA study needs assessor identifies that no support is required by the student. No additional fee will be payable without the prior approval of SFE.

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

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

## **7.2 Living Accommodation**

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DSA are not available towards the additional costs of accommodation where the accommodation is provided, managed or controlled by the HEP or its agent, by which it is meant an organisation or individual acting on behalf of the HEP for the provision of accommodation.

DSA remains available for the additional costs of accommodation not provided by the HEP or its agent, but only where the additional costs are incurred solely because of the student's disability.

HEPs should not pass any additional costs of specialist accommodation on to the student.

DSA study needs assessors should consider the student's accommodation needs for the duration of the course, so that students do not need to have a further assessment if they move from HEP accommodation to private accommodation in subsequent years of their course.

SFE will consider the status of the accommodation provider and will also make a judgement on a suitable comparator for costs. Generally where only one type of accommodation is available, for example, where all accommodation provided is en-suite, then the student will not incur additional costs in relation to the provision of en-suite accommodation when compared to their fellow students.

Sometimes a HEP will have a range of accommodation available and a certain type is specifically selected to meet the student's needs. In such cases a comparator might be from outside the locality of the allocated accommodation. The DSA study needs assessor should seek information on how the particular accommodation was selected by the student or

allocated by the HEP to enable SFE to determine the appropriate comparator. It would also be helpful if a map of the HEP's campus is supplied, in order to identify suitable comparators for accommodation costs in the area.

### 7.3 Consumables

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There is no standard 'consumables allowance'.

Consumables, such as paper and ink supplies, will continue to be funded where the DSA study needs assessor has evidenced that the student has a need for hard copy materials that is additional to that of a non-disabled peer, and that a printer has been provided to meet that additional need, or the student already owns a suitable printer.

DSA study needs assessors should clearly evidence the need for hard copy materials and how that need is additional to that experienced by a non-disabled student. DSA study needs assessors should also evidence why that additional need cannot be met through the HEP's services, for example, library services.

If the need for additional consumables is identified, DSA study needs assessors should consider carefully what consumables are required and to what level. An estimate of usage should be provided to SFE, along with the factors that have been taken into account when considering that usage, including the usage that a non-disabled student might have. A standard estimate should not be used by DSA study need assessors, given the wide variation in the needs of individual students.

### 7.4 Books

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DSA funding is not generally available for books.

Core books are a standard expense faced by all students and DSA funding is not available for core books. If a disabled student requires access to a core book in an alternative format they should contact the library services at their HEP to arrange for assistance.

Non core books are optional for students and will not generally be considered essential for DSA 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.

Wherever possible, students should be assisted by their HEP to access materials in alternative formats if needed or through long library loans or other similar arrangements.

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 HEPs subscribe should be as accessible as possible (for example, enable adjustments to font size and display colour, enable text to be read by text-to-speech tools) see useful guidance at: <http://www.ijsctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/keyinitiatives/libraries>.

When producing reading lists, it would be good practice for HEPs 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 HEP subscribes.
- If not available or accessible using assistive technology through the HEP's e-book platforms the books could: a) be obtained in an accessible format directly from publishers, or b) be scanned in-house by the library service.

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

It would be good practice for HEPs to make assistive technology tools, such as text-to-speech, available on all HEP 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 HEPs should provide long library loans or fully accessible scanned versions where appropriate (and where copyright Regulations allow).

DSA study needs assessors should make it clear during the needs assessment that DSA will only be provided to purchase non-core books where they are deemed to be essential and are not available through any other source. A 'book allowance' should not be recommended. Students should be signposted to their HEP's library services to access materials for their study.

If the situation arises whereby a student is unable to access the text they require and the purchase of hard copy items is the only solution, due to the specialist nature of the text, then the DSA study needs assessor should set that out in the NAR if known at the time, or the DSA study needs assessor should use the current 'additional recommendation' process to submit the request to SFE if identified later during the course.

## **7.5 Special diets (for those living with allergies)**

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DSA funding is not available for special diets

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 DSA.

## 7.6 Fridges (for students needing to store medication)

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DSA 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.

## 8 Other

### 8.1 Appeals and Complaints

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Students wishing to raise any complaints relating to services provided should contact the corresponding supplier in the first instance. Where the student and supplier are unable to resolve matters the student should 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>.

The SLC has formal processes for handling complaints about their service and a separate route to appeal against a decision by SFE regarding funding.

Students can contact SLC if they wish to make a complaint about service by:

Telephone: 0300 100 0601

Email: [customer\\_complaints@slc.co.uk](mailto:customer_complaints@slc.co.uk)

Online customer complaint form: -

[http://www.slc.co.uk/media/5032/slc\\_customer\\_complaints\\_form\\_d.pdf](http://www.slc.co.uk/media/5032/slc_customer_complaints_form_d.pdf)

Or if they wish to appeal an SFE decision regarding funding:

Email - [formal\\_appeals@slc.co.uk](mailto:formal_appeals@slc.co.uk)

The existing appeals process should be used for DSA cases where a DSA study needs assessor recommends support that is not available under DSA or not sufficiently justified, and the recommendation is rejected by SFE.

In addition to the existing appeals and complaints process, an ECP is available to consider applications for DSA in the circumstances set out below.

### 8.2 Exceptional Case Process (ECP)

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The ECP is intended to provide support to DSA eligible students who are in dispute with their HEP over reasonable adjustments by providing interim funding to pay for support to enable the student to study whilst the dispute is being decided.

It is not the purpose of ECP interim funding to replace reasonable adjustments that should be made by an HEP.

An award of DSA may be considered in the following circumstance:

Non-provision of an adjustment (including NMH and accommodation).

**Step 1:**

The DSA study needs assessor should consider the barriers that need to be addressed and set out the strategies that are necessary to overcome the barrier in the NAR.

They should detail:

- What items of equipment and/or assistive software is essential to address the barrier and, if necessary, what other additional support strategies might be needed, for example, hand-outs, notes, etc.
- The DSA study needs assessor should detail what strategies would work for the student to provide the support essential for them to access their course.
- Some of these strategies are likely to include support and activities with outcomes associated with NMH Bands 1 and 2 NMH activities and specialist transcription services. It will be for the HEP to agree with the student how to meet their needs in these areas.
- Some of these strategies may be the primary responsibility of DSA funded support (primarily NMH Bands 3 and 4).

The recommendations for DSA fundable items/support considered by SFE assessors and are agreed/rejected under normal processes – end of process for those items.

**Step 2:**

Student notified of DSA entitlement and advised to pass the relevant parts of their NAR to HEP disability officer to consider the support that has been identified as primarily the responsibility of the HEP (for example, assistance with capturing points from lectures, assistance in the library etc.). The DSA2 letter will also advise the student to contact their HEP.

**Step 3:**

HEP agrees to put support in place – end of process, or

**Step 4:**

The HEP and student do not agree on the type of support to be supplied and enter a formal dispute. The ECP team is notified by the student, with confirmation from the HEP, that an agreement has not been reached and that the student wishes to apply for support through



DSA. This can be done completing the 'Support Request Form' and email this to the DSA Team (disability\_adviser@slc.co.uk).

**Step 5:**

The ECP team consider the circumstances of the student and consider that the support would fall outside the scope of DSA in any event. DSA funding rejected and student notified – end of process, or

**Step 6:**

The ECP team consider the circumstances of the student and conclude they are very exceptional and DSA funding is agreed for the duration of the course and the student is notified – end of process, or

**Step 7:**

The ECP team consider that the needs of the student are not exceptional and support through the HEP is expected. Student notified that they would need to pursue the formal complaint with their HEP and advise that interim support will be put in place for a limited period of time while their appeal is in progress.

Interim support is payable for a limited period of time initially whilst the HEP concludes their consideration of the student's circumstances. If the student submits evidence that the case is going to the OIA, interim support for a further limited period of time is available while the case is under consideration by the OIA.

**Step 8:**

Outcome of OIA review indicates that the student's complaint that the HEP has failed to provide a suitable strategy, and could reasonably be expected to do so, is 'justified' or 'partially justified', and may make recommendations to the HEP which they are expected to comply with – HEP to provide support, end of process for that support, or

Outcome of OIA review indicates that the student's complaint that the HEP has failed to provide a suitable strategy, and could reasonably be expected to do so, is 'not justified' – refer back to SFE ECP team to consider whether DSA will continue funding support for the duration of the course. Generally funding will be provided if the type of support is within the scope of the Regulations covering DSA.

All exceptions are on a student basis, and will not be granted at an HEP or support-type level.

To note:

HEPs should consider appeals as quickly as possible and notify SFE of the outcome.

Appeals and complaints against HEPs

HEPs have a legal duty under the Equality Act to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled students. If a student requests an adjustment from their HEP, and the HEP determines that the adjustment is not reasonable, the student can appeal or complain through the HEP's

normal channels at no cost. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome to their appeal or complaint, they may make a complaint to the OIA, once the internal complaints procedures are exhausted <http://www.oiahe.org.uk>. If the OIA determines that there has been a failure on the part of the HEP and upholds the student's complaint, then the HEP would need to respond to the OIA. The OIA covers HEPs in England and Wales. HEPs in Scotland are covered by the SPSO. If a student has a complaint against SAAS or their HEP and have completed that organisations internal complaints process they can ask the SPSO to investigate - [www.spsso.org.uk](http://www.spsso.org.uk). Unresolved disputes with a HEP in Northern Ireland should be referred to the DfE (NI)

HEPs are being asked to improve the appeals process for students who have requested an adjustment which has been rejected. HEPs should seek to minimise any delay for disabled students seeking adjustments.

The OIA is listed by the CTSI as an Entity which is compliant with the requirements of the European Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution which was implemented in July 2015. One of the requirements of this Directive is that, unless a case is considered "highly complex", decisions on a complaint should be made within 90 days of receiving a completed complaint file.

DfE expects HEPs to work to resolve disputes regarding adjustments as quickly as possible. In any event DfE do not expect this process to be used frequently, given the clear message to HEPs on where we expect the primary responsibility for certain types of support to lie.

### **8.3 Reimbursements**

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

Students must not be advised by disability advisers or DSA study needs assessors to commit to expenditure before SFE approval is received on the assumption that a reimbursement will be made. The cost of previously owned/purchased equipment will not be reimbursed.

#### **Exceptions**

Exceptions will be considered for costs of travel to the course from the date the application for DSA is received by SFE, but only if the travel costs are subsequently recommended by the DSA study needs assessor and receipts are provided.

The additional costs of specialist accommodation will be considered from the start of the AY in which the application for DSA is received, subject to the general rule set out at 8.2 and only if the costs are subsequently recommended by the DSA study needs assessor.

Reimbursement for certain types of NMH provided by an HEP 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 DSA study needs assessor will be considered for funding through DSA.

## **8.4 Devolved administrations**

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Students from England studying at HEPs in the devolved administrations and who are eligible for student support from SFE will have the same DSA 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 and/or HEP. Organisations in the devolved administrations that are responsible for students and student complaints include:

- For Scotland – SAAS and SPSO
- For Wales - SFW and the OIA for HE
- For Northern Ireland – SFNI and the NIPSO

## **8.5 VAT**

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Neither DfE nor the SLC can give advice on VAT matters. Any queries regarding the charging of VAT should be directed to HMRC.

## 9 Annexes

### 9.1 Annex A - Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)

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“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:

- I. Developmental SpLD – a neurologically based problem with particular aspects of learning despite appropriate educational opportunity and intellectual ability.
- II. 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
- 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

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 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.<br><br>Diagnostic reports to be in the format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's report.<br><br>Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by STEC.   |
| Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2007 and August 2008 | Accept diagnostic reports from psychologists and specialist teachers. Specialist teachers must hold a current practising certificate in assessing SpLDs 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).<br><br>Diagnostic reports to be in the report format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines<br><br>Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by STEC. |
| Diagnostic assessments carried out from September 2008                    | Procedures as from September 2007 above plus the following.<br><br>All training for assessing SpLDs to incorporate the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines.  |
| From 2012   | Psychologists will be registered with the HCPC (the Health and Care Professions Council, formerly the Health Professions Council) as practitioner psychologists.  |

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.

An SpLD Working Group was set up in 2003 to review the arrangements for identifying and assessing SpLDs in HE students. The Working Group was asked to produce a report

recommending a framework to guarantee the quality of assessments which diagnose SpLDs. The final report is available via an archived page in the National Archives at: [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20060716073917/http://www.dfes.gov.uk/student-support/dsa\\_1.shtml](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20060716073917/http://www.dfes.gov.uk/student-support/dsa_1.shtml).

The SpLDs Working Group asked a committee to take a lead in implementing a number of the report's recommendations. This committee is the SASC. A sub-committee of SASC, the 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 above sets out the criteria a diagnostic assessment must meet depending on when it was carried out.

Further information on identifying SpLDs through assessment can be found in the regularly updated guidance issued by SASC and STEC see [www.sasc.org.uk](http://www.sasc.org.uk). New guidance relating to the assessment of ADHD and updated guidance on Dyspraxia is now available.

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 PG courses. Between May 2020 and June 2021, due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the holding of in-person diagnostic assessments, temporary arrangements were put in place so that DSA applicants who did not already have a full diagnostic assessment could submit an evaluation of need undertaken remotely as evidence of eligibility for DSA. Students who have had their eligibility for DSA agreed by SLC 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). Further details can be found in SSIN 03/21: [Disabled Students' Allowance \(DSA\) - Diagnostic Assessments for students with Specific Learning Difficulties \(SpLDs\) \(slc.co.uk\)](#)

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

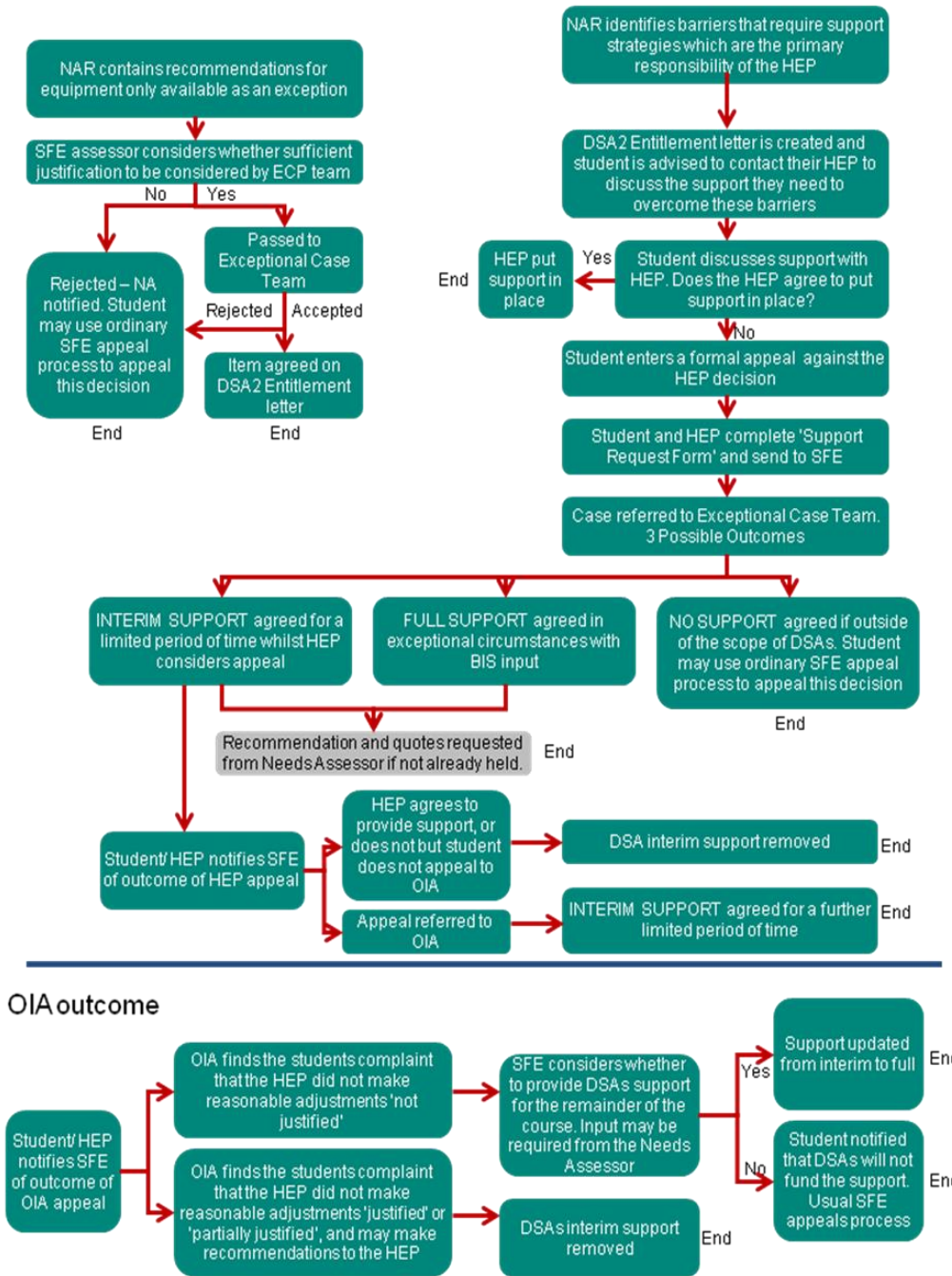
A diagnostic assessment should be based on tests recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group's guidelines and updated by SASC and STEC. See 'SASC and the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee' page 45. assessment is part of the diagnosis and the cost should be met by the student, although an application may be made to the HEP'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 an SpLD 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.

9.2 Annex B - DSA Exceptional Cases Process Map

Annex B - DSAs Exceptional Case Process map



An NAR may contain recommendations for equipment only available as an exception. The SFE assessor may or may not consider whether there is sufficient justification in the case for the recommendations to be considered by the ECP team. If the SFE assessor sees the recommendation as justified then they will pass the case to the Exceptional Case Team which will then consider the case and either agree the item on the DSA2 entitlement letter or reject the claim and notify the student. The student may appeal this decision by way of the SFE



appeal process. Alternatively, the SFE assessor may not see the recommendation of the NAR as justified, in which case they will reject the claim and notify the student. The student may also appeal this process by way of the ordinary SFE appeal process.

Additionally, a NAR may identify barriers that require support strategies which are the primary responsibility of the HEP. Subsequently, the DSA2 Entitlement letter is created and the student is advised to contact their HEP to discuss the support they need to overcome these barriers. The student will then discuss support with the HEP and the HEP may or may not agree to put the support in place. If the HEP does agree, they will do so. If they don't then the student may submit a formal appeal against the HEP decision. The Student and the HEP will complete a "support Request form" and send to SFE. The case will then be referred to the Exceptional Case team. This team will determine the outcome of the case. There are three possible outcomes that the Exceptional case team may decide:

1. Interim support will be agreed for a limited time whilst HEP considers appeal. This may require the recommendation and quotes to be requested from the DSA study needs assessor, if not already held. The student/HEP will notify SFE of outcome of HEP appeal. Should the HEP agree to provide support then the DSA interim support will be removed. If the HEP does not agree, but the student does not appeal further to OIA, the DSA interim support will be removed. Alternatively, the HEP appeal may be referred to OIA whereby the DSA interim support will be agreed for a further limited period of time.
2. Full support agreed in exceptional circumstances with DfE input. The recommendation and quotes may be requested from the DSA study needs assessor, if not already held.
3. No support agreed if outside of the scope of DSA. Student may use ordinary SFE appeal process to appeal this decision.

If an appeal is referred to OIA, then it is up to the student and/or HEP to notify SFE of outcome of OIA appeal. OIA finds the students complaint that the HEP did not make reasonable adjustments "not justified." SFE will then consider whether to provide DSA support for the remainder of the course. Input may be required from the DSA study needs assessor. If SFE makes a determination in the student's favour, support will be updated from interim to full. If SFE makes a determination that is not in the student's favour then the student will be notified that DSA will not fund the support. Alternatively, OIA may find the students complaint that the HEP did not make reasonable adjustments "justified" or "partially justified" and may make recommendations to the HEP. The DSA interim support will then be removed.

### 9.3 Annex C – Needs Assessment reviews

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This guidance sets out when a review of a student's support arrangements would be funded, when it would come under the single fee arrangement, and when it would be 'rolled over' by SFE. It also sets out arrangements for fees applicable when a student fails to attend an appointment.

Note that these arrangements apply to all DSA students and have been in place from 1 September 2015.

The available outcomes are:

- 1) The student's existing support arrangements are continued (or 'rolled over') by SFE without a review.
- 2) A review is undertaken within the single fee arrangement (for example at no extra charge).
- 3) A funded review is undertaken.
- 4) An entirely new full fee assessment is undertaken.

#### **Funded reviews**

Students will qualify for a funded review:

- When moving from an UG course to PGCE or non-taught PG study
- When they present with a new disability that requires an agreed significant amount of additional work. (Centres are required to fully document the additional work undertaken for a review and submit this to SFE. As a guideline, but not exclusively, it is anticipated that reviews requiring at least two hours of additional work will be considered for funding)
- If there is a gap of more than 2 years since the student last studied
- If they have not had a full assessment or funded review for 5 years

The fee for funded reviews will be capped at £300 +VAT.

Students may be referred at their own request, or if SFE is concerned that the rolling over of support is inappropriate.

Significant change to the student's course will no longer be a criterion that prompts a review.

Also, a worsened existing disability or condition will no longer be a criterion that prompts a review.

#### **Reviews undertaken within the single fee arrangement**

Reviews of a student's support arrangements will be undertaken within the single fee arrangement (for example at no extra charge) if none of the circumstances set out in the above 'Funded reviews' or below 'Full fee assessments' sections apply.

#### **Full fee assessments**

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In a small number of cases, a subsequent full fee assessment will be paid where a student is unable to attend a review at their original needs assessment centre due to location and the issue could not be resolved by other methods (see scenario C below). If the issue could be resolved by other methods, then original needs assessment centre would only retain responsibility for the student up to a maximum of 5 years from their initial assessment.

### Missed appointments

If a student fails to attend an appointment or gives less than 24 hours' notice of cancellation (excluding weekends and bank/public holidays), needs assessment centres will be able to charge a fee of no more than:

- £60+VAT for a full assessment appointment
- £30+VAT for a funded review appointment

If the centre is able to fill the appointment space with another student, they will not be able to charge a fee.

It is suggested good practice for the centre to contact the student (for example by text) the day before to remind them of their appointment.

### Scenario examples:

#### UG to UG course

Student A was assessed on an UG course in AY 19/20. Student changes to a different UG course at the same HEP in AY 20/21.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement will apply.

Student B was assessed on an UG course in AY 19/20. Student changes to a different UG course at a different HEP in AY 20/21, but can attend the same needs assessment centre.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement will apply.

Student C was assessed on an UG course in AY 19/20. Student changes to a different UG course at a different HEP in AY 20/21, but cannot attend the same needs assessment centre because of geographical distance.

The original needs assessment centre should make every effort to deal with the student for example telephone, email, Skype etc. under the single assessment fee arrangement.

(1) If it is less than five years since the previous assessment, and the change can easily be managed, rolling over of support/single assessment fee applies.

(2) If it is less than five years since the previous assessment and change cannot be easily managed because of the geographical location of the new HEP, then the student should be directed to a new needs assessment centre, which may then charge a full fee.

(3) If five years or more has passed since the previous assessment, the student wants a new review and cannot attend the original needs assessment centre, they should be directed to a new needs assessment centre, which may then charge a full fee.

Student D was assessed on an UG course in AY 19/20. Student is on the same course but presents a new disability in AY 20/21.

The student would qualify for either a single fee review or a funded review depending on the impact of the change and the amount of work involved.

Student E was assessed on an UG course in AY 18/19. Student is still on an UG course in AY 20/21 and has not met the criteria for a funded review during that time.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as at least five years has passed since their previous assessment or funded review.

Student F was assessed on an UG course in AY 15/16. Student suspends study for AY 17/18. Student returns to same course in AY 20/21.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as there has been an at least two-year gap in study.

### **UG to PG course**

Student G was assessed on an UG course in AY 17/18. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (PGCE) in AY 20/21.

The student will qualify for a funded review.

Student H was assessed on an UG course in AY 17/18. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (taught) in AY 20/21.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement will apply.

Student I was assessed on an UG course in AY 16/17 and finished UG course in 2017. Student starts PG course (taught) in AY 20/21.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as there has been an at least two-year gap in study.

Student J had initial assessment in AY 14/15 and finished UG course in 2019. Student starts PG course (taught) in AY 20/21.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as at least five years has passed since their previous assessment or funded review.

Student K had an initial assessment on an UG course in AY 15/16. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (taught) in AY 18/19.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement will apply.

In AY 20/21 Student K presents a new disability.

The student would qualify for a funded review as the change is at least five years after the initial assessment.

Student L was assessed on an UG course in AY 17/18. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (taught masters) in AY 18/19.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement should apply

In AY 20/21 Student L (above) presents a new disability.

The student would qualify for either a single fee review or a funded review depending on the impact of the change and the amount of work involved.

Student M was assessed on an UG course in AY 17/18. Student moves straight from UG to a research-based PG course in AY 18/19.

The student would qualify for a funded review.

In AY 20/21 Student M (above) presents a new disability.

The student would qualify for either a single fee review or a funded review depending on the impact of the change and the amount of work involved.

Student N was assessed on an UG course in AY 16/17. Student moves straight from UG to PG (taught) course in AY 18/19.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement should apply

In AY 20/21 Student N indicates a need to review support.

The student would qualify for a funded review as the change is at least five years after the initial assessment.

Student O is assessed on an UG course in AY 20/21. Student requests a review as they do not agree with the initial recommendations.

In line with current practice, this student can have a review under the single assessment fee arrangement but only at the original needs assessment centre. The student will not be funded to attend another needs assessment centre.

#### **PG to PG cases**

It is anticipated that, for students moving from a PG course to another PG course, arrangements will follow the same logic as set out in the above scenarios.

#### 9.4 Annex D - Updates Log

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| Date           | Updates   |
|----------------|---|
| November 2020  | Version 0.1 - Updates for DSA UG-PG alignment project   |
| April 2021     | Version 0.2 - General updates following stakeholder review  |
| May 2021       | Version 0.3 - General updates following stakeholder review  |
| May 2021       | Version 1.0 – Signed Off and Published  |
| September 2021 | Version 2.0 – updates to section 2.12 for overseas placements, and updates to sections 5.4.1 and 5.4.7 to clarify what happens where a student is using their own computer and it breaks down |