



Children and Young People's Services

Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) – For Vision Impaired Students

What is DSA?

How do I apply?

Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) is a pot of money that is allocated to students with additional needs. This can be for a single disability, such as a vision impairment, or a mixture of disabilities, such as a physical disability.

DSA money is provided to students in Higher Education (HE), which is usually completed at a university. However, some people complete HE level programmes at college, whilst on placement or via distance learning programmes.

The money is set aside to allow you as a disabled student to fully access student life in the same way as any other student.

DSA can be used to provide services which help you overcome physical barriers such as mobility and independent living skills; academic difficulties – for example, receiving work in an alternative format such as large print or audio; or practical barriers, such as a sighted guide to guide you around the university campus.

Put simply DSA is there to allow you to be a student, concentrate on your studies and eliminate the potential barriers that may negatively impact your final results.

How do I apply for DSA?

When you are thinking about going to study at a HE level, you are probably thinking of lots of different things, such as the course you want to study and where to study; the academic subjects you are good at and enjoy; the academic course to choose and what career it could lead to.



Your options need careful consideration, so talking with family members, college staff, careers advisors and taking the time to have a look around universities could assist you to make the right choice. Once you have arrived at a decision, you will make a selection of choices, in terms of your favourite places that you would like to complete your studies.

At this point you will need to also contact Student Finance England (SFE). This is the organisation that controls the grants and funding for HE academic programmes in England.

When you apply for funding and grants to support you over your time as a HE student, you will need to request to apply for DSA.

The DSA team is separate within SFE and will be able to talk you through the full process, from beginning to end.

You will need to complete an application form, which details your circumstances, your chosen university or college, the course you are going to study and its duration.

By doing so, your application for DSA will have begun.

Where can I go to have my assessment?

What does a DSA involve?

To obtain DSA you will first need to complete a Disabled Student Assessment, which confusingly is also known as DSA. The assessment can be carried out at any assessment centre in the country.

It often makes the most sense for the assessment to be carried out at the university or location, where you will be completing your studies, as this will give you the opportunity to meet with the Student Support Staff and discover where they are located in the academic campus. This is important, as you may need to visit this centre on a number of occasions as your programme of study develops.

The assessor will ask a lot of questions about you and your course and what support you have had in the past. They will also ask you specifically if you know what support you will require to complete this programme of study.



The assessor will often look through the prospectus to complete this part of the assessment. The assessor will look at the specific needs of the course, looking for things such as type of assessments, practical elements, the requirement to travel and complete outside work and the estimated number of hours of study per week.

Your involvement at this time is very important. Researching the course, having an opinion about the level of support you may need to help you manage the academic requirements and being aware of potential barriers you may face, will allow you to have an open discussion with the assessor, to help you obtain the full support you will require.

Being open and honest with the assessor will help you to obtain the support you need. The assessor will probably not have met you before. You are therefore responsible for informing them about your disability, how it affects you and how you work, to make the most of your time as a student.

The support is split into various categories, such as Study Assistant, Sighted Guide, or Personal Support.

Once the assessment is complete, the assessor will complete the assessment report. You will receive a copy so that you can agree the content and the proposed level and type of support.

The report will be sent to SFE for agreement.

The flow chart at the end of this document shows the different stages in the process.

What can DSA can be used for?

DSA can be used for a range of things, such as technical support. For example, a Braille note, embosser or laptop computer to work as a pen and paper substitute. The allowance can also be used to allow you to print and photocopy materials in your preferred format, so you may be offered an allowance for printing, paper or ink cartridges. You could also ask for support with note taking and library support, to allow you full access to the research and learning materials, to ensure you are able to complete the necessary assignments and assessments.



The allowance can also be used for more personal aspects of your time at university, such as sighted guiding, to allow you to manage the mobility aspects of student life. It can be used to upskill you in mobility and independent living skills, to allow you full independence as a student. Additionally, the allowance may be used for medical support, to allow you to manage your student life in the same way as any other student.

What if I do not get into my first choice university?

If you do not get into your first choice university, you do not need to start this whole process again. You will simply need to contact the university where you completed your assessment, as your preferred choice, asking them to forward your assessment report to the new university.

At this time, it may also be very beneficial to arrange to visit your new university and the relevant support staff. Again this will make you familiar with the physical aspects of the university, as well as allowing the staff at the new location to ask you any questions they may have, in order to ensure they are meeting your needs as a student, with additional needs.

Who do I turn to if I feel it is not going right?

If you think that things are going wrong, you do not have to suffer in silence! All universities and colleges have a Student Support Service, which are there to manage your needs as a student. They are used to working with all students, who come across difficulties, often living away from home for the very first time. However, as a student with a disability, you may also have other issues and barriers to face.

It is most important that you seek help. Do not think the problem will go away or get better in time. Small problems can soon become large problems, jeopardising your student career and potentially your final results. When you have a problem, however small, you should go to your DSA advisor immediately, who will help you resolve any concerns and stay on top of your workload.

In addition to the Student Support team at your place of study, you can contact SFE directly to talk to them about any issues or concerns; you can also contact the DSA department team within the SFE department.

Finally, you can talk with your usual support networks, such as family members, careers teams or Guide Dogs Children and Young People's Services.



Leaving College to Mortar Board – Disabled Student Allowance Process

Figure 1 Stepped listing of actions required for DSA application

- ➔ Choose University or College HE Level – Choose Course
- ➔ Apply to Student Finance England (DSA team based within SFE)
- ➔ Apply for Disabled Student Allowance
- ➔ Complete Application Form
- ➔ Undertake a Disabled Student Assessment
- ➔ Student Support Staff at the HE location – what support you will require
- ➔ Assessor will evaluate the Course and your needs to explore barriers to your academic needs
- ➔ Categories e.g., Study Assistant, Sighted Guide, Personal Support
- ➔ Assessor complete the Assessment Report: copy sent to you
- ➔ Assessment Report Sent to Student Finance England for Agreement

For further support contact:

Tel: 0800 781 1444

Email: cypservices@guidedogs.org.uk