



**Bridging the gap –
a guide to the Disabled
Students' Allowances
(DSAs) in higher
education 2012/13**

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Who are Student Finance England?

We're Student Finance England, a partnership between the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Student Loans Company. We provide financial support on behalf of the UK government to students from England entering higher education in the UK.

We're here to help and can offer you financial support when you need it most – during your studies. We are the student finance experts and this guide will help you find out everything you need to know about student finance. Depending on your circumstances, your course and where you study, you may be able to get a range of financial help and support. Most students won't have to pay anything up front. You could get grants and bursaries (which you don't have to pay back) and loans (which you do).

There's also extra help for those with a disability, a mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or dyspraxia.

For information on applying for student finance, new students should read '**A guide to financial support for new full-time students 2012/13**'

Continuing students should read '**A guide to financial support for higher education - 2012/13 continuing full-time students**'

These guides are available at www.direct.gov.uk/sfforms2012

What is this guide about?

This guide provides information about Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for new and continuing students in higher education.

DSAs help pay for the extra costs you may have as a direct result of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. The allowances can help with the cost of having a person to support you, such as a note-taker, items of specialist equipment, travel and other course-related costs. The information in this booklet is for guidance only and does not cover all circumstances. If you don't live in England you can find out more information about what's available where you live from the following websites:

Wales:
www.studentfinancewales.co.uk

Northern Ireland:
www.studentfinanceneni.co.uk

Scotland: www.saas.gov.uk

Do I have to tell my university or college about my disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty?

No. You can still get DSAs without telling your university or college. But you can tell your university or college about your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty, in complete confidence, to make sure that you receive the support you need.

Under the Equality Act 2010 it's unlawful for universities and colleges to discriminate against disabled students by treating them less favourably when offering places and providing services.

Under the Act, universities and colleges must make 'reasonable adjustments' so that disabled students are not significantly disadvantaged compared with other students who are not disabled.





Do I qualify?

Summary

This section gives some information about who is eligible to get DSAs. You can also visit our website at **www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance** for more information.

You **can** get DSAs if you:

- are on a full-time or part-time undergraduate course (for example, a degree or HND-level course) including Open University and other distance-learning courses; or
- are on an eligible full-time or part-time postgraduate course (which you need a degree or equivalent qualification to get onto), including Open University and other distance-learning courses; **and**
- have a disability, mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty which affects your ability to study.

Any previous study will not affect your eligibility for DSAs, even if you received financial support.

However, if you received DSAs for any specialist equipment for a previous course, this may be taken into account.

There's no age limit on receiving DSAs.

You **cannot** get DSAs if you are:

- receiving support equivalent to DSAs from another funding provider; or
- an EU student; or
- a sandwich-course student on a full-year placement. (However, you may still be able to get DSAs if you are doing certain types of unpaid work experience in the public sector or voluntary sector). If you don't qualify for DSAs during your placement year, you may be able to get help from the Access to Work Scheme. Visit the website at **www.direct.gov.uk/accesstowork** for more information.

You can't get DSAs for more than one course at the same time.

Part-time or Open University (OU) students

To be eligible for DSAs, you must be registered for a part-time or OU undergraduate or postgraduate course that lasts for at least one year and does not take more than four times as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course.

How do I show I'm eligible?

If you're physically disabled, are blind, partially sighted, deaf or hard of hearing, have a medical condition or have a mental-health condition, you'll need to provide medical evidence of this, such as a letter from your doctor or specialist.

If you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you must provide evidence in the form of a 'diagnostic assessment' from a psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher. If you had your diagnostic assessment before your 16th birthday, it will need to be updated.

You'll have to pay for any tests to prove that you're eligible for DSAs.

If you need a test but can't afford to pay for it, you may be able to get financial help through your university's or college's Access to Learning Fund.

The table below shows what medical evidence you need to send us.

For disabilities and medical conditions	A report or letter from your GP or consultant.
For specific learning difficulties	A report, produced since you were 16, from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a chartered or practitioner psychologist;or• a specialist teacher holding a current Assessment Practising Certificate.
For mental-health conditions	A letter from your GP or other qualified specialist.



What help can I get?

Summary

Disabled Students' Allowances can help pay the extra costs you may have on your course because of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. There's a range of help available, which is described in more detail in this section. The rates given are the maximum amounts you can get.

Top tips



The amount of DSAs you can get **doesn't** depend on your household income but it **does** depend on your needs assessment. See Step 4 on page 13 for more details.

Undergraduate students

Specialist equipment allowance

What is it for?	To help you buy equipment you may need because of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. You can also use it to pay for repairs, technical support, insurance or extended warranty costs arising from owning that equipment.
How much can I get?	Full-time and part-time students can get up to £5,161 for the whole course . How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family, but it does depend on your needs assessment.
How is it paid?	The money will be paid direct to a equipment supplier or into your bank account.

Specialist equipment allowance

Do I have to pay it back?

No, unless you leave your course early, in which case you may be asked to pay some back.

Anything else?

The rates shown are the maximum you can get. They're meant to support people with a high level of need, so most people will get less.

We (or the OU) might pay the cost of renting rather than buying items of equipment if this is more economical.

If you need more help or advice, you can contact us. Or, you can speak to the disability advisor at your university or college.



Non-medical helper allowance

What is it for? To help pay for support workers such as readers, sign-language interpreters, note-takers, specialist one-to-one support and other non-medical assistants you need to help you benefit fully from your course.

How much can I get? How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family, but it does depend on your needs assessment.

The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.



Full-time Up to £20,520 **a year**.

Part-time **A percentage** of the full-time rate, depending on how intensive the part-time course is, up to £15,390 **a year**.



How is it paid? The money will be paid direct to the supplier of the service (for example, your university or college) or into your bank account.

Do I have to pay it back? No, unless you leave your course early, in which case we may ask you to pay some back.

Anything else? The rates shown are the maximum you can get. They are meant to support people with a high level of need, so most people will get less.

If you need more help or advice, contact us. Or, speak to the disability advisor at your university or college.



General allowance

What is it for? To help pay for other disability-related spending. You can use it to buy items such as print cartridges and braille paper or to top up the specialist equipment and non-medical helper allowances, if necessary.

How much can I get? How much you can get **does not** depend on your income or that of your family, but it **does** depend on your needs assessment.

The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.



Full-time Up to £1,724 **a year**.

Part-time **A percentage** of the full-time rate, depending on how intensive the part-time course is, up to £1,293 **a year**.



How is it paid? The money will be paid direct to the supplier of the services (for example, your university, college or equipment supplier) or into your bank account.

Do I have to pay it back? No, unless you leave your course early, in which case you may be asked to pay some back.

Anything else? The rates shown are the maximum you can get. They are meant to support people with a high level of need, so most people will get less.

You can also use this allowance to pay any travel expenses for attending your needs assessment.

If you need more help or advice, contact us. Or speak to a disability advisor at your university or college.

Travel allowance

What is it for?	To help with any extra travel costs you may have to pay to attend your university or college because of your disability (for example, if you need to take a taxi because your disability prevents you from taking public transport). You will not be eligible for help with everyday travel costs which any student would expect to pay, and you may have to provide receipts.
How much can I get?	Full-time and part-time students can get reasonable spending on extra travel costs. How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family but does depend on your needs assessment.
How is it paid?	The money will be paid direct to the supplier of the services (for example, a taxi firm) or into your bank account. If you're claiming using a 'reimbursement of costs' form, available at www.direct.gov.uk/dsas , remember to keep any receipts or invoices as evidence.
Do I have to pay it back?	No (unless you leave your course early, in which case you may be asked to pay some back).
Anything else?	If you need more help or advice, you can contact us. Or, you can speak to a disability advisor at your university or college.



For full-time and part-time postgraduate students

For both full-time and part-time postgraduate students there is a single allowance of up to £10,260 a year. You can use this for specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, extra travel costs or other course-related costs. The amount of DSAs you receive will depend on your needs assessment.

Students on PGCE courses can apply for the DSAs awarded to undergraduates and so will not be eligible for postgraduate DSAs.

Initial Teacher Training Courses (ITT)

If you're already on an ITT course, you can continue to apply for the same package of DSAs support you've received in previous years. Students who started a full-time ITT course on or after 1 September 2010 can apply for the full-time support package, including the full-time DSAs package. Students who started a part-time ITT course on or after 1 September 2010 can apply for the standard part-time student support package, including part-time DSAs.

Benefits

Most full-time students can't get income-related benefits such as income-based Employment and Support Allowance or Housing Benefit. However, certain groups (including single parents, student couples with dependent children and some disabled students) may be able to get income-related benefits while they're studying.

Jobcentre Plus and your local authority's Housing Benefit section will take account of most of any Maintenance Loan (and some student grants) that you're entitled to. The Special Support Grant and DSAs will not be taken into account.

There's a free and confidential Benefit Enquiry Line for people with disabilities and their carers. The number is **0800 882 200** (textphone: 0800 243 355).





How do I apply?

Summary

So, now you know what support is available, how do you get it? This section tells you how to apply for DSAs, who you should send your application form to, and how to get a needs assessment.



Top tips



Apply now as the application process can take 14 weeks. There's no deadline for DSAs but the sooner you apply, the greater that chance of having everything you need in place at the start of your course.



Full-time undergraduate students

Step 1



Go to www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance **NOW** and apply for student finance.

Click on the option to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances on your main application. This will automatically trigger a shortened version of the DSA application form (DSASL) to be sent out to you to fill in and return to us. You can also download this form from www.direct.gov.uk/sfforms2012. Fill this in and return it to Student Finance England.

If you are only applying for DSAs and no other form of student finance, simply download the full DSA application form (DSA1F) from www.direct.gov.uk/sfforms2012. Fill this in and return it to us.

Top tips



Make sure you apply for your Maintenance and Tuition Fee Loans, bursaries and other grants before the 31 May 2012. There is no deadline for applying for DSA's but the sooner you apply the greater the chance of having everything you need in place for course start.

Step 2



Receive your eligibility notification. If you're eligible for DSAs we will write and tell you to arrange a needs assessment to find out exactly what equipment and support you need.

Top tips



Be sure to book your needs assessment as soon as you get your eligibility letter.



Step 3

Book your needs assessment. You should book your assessment as soon as you receive notification of your eligibility. To find your nearest approved needs assessment centre go to the website at www.dsa-qag.org.uk



Step 4

Receive your entitlement notification. Once we receive the results of your needs assessment, we will write and let you know if DSAs can pay for any specialist equipment and other support that has been recommended in your needs assessment. We will also give you instructions for ordering equipment or arranging other support.

Top tips



Remember to order your equipment and arrange your other support as soon as you get your entitlement letter or email.



Step 5

Order your equipment and arrange your other support.



Step 6

Start your course.



Step 7

Reapply for your student finance in advance of each year of your course

If you apply for DSAs along with your main application for student finance, you won't have to reapply for DSAs each year of your course as long as you state on your main application that you want to continue receiving them. Only postgraduate, part-time and DSA-only students need to apply each year.

Part-time undergraduate students and postgraduate students (not OU students)

If you are a part-time undergraduate student, or a postgraduate student, and you want to apply for DSAs, you should fill in the Disabled Students' Allowances application form (DSA1) and send it to us. You can download the form from www.direct.gov.uk/dsas or get one by phoning us (see the contact details on page 15).

Open University students

You should apply direct to the Open University's Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) office.

If you have told the Open University (OU) that you have a disability, mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty, the OU's DSA Office will automatically send you all the information you need to apply for DSAs. You'll need to send your filled-in form, and any relevant documents, back to the Open University's DSA Office. Or you can apply online at www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport/apply

NHS or research council funding

If you're receiving funding from the NHS or a research council, contact them (see the contact details on page 16).

NHS secondees

If you're employed by the NHS and are seconded (transferred temporarily) onto a healthcare course, you're not usually eligible for bursaries or DSAs from the NHS. However, you can receive DSAs from us if you meet the eligibility conditions.



Useful information and contacts


Student Finance England

You can go to

www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance at any time or you can phone us on **0845 300 5090** (textphone: **0845 604 4434**) between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday, and between 9am and 5.30pm on Saturdays and Sundays. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

 facebook.com/SFEngland

 twitter.com/sf_england

 youtube.com/studentloanscouk

Download our key dates checklist about what to do and when to do it (attach it to your fridge or notice board) **www.studentfinance.direct.gov.uk/dates**

Check out our student finance zone on The Student Room at **www.thestudentroom.co.uk/studentfinance**

Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG)

Details of your nearest needs assessment centre are given on the DSA-QAG website at **www.dsa-qag.org.uk**

Disability Alliance

Disability Alliance runs a free helpline providing information and advice to disabled students as well as publishing 'Into Higher Education', an annual guide for disabled students thinking about entering higher education.

Phone: **0800 328 5050** (11.30am to 1.30pm on Tuesdays, and 1.30pm to 3.30pm on Thursdays).

Email: **skill4disabledstudents@disabilityalliance.org**

Open University (OU)

The OU DSA office deals with OU students who live in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Phone: **01908 654136**

Textphone: **01908 659955**

Email: **DSA-queries@open.ac.uk**

9am-5.30pm Monday - Thursday

9am - 5pm Fridays

National Union of Students (NUS)

You can get more information from the NUS website at **www.nus.org.uk**.

NHS Funding

Students studying a course funded by the NHS can visit the website at **www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Students.aspx** for information on how they can apply for DSAs.

Research Councils

Students getting funding from research councils can visit the website at **www.rcuk.ac.uk/rescareer/rcdu/disabledstudents** for more information on how to apply for DSAs.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The EHRC helpline can give information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues.

Phone: **0845 604 6610**

Textphone: **0845 604 6620**

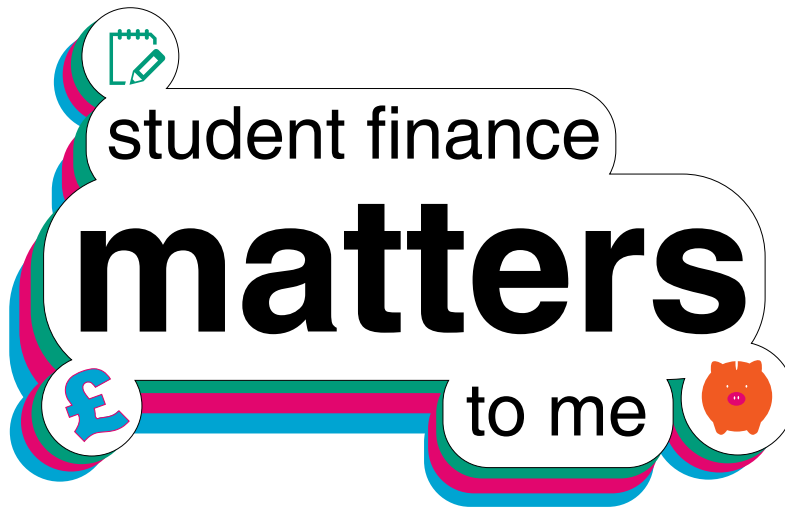
(Lines are open from 9am to 5pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and from 9am to 8pm on Wednesdays).

Visit the EHRC website at **www.equalityhumanrights.com**.



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