

If you think you might need some help to do your best in Higher Education, the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is there to finance support.

Summary

Applying for Disabled Student Allowance involves several steps:

1. Get a '**Diagnostic Assessment**' (unless you had an assessment by a 'qualified assessor' when you were a child).
2. Complete your **DSA application** (usually online) and submit your Diagnostic Assessment Report as proof of your 'disability'.
3. Wait for Student Finance England (or Student Finance Wales) to accept your application.
4. Book a **Study Needs Assessment**.
5. Wait for SFE (or SFW) to accept the Study Needs Assessment and send you a **DSA2 Letter**.
6. **Contact the suppliers** listed in your DSA2 letter to arrange delivery of your equipment and an initial appointment with your study skills tutor and/or mentor.

Exam access arrangements are separate from the DSA system. Your university will tell you how to apply when you register with the university's Disability Service.

This Guide will give some general information about DSA and explain each step in more detail.

What is DSA?

DSA is a fund that allows anyone with a disability (including a specific learning difficulty) to access support at University or other Higher Education Institution.

Specific Learning Difficulties include:

- Dyslexia
- DCD (Developmental Coordination Difficulty, generally known as dyspraxia)

- Dyscalculia
- AD(H)D (Attention Deficit Disorder- with or without Hyperactivity)
- DLD (Developmental Language Disorder, often known as Speech and Language difficulty)
- ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder)

Specific Learning Difficulties are considered to be disabilities. DSA support can include human support (such as specialist study skills support or mentoring) and assistive technology (such as mind-mapping software, reading software or note-taking software). The human support may be provided by your university's student support service or an outside agency. The support provided will be tailored to your needs.

You do not need to apply for Disabled Student's Allowance to ask your university for exam access arrangements but you do need to provide evidence from a full diagnostic assessment.

Why is DSA useful?

What students say about assistive technology:

The DSA assessment really improves my learning throughout university and still is. Going into third year with a strong 2:1 could not have been achieved without the help of the DSA assessment and the equipment they gave me. I do recommend to take the free training for the software that they give you because they helped me make my essays that little stronger. It is definitely worthwhile and helped me to relax and enjoy writing the essays. It also helped me to have all the equipment because I could relax in my own space and on my own to complete assignments instead of a busy library. (Lucy)

What students say about specialist one-to-one study skills support:

- Given how invaluable I found the support, I appreciate that honestly I sought out this help a bit too late in the year.
- In lectures I used the techniques we had discussed and the quality of my lecture notes has improved as well as my understanding of the topics discussed in the lecture.
- I really struggled adapting to life online this term, but X [study skills tutor] and I came up with a number of good strategies which have proved very useful.

- It was useful to discuss how to streamline revision so I could get through all the content.
- The work we did on how to understand the 'bigger picture' of a piece of text helped tremendously in the reworking for my dissertation.

Assessment

The first step towards accessing this support is to have a diagnostic assessment that identifies your specific difficulties and confirms that they are significant and not short-term. A Form 8 or IEP (Individual Education Plan) is not enough on its own.

If you have had an assessment in the past, no matter how long ago, this should be enough, so long as a qualified assessor has completed it. In general, this means a Practitioner Psychologist who is a member of the HCPC (Health Care Professions Council) or a Specialist teacher holding an APC (Assessment Practising Certificate).

Who can assess for Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)?

It should be noted that there is a high degree of overlap between these conditions.

| Specific Learning Difficulty | Assessor |
|---|--|
| Dyslexia, dyscalculia Also, for anyone over 16: dyspraxia and ADHD (but only as a specific learning difficulty). | A qualified assessor (such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph) |
| DCD/Dyspraxia | An Occupational Therapist – with evidence from EHCP if appropriate |
| ADHD | Medical Practitioner – with evidence from EHCP if appropriate |
| DLD (Developmental Language Disorder) | Speech and Language Therapist |
| ASD | Medical Practitioner |
| Any learning difficulty | Impact on learning can be assessed by a qualified assessor |

Finding an assessor

- Practitioner Psychologists can be found on the HCPC website.
- Assessors holding APCs can be found on websites for the British Dyslexia Association, the Dyslexia Guild and Patoss.
- SASC (SpLD Assessment Standards Committee), has a complete list from all 3 awarding bodies but does not give their location. Local Dyslexia Associations normally have a list of qualified assessors and can sometimes reduce or spread the cost if payment would be difficult.
- If you are already at University/College, the Support Service can help you to find an assessor.

How do you get DSA once you have your assessment report?

- The next stage is to complete the DSA Application form.
- If you have already applied for student finance you can apply online by signing into your student finance account. You can access the application form from this webpage: www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/how-to-claim. You will need to submit a copy your Diagnostic Assessment Report as proof of your disability.
- If you do not have a student finance account (maybe because you are not taking out a student loan or grant) you can apply on paper. Download the DSA1 Form from www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/how-to-claim and submit it by post with a copy of your Diagnostic Assessment Report.
- Once SFE (or SFW in Wales) have accepted your application you will be told to book a Study Needs Assessment. **You do not need to pay for this.**
- The Needs Assessor will talk to you, demonstrate equipment and decide what assistive technology, study skills support or mentoring you need.
- Be realistic about how much support and equipment you may need - this is not the time to say: 'I coped at school so I'm sure I'll be fine'.
- You will be sent a copy of the Study Needs Assessment.
- Once this is processed by SFE you will receive a DSA2 Letter which will tell you the contact details of the suppliers for your equipment and Non-Medical Helper support (NMH in the jargon). Your university may be named as the supplier for specialist study skills and/or mentoring support but this NMH support may be provided by an external agency.
- **It is up to you to contact the suppliers** don't put it off because you have too many things to do.
- Be aware that it may take 6 weeks or longer to process your application, so begin this as soon as you can. If you are about to begin Higher Education, get things

moving as soon as you can.

- SFE expects that the NMH provider should, within 14 calendar days of the student making contact, either (a) start supporting the student, or (b) put in place support for a later date, if requested by the student, and confirm this to the student in writing.

Exam Access Arrangements

- You will need to register with your University's student welfare or disability service in order to be considered for exam access arrangements, whether or not the university is providing you with SpLD support.
- There will be more forms to fill in and they will need a copy of your Diagnostic Assessment Report.
- Most universities will accept the recommendations for exam access arrangements made in your assessment report but they may request additional information; the final decision is usually made by an exams committee, not the student welfare department.

Mature Students

- If you are a mature student and are working on a degree level course part time, you can still qualify for support. It could be worth approaching your employer or the University/College to ask if they will fund an assessment if you do not already have one. You lose nothing by asking!
- Otherwise you will probably need to pay for an assessment privately, but once you have it there is no further cost to you and an assessment could also be of use in the workplace.

Finally

- Be prepared for lots of form filling and paperwork both before and after your DSA is approved. Don't lose the chance of support because you hate filling in forms or writing emails! Ask for help if this is something you find difficult.

COVID-19

- During the Covid 19 pandemic a 'remote' assessment called an 'Evaluation of Need by Video Platform' is accepted if carried out between May 2020 and 31 December 2020. If the pandemic continues to affect face-to-face meetings this may be further extended.

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