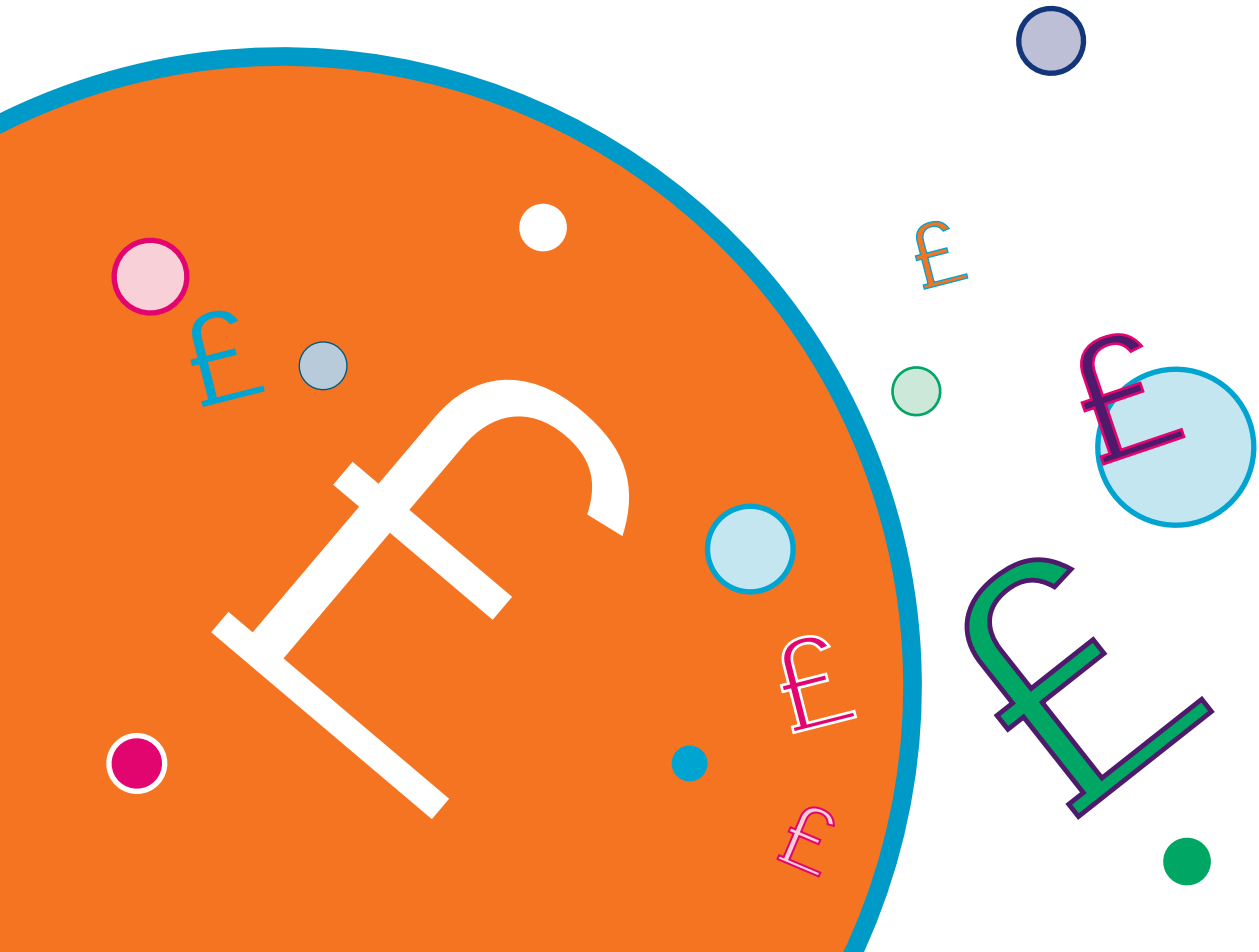


BRIDGING THE GAP

A GUIDE TO

THE DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCES (DSAs)

IN HIGHER EDUCATION 2011/2012



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Office for Disability Issues (www.odf.gov.uk)

What is Student Finance England?

Student Finance England is a partnership between the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Student Loans Company Ltd. It provides financial support, on behalf of the UK Government, to English students entering higher education in the UK.

What is student finance?

Student finance is money to help you with your tuition fees and living costs while you're studying in higher education. It can include grants, loans and bursaries.

Different student finance packages are available, depending on whether you are studying full-time or part-time, or on an undergraduate or postgraduate course.

There's also extra help, in the form of Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs), for people with disabilities, mental-health conditions (for example, depression or anxiety) or specific learning difficulties (for example, dyslexia or dyspraxia).



What is this guide about?

This guide provides information about the DSAs available for new and existing 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 non-medical helper, items of specialist equipment, travel and other course-related costs.

This guide explains:

- what costs DSAs can help with;
- how to apply;
- how you get paid; and
- who can help you with your application for DSAs.

The information in this booklet is for guidance only and does not cover all circumstances.

Who is this guide for?

This guide provides information about DSAs for new and existing students in higher education whose homes are in England. If you do not live in England you can find out more information relevant to where you live at one of these websites.

Wales:

www.studentfinancewales.co.uk

Northern Ireland:

www.studentfinancenir.co.uk

Scotland: **www.saas.gov.uk**

This guide is not for students who will get support that is equivalent to DSAs from another organisation which provides funding.

If you are eligible to apply for a bursary from the NHS, you won't qualify for DSAs from Student Finance England but you can apply for equivalent help through the NHS bursary scheme.



You also won't qualify for DSAs from Student Finance England if you're a postgraduate student eligible to apply for:

- funding from a research council;
- equivalent support provided by a social work bursary from the NHS Business Services Authority; or
- equivalent support provided by your university or college.

In any of these circumstances you should contact your funding provider (e.g. NHS) for advice on any extra support you may be entitled to because of your disability. You can find contact details on page 21.

Contacting Student Finance England

You can also get more information from www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance and from your school, university or college.

Follow Student Finance England on Facebook and Twitter.

 facebook.com/SFEngland

 twitter.com/sf_english



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

No, but if you tell them, they can make sure you get any extra help or support you might need.

Under the Equality Act 2010 it is 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.

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.



Do you qualify?

Summary

This section gives some information about the rules on whether you are eligible to receive DSAs. You can also visit the 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 (e.g. 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 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 DSAs paid for any specialist equipment for a previous course, this may be taken into account.

There is no age limit on receiving DSAs.

You **cannot** get DSAs if you:

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

You cannot have DSAs for more than one course at the same time.

Open University (OU) students

To be eligible for DSAs, you must be registered for an OU undergraduate or postgraduate course that lasts for at least one year and does not take more than twice as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course. This will usually mean that the course amounts to 60 credit points each year.

However, you may be able to study less than 60 credit points in some years as long as you make up the difference in other years. You can only do this if you can still complete the course in no more than twice the time it would take to complete an equivalent full-time course.

If you are an OU student, you should apply to the OU for DSAs. The OU will assess your application and, if you are eligible, pay DSAs. How to apply for DSAs is explained from page 14.

How do I show that I am eligible?

If you are physically disabled, or have a mental-health condition, you will 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 your needs were assessed before your 16th birthday, the assessment will need to be updated. Your diagnostic assessment must meet certain requirements. For more information, contact us or the Open University (if you are an OU student).

You will have to pay for any tests to prove that you are 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.



What help can you 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 is a range of help

available and is described in more detail in this section. The rates given are the maximum amounts you can get. **The DSAs you receive will depend on your 'needs assessment' (see step 3 page 15 for more details).**

Undergraduate students

Specialist equipment allowance

What is it for?	To help you buy equipment you 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?	<p>How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family, but it will depend on your needs assessment.</p> <p>The table below shows the maximum amount of help available in 2011/12.</p> <table border="1"><tr><td>Full-time</td><td>Up to £5,161 for the whole course</td></tr><tr><td>Part-time</td><td>Up to £5,161 for the whole course</td></tr></table>	Full-time	Up to £5,161 for the whole course	Part-time	Up to £5,161 for the whole course
Full-time	Up to £5,161 for the whole course				
Part-time	Up to £5,161 for the whole course				
How is it paid?	The money will be paid direct to the 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 are meant to support people with a high level of need, so most people will get less.

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

You may be able to get items of specialist equipment recommended in your needs assessment before the start of your course so that you can use them from the very beginning of your studies. However, you will need to prove that you have been accepted on your course.

If you need more help or advice, you can call us (or the OU if you are an OU student). Or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your university or college.

Non-medical helper allowance

What is it for?

This allowance can 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 use to 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 **will** depend on your needs assessment.

The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for 2011/2012.

Full-time	Up to £20,520 a year
Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate, depending on the intensity of study of a part-time course, up to £15,390 a year

How is it paid?

The money will be paid direct to the supplier of the service (e.g. 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 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.

If you need more help or advice, you can call us (or the OU if you are an OU student). Or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your university or college.

General allowance

What is it for?	This allowance can help pay for other disability-related spending. You can use it to buy items such as printer cartridges and braille paper, or to top up the specialist equipment and non-medical helper allowances, if necessary.				
How much can I get?	<p>How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family, but it will depend on your needs assessment.</p> <p>The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.</p> <table border="1"><tr><td>Full-time</td><td>Up to £1,724 a year</td></tr><tr><td>Part-time</td><td>A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,293 a year depending on the intensity of study</td></tr></table>	Full-time	Up to £1,724 a year	Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,293 a year depending on the intensity of study
Full-time	Up to £1,724 a year				
Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,293 a year depending on the intensity of study				
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?	<p>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.</p> <p>You can also use this allowance to pay any travel expenses you might have in order to attend your needs assessment.</p> <p>If you need more help or advice, you can call us (or the OU if you are an OU student). Or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your university or college.</p>				

Travel allowance

What is it for?	This allowance can help with any extra travel costs you may have to pay to attend your university or college because of your disability (i.e. 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?	How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family but will depend on your needs assessment. <table border="1"><tr><td>Full-time</td><td>Reasonable spending on extra travel costs</td></tr><tr><td>Part-time</td><td>Reasonable spending on extra travel costs</td></tr></table>	Full-time	Reasonable spending on extra travel costs	Part-time	Reasonable spending on extra travel costs
Full-time	Reasonable spending on extra travel costs				
Part-time	Reasonable spending on extra travel costs				
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.				
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 call us (or the OU if you are an OU student). Or, you can speak to the disability adviser 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 to meet costs 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 are eligible to apply for the DSAs awarded to undergraduates and so will not be eligible for postgraduate DSAs.

Initial Teacher Training Courses (ITT)

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

apply for the standard part-time student support package, including part-time DSAs.

Benefits

Most full-time students cannot 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 are entitled to. The Special Support Grant and DSAs will not be taken into account. There is 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 you 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.

You can apply for DSAs at any stage of your course, but you should apply as soon as possible, even if you're waiting for a confirmed place. If you apply early you can have the support you need in place for the start of your course.



Full-time undergraduate students



Step 1 Fill in the application form

If you have completed an application for student finance and indicated that you want to apply for DSAs, we will send a DSA application form (DSA1) to you. If you are **only** applying for DSAs, you can download the application form from the website at **www.direct.gov.uk/dsas**. You can get versions in large print, in braille or on CD by contacting us, as set out on page 19.

You should return your form to us, with evidence of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty (see 'How do I show that I am eligible?' on page 7). The evidence you need to send will depend on your condition.

Open University (OU) students should apply at **www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport/apply**.



Step 2 Find out if you qualify

We, or the OU, will write to you to let you know if you qualify for DSAs. If you do not qualify, we will tell you why.



Step 3 Attend a needs assessment

If you're eligible for DSAs we, or the OU, will tell you to arrange a needs assessment to identify the help you need on your course. Your needs assessment will be carried out at an independent assessment centre, or at a centre within your university or college, by a person with specialist knowledge.

The assessment can be arranged well before the start of term. This can be as early as March of the year you plan to start your course and even before you have a confirmed place at university or college. However, you should not arrange a needs assessment until we, or the OU, tell you to do so and that your choice of assessment centre is approved. Details of your nearest needs assessment centre are given on the Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG) website at www.dsa-qag.org.uk.



Step 4 Receive your needs report

You will be sent a copy of your needs assessment report which will set out the types of equipment and other support you will need, how much it will cost, and where to get it from. However, any support that is recommended will have to be agreed with us, or the OU.



Step 5 Find out what DSAs can pay for

We, or the OU, will send you a letter to tell you whether any specialist equipment and other support that has been recommended in your needs assessment can be paid for from DSAs. We will also give you instructions for ordering equipment or arranging other support.



Step 6 Receive your support

Your DSAs will be paid directly to the supplier of the equipment or service or into your bank account.

Re-applying

If you apply for DSAs along with your main application for student finance, you will not have to re-apply for DSAs each year of your course as long as you state on your main application that you wish to continue receiving them. If you **only** apply for DSAs, you will have to re-apply for them in each year of your course.

Part-time undergraduate students and postgraduate students (but 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 19).



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 will 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 are receiving funding from the NHS or a research council, contact them (see the contact details on page 21).

NHS secondees

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

How to find out more

You can download extra copies of this guide and other guides to student finance by:

- visiting the website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance or
- contacting us (see our contact details below).

You can order forms and guides in Braille, in large print or on CD by emailing us at

brailleandlargefonts@slc.co.uk, or phoning us on **0141 243 3686**.

You will need to give your name, address and customer reference number, and tell us what format you want.

The email address and phone number above can only deal with requests for forms and guides in different formats.

Other student finance guides

Help for new full-time students:

'A guide to financial support for full-time higher education students – new full-time students'.

Help for existing full-time students:

'A guide to financial support for full-time higher education students – existing full-time students'.

Help for part-time students:

'A guide to financial support for part-time students in higher education'.

Help for students with children or adult dependants:

'Childcare Grant and other support for full-time student parents in higher education'.

Information about student loans:

'Student Loans – a guide to terms and conditions'.

Contacting Student Finance England

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.

Other useful contacts

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

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.

EHRC Helpline
Freepost RRLG-GHUX-CTR
Arndale House
Arndale Centre
Manchester
M4 3EQ

Phone: **0845 604 6610**

Textphone: **0845 604 6620**

Fax: **0845 604 6630**

(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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