

DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCES (DSA)

What are DSAs?

DSAs are grants to help meet the extra course costs students can face as a direct result of a disability, ongoing health condition, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. They help disabled people to study in higher education on an equal basis with other students.

They are paid on top of the standard student finance package and don't have to be paid back.

The amount you get depends on the type of extra help you need - not on your household income.

What can DSAs be used for?

They can help pay for:

- specialist equipment you need for studying - for example, computer software
- non-medical helpers, such as a note-taker or reader
- extra travel costs you have to pay because of your disability
- other costs - for example, tapes or Braille paper

Who can get them?

You can apply if you are doing an undergraduate or postgraduate course (including a distance-learning course) that is:

- full-time and lasts at least one year
- part-time, lasts at least one year and doesn't take more than twice as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course

Check that you're eligible for student finance

To apply for DSAs, both you and your course must meet certain conditions. Check these before you apply.

Who doesn't qualify

If you are eligible for a bursary from the NHS, you won't qualify for DSAs from Student Finance England or your local authority. But you can apply for equivalent help through the NHS bursary scheme.

You also won't qualify for DSAs from Student Finance England or your local authority if you're a postgraduate student getting:

- research council funding
- a social work bursary from the NHS Business Services Authority that includes equivalent support
- funding from your university or college that includes equivalent support

Contact your funding provider for advice on any extra support you may be entitled to because of your disability or condition.

How much can you get?

This is based on your individual needs, but there are maximum amounts for the different allowances.

How the application process works

Apply for DSAs as early as possible, don't wait until you've been accepted on a course.

Step one: you complete an application form

There are two ways to apply for DSAs:

1. if you're applying for DSAs only, you complete form DSA1
2. if you're also applying for the main student finance package, you indicate on the main application that you want to apply for DSAs – and then complete a 'short' version of the DSA1 form

Whichever route applies to you, apply as early as possible. Don't wait until you've been offered a place at College.

Make sure you send the form to the right address. Depending on your circumstances, this could be to Student Finance England, your local authority or the Open University (OU).

Step two: you supply proof of your disability or condition

You'll need to supply evidence with your application of your disability or condition. For example, if you have a disability or on-going health condition it may be a letter from your doctor or specialist.

If you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you'll need to provide a 'diagnostic assessment' from a psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher. If you've had a diagnostic assessment in the past when you were under age 16, it may need updating.

You'll have to pay for any tests to establish whether you qualify for DSAs. If you need a test but cannot afford to pay for it, you may be able to get financial help through the college's Access to Learning Fund.

Step three: your application is considered

Student Finance England (or your local authority or the OU) will consider your application and let you know whether you qualify for DSAs.

Step four: working out how much help you'll need

If you qualify for DSAs, you'll be asked to attend an 'assessment centre' to work out what help you'll need. The centre will then write a report setting out all the help they think you need and will send this to Student Finance England (or your local authority or the OU). The centre will also send a copy to you.

Step five: you receive your DSAs

If Student Finance England (your local authority or the OU) agree the report, they'll tell you in writing how to arrange getting your help.

If you need further advice, contact the Learning Supporting Department at college.