



Bridging the Gap: a guide to the **Disabled Students' Allowances** **(DSAs)** in higher education

Guide for 2007/2008

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Important Information

If you want to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances you should do so as early as possible before your course starts so that arrangements can be made for any special support you need to be assessed and ready in time for the start of your course.

1 What is this guide about?

This guide provides information about Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for current and prospective students in higher education. It covers:

- full-time and part-time undergraduate students (including Open University and other distance-learning students); and
- full-time and part-time postgraduate students (including Open University and other distance-learners).

This guide explains:

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

The guide is intended for students and prospective students whose homes are in England. **Appendix 1** on page 28 explains where you can get more information about the conditions for receiving student finance including DSAs.

Broadly similar arrangements apply if you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland. Contact details for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are on page 26.

This guide is **not** intended for:

- undergraduate and postgraduate students who will get an NHS bursary for their course (see **appendix 4**);
- postgraduate students receiving a bursary or award from a research council, the NHS or the General Social Care Council (see **appendix 4**); or
- postgraduate students receiving support equivalent to DSAs from their university or college (see **appendix 4**).

DSAs can be awarded to full-time and part-time undergraduate students and certain full-time and part-time postgraduate students who can show that they have a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty which affects their ability to study. Your local authority will normally be responsible for assessing whether you are eligible for DSAs and how much you will receive, but please check if your local authority is testing new student finance arrangements (see 'Important information for students living in England' on page 5).

The Student Loans Company (SLC) will then pay you DSAs on behalf of your local authority. If you are an Open University (OU) student, the OU will assess your application and pay DSAs.

The information here is for guidance only and does not cover all circumstances. If you need more help, speak to your local authority (or the SLC or OU) or the disability adviser at your university or college.

You can get large print, Braille and audio-tape versions of this guide by phoning our free order line on 0800 731 9133, or textphone 0800 328 8988. (All our forms, guides and leaflets about higher education student finance are available in these formats.) You can also download this guide from our website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

Important information for students living in England

If you usually live in England, the local authority whose area you normally live in will usually consider your application, even if you study outside that area.

But, if you live in one of the local authority areas listed below, you will need to phone the SLC's Customer Support Office on 0845 607 7577 to apply for support. Your local authority will not be involved in the application process for this year and you will need to contact the SLC if you have any questions.

- London Borough of Brent
- Darlington Borough Council
- London Borough of Hackney
- Hartlepool Borough Council
- North Yorkshire County Council
- Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
- London Borough of Southwark
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- York City Council

Your entitlement to support will not be affected by this change.

2 What are the Disabled Students' Allowances for?

The DSAs help pay for extra costs you may have to pay when studying your course, as a direct result of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. The allowances can help with the cost of a non-medical personal helper, items of specialist equipment, travel and other course-related costs.

3 Am I eligible?

Full-time and part-time undergraduate students

You are eligible to apply for DSAs if:

- you are studying an eligible full-time **undergraduate** course (including a distance-learning course) and you are personally eligible for maintenance support for that course; or
- you are studying an eligible part-time **undergraduate** course, (including a distance-learning course) and are personally eligible for part-time support. (A part-time course would have to last for at least one year and must not take more than twice as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course.)

Appendix 1 on page 28 explains where you can get more information about the conditions for receiving student finance including DSAs.

You may be eligible to apply for DSAs if you are studying a part-time course of initial teacher training (ITT). Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will be able to give you more details about this. PGCE courses attract support, including DSAs, as if they were undergraduate courses rather than postgraduate courses.

You are **not** eligible for DSAs if:

- you are an EU student and are eligible only for support with your fees; or
- you are a sandwich-course student on a full-year paid placement.

Postgraduate students

You are eligible to apply for a DSA if you study a recognised taught or research **postgraduate** course (including a distance-learning course) and meet the personal eligibility conditions. **Appendix 1** on page 28 explains where you can get more information about the conditions for receiving student finance including DSAs.

All postgraduate courses should last for at least one year and lead to a master's degree, doctorate, postgraduate diploma or certificate, for which the entry requirement is at least a first degree or equivalent. Part-time courses will need to take no longer than twice the time of an equivalent full-time course in order to be eligible.

Some postgraduate students will **not** qualify for a DSA from their local authority (or the SLC or OU). If you are receiving a bursary or award from a research council, the NHS, the General Social Care Council or if your university or college provides support that is equivalent to DSAs, you will not be eligible for a postgraduate DSA from your local authority (or the SLC or OU). You should contact the provider of your bursary or award for advice on any extra support you may be entitled to because of your disability (see **appendix 4** on page 31 in this guide).

Students on PGCE courses will continue to be eligible for the DSAs awarded to undergraduate students and, as a result, will not be eligible for a postgraduate DSA.

After completing an undergraduate course of study, if you then go on immediately to postgraduate study, any amount you received through the DSA for specialist equipment as an undergraduate will be taken into consideration.

Open University students

To be eligible for DSAs, you must be registered for an OU undergraduate or postgraduate level 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.

Appendix 1 on page 28 explains where you can get more information about the conditions for receiving student finance including DSAs.

Students undertaking more than one course

You cannot, at any one time, have DSAs for more than one course.

Previous study

If you are starting your course in 2007/2008, previous study on a course of higher education will not affect your eligibility for DSAs, even if you received financial support for it. If you are already on a course, and have received public financial support for a previous course, you should still be eligible for DSAs. However, if you received any specialist equipment through the DSAs for a previous course, this will be taken into consideration. Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will be able to give you more advice.

Age

Eligibility for DSAs is not affected by an age limit, and if you are aged 60 or over you may be eligible for them even if, as a full-time student, you are not eligible for a student maintenance loan.

4 Do I have to tell my university or college about my disability or specific learning difficulty?

No, but it will help you with your application if you contact the disability adviser at your university or college. He or she may be able to advise you and give you more information about the help the university or college can provide. There is more information about the role of the disability adviser on pages 9 and 10. If you are studying part-time and want to apply for DSAs, you will also need to ask your university or college to certify that your rate of study is at least 50% of an equivalent full-time course.

If you register for a course as an OU student and want to apply for DSAs, you will have to tell the OU about your disability or specific learning difficulty in order to automatically receive an application form from the OU's DSA Office. If, when you register for a course, you do not want to tell the OU about your disability or specific learning difficulty, you will have to contact the OU's DSA office direct to ask for an application form.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995)

Some students with disabilities do not want to reveal their disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty for fear of discrimination. In April 2005, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 was passed, making amendments to the DDA 1995. The 2005 Act introduces a duty for the public sector to promote disability equality (the Disability Equality Duty).

The duty requires public authorities (which will include most universities and colleges), when carrying out their functions, to consider the need to:

- promote equal opportunities between disabled people and other people;
- get rid of discrimination that is unlawful under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- get rid of harassment that is related to people's disabilities;
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people;
- encourage disabled people to take part in public life;
- take steps to take account of disabled peoples' disabilities, even if that involves giving them more favourable treatment.

These responsibilities are defined as the **general duty** to promote disability equality. Universities and colleges also have **specific duties**, which provide a clear framework for meeting the general duty. Central to the specific duties is the need for universities and colleges to have produced a Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006.

Under the DDA 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) it is also unlawful for universities and colleges to discriminate against disabled students by treating them less favourably in their admissions policies or the services they provide. Under the DDA 1995, universities and colleges must make reasonable adjustments so disabled students are not at an unreasonable disadvantage compared to students who are not disabled. The Disability Rights Commission should be able to answer more detailed questions about the DDA 1995.

Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will keep any information about your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty confidential, but if you choose not to tell your university or college about your disability, the necessary reasonable adjustments may not be made. You can tell the university's or college's disability adviser about your disability in complete confidence, to make sure they get you the support you need.

If you are still worried about revealing your disability, you could contact **Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities**, or a disability organisation that specialises in your particular disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. You can find contact details for Skill and the Disability Rights Commission on pages 27 and 28.

The role of disability advisers

Disability advisers are available at most higher education institutions and play an important role in the DSA process. The role of disability advisers may vary between institutions but, generally, they will:

- help students with their DSA applications;
- offer disabled students advice on other sources of funding and support that may be available;
- arrange DSA needs assessments on behalf of students;
- advise on the particular needs that may arise from specific courses;
- help put in place the support that is recommended in the DSA needs assessment report;
- explain and give advice on assessments, called diagnostic assessment reports, of specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia;
- explain and give advice on DSA needs assessment reports;

- co-ordinate the network of support workers;
- work with accommodation services, social services, local authorities (or the SLC) and academic departments;
- make recommendations for the academic department in relation to students, for example, special exam arrangements;
- supervise and arrange training for support workers;
- research, develop and help put into practice institutions' policies for exams, physical access and fieldwork; and
- develop and put into practice disability elements of various institutional strategies.

Without the involvement of a disability adviser, the process of getting DSA support might be more difficult. We recommend that the disability adviser is sent a copy of your DSA needs assessment report (see 'How can I find out what I will need?' on page 16). Your DSA needs assessor will only send the disability adviser a copy of the report if they have your permission, in writing. Your disability adviser should not normally carry out your DSA needs assessment.

5 How do I show that I am eligible?

Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) must consider all cases where disabled students face extra costs to attend their course because of their disability. If you have a physical disability, a mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you may qualify.

If your condition has been documented at an earlier stage, your eligibility for DSAs can be easily proved. If you are physically disabled, or have a mental-health condition, you will need to provide medical proof of this, such as a letter from your doctor or specialist. A previous assessment of a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia, may need to be updated (please see the next section).

If you have more than one medical condition, you should provide evidence for all of them. If you do not provide evidence, this may delay your application for DSAs.

Specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia or dyspraxia)

If you have a specific learning difficulty, your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will need evidence of this in the form of an assessment, called a diagnostic assessment, from a psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher.

However, any diagnostic assessment they provide must meet the criteria set out in **appendix 3** (page 29). When students with a specific learning difficulty apply for DSAs, it is recommended that local authorities (or the SLC or OU) accept a full diagnostic assessment that has been carried out since they were 16. Local authorities (or the SLC or OU) may ask for an update of a previous diagnostic assessment carried out before the age of 16 to see what the likely effect of your specific learning difficulty will be on the skills you need for higher education.

Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) may ask you to have an independent diagnostic assessment to establish your specific learning difficulty and eligibility for DSAs. The university or college disability adviser may be able to help you arrange an updated, or new, assessment.

Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) **cannot** meet the costs of diagnosing your disability for **establishing** your eligibility for DSAs. Ask your local authority (or the SLC or OU) what evidence of your disability they will need **before** you send in your application. If you need a test to establish your eligibility for DSAs, but cannot afford the fee, you can apply to your university or college for help in meeting the costs through the Access to Learning Fund (see page 20). The university's or college's disability adviser may be able to help you with this.

6 How and to whom do I apply?

Full-time undergraduates

If you are entering higher education for the first time in 2007/2008 and are applying for financial support, you will find that the application form asks if you want to apply for DSAs. You can apply on paper (using form PN1 if you are a new student, or form PR1 if you are a continuing student) or on-line at www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk.

You can get copies of form PNI and PR1 from your local authority (or the SLC) or by phoning our free order line on 0800 731 9133, or textphone 0800 328 8988. You can get large print, Braille and audio-tape versions free of charge by phoning our order line. You can also download these forms from our website at

www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

If you are applying using a paper form, please tick that you want to apply for DSAs and give details of your disability, mental-health condition, or specific learning difficulty.

Many local authorities have a named officer who deals with applications for DSAs. You may contact your local authority (or the SLC) before you send in your application to find out if there is a named officer who you can send it to and discuss the DSA process with. Your local authority (or the SLC) will be able to offer you advice about the DSAs, even if they do not have a named officer dealing with DSA applications. Your local authority (or the SLC) will need evidence of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty, as referred to in section 5 on page 10. The process of getting DSA support will be made quicker and easier if you can send evidence of your disability with the PN1 or PR1 application form. However, you should not delay sending a filled-in PN1 or PR1 application form if you don't have evidence available straightaway. You can always send evidence of your disability at a later date. If you fill in the on-line application form, we will always ask you to provide this evidence afterwards.

Once your local authority (or the SLC) has confirmed your eligibility for DSAs, they will then ask you to have a DSA needs assessment carried out so that the help you need on your course can be identified and arranged (see section 11 on page 16). Following your DSA needs assessment, your local authority (or the SLC) will let you know the level of help you can have from DSAs. If you are not sure about your entitlement, discuss it with your local authority (or the SLC).

Part-time undergraduates

If you are a part-time student and want to apply for DSAs, you should ask your local authority (or the SLC) to send you the DSA application form for part-time undergraduate students. They can arrange for a large print, Braille or audio-tape version of the form to be sent to you if you need it. You can also download the form from our website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

Undergraduates studying higher education courses at further education colleges

If you are studying a higher education course within a further education college, you could be entitled to support through the DSA scheme. If you want to apply for DSAs, you should contact the Disability Service at the college where you are studying. This may be known as Learning Support, Study Advice or as the Learner Support Service in your college.

The staff member responsible for supporting students with a disability or specific learning difficulty in your college should be able to give you help with, and advice on, the process of applying for DSAs. This person may be called a Disability Co-ordinator, Learning Support Co-ordinator or Additional Learner Support Co-ordinator.

If you do not want to apply for DSAs through your further education college, your local authority or the Disability Advisor at the university providing the higher-education course will be able to give you advice on how to apply for DSAs.

Postgraduates

If you are a postgraduate student, you should ask your local authority (or the SLC) to send you the DSA application form for postgraduate students. They can arrange for a large print, Braille or audio-tape version of the form to be sent to you if you need it. You can also download the form from our website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

Open University students

If, when you register for an undergraduate or postgraduate course, you have told the Open University that you have a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty, the OU's DSA Office will automatically send you all the information you need to apply for DSAs.

If, when you register for a course, you do not tell the OU about your disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty, you will have to ask the OU's DSA Office at Walton Hall for a DSA application form. You will need to send your filled-in form, and any necessary or relevant documents, back to the Open University's DSA Office (see page 27 for contact details).

7 When do I apply?

Apply as soon as you can before your course starts in order to receive the support you need promptly. However, you can apply for DSAs at any stage of your course.

8 How will payments be made?

If your application is successful, your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will tell you the amount of help you can have from the DSAs. The SLC will make DSA payments either to you, into your bank account, or directly to the supplier of equipment or services.

We recommend that the SLC or OU pay the supplier of equipment, your university or college, or your non-medical helper, direct. However, you will have to agree to this.

Your DSA assessor or local authority (or the SLC or OU) may recommend that you use a particular supplier. These suppliers will normally offer an extended warranty to cover the whole of your course and a very thorough after-sales service.

We expect that they will be able to:

- supply all or most of the equipment;
- set up any equipment; and
- install all the recommended software.

9 Do DSAs depend on my income?

No, DSAs do not depend on your income or the income of your family.

10 What do the DSAs cover?

DSAs are not paid as a set amount. Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will find out what you need and how much it will cost, usually by asking that you have a DSA needs assessment. You will only get enough money from the DSAs to cover the cost of the equipment or support you need because of your disability. The amount of DSAs you receive will depend on the DSA needs assessment. If you are a part-time student, you will have to get certification from your university or college that your rate of study is at least 50% of a full-time course in order to be eligible, and to work out the rate of the non-medical helpers and general allowances.

However, there is a limit to the amount of help you can get from the DSAs. The rates shown below are the maximum you can get. They are meant to support people with a high level of need, so most people will get less than the maximum.

The rates of allowances for 2007/2008 (2008 for OU students) are as follows.

For full-time undergraduate students

- Specialist equipment allowance - up to £4,905 for the whole of your course.
- Non-medical helper's allowance - up to £12,420 a year.
- General Disabled Students' Allowance - up to £1,640 a year.
- Reasonable spending on **extra** travel costs (see page 16 for details on travel costs).

For part-time undergraduate students

- Specialist equipment allowance - up to £4,905 for the whole of your course.
- Non-medical helper's allowance - **as a percentage** of the full-time rate, according to the workload of a part-time course, up to £9,315 a year. For example, for a student studying:
50% of a full-time course - up to £6,210 a year; or
60% of a full-time course - up to £7,452 a year.

- General Disabled Students' Allowance **as a percentage** of the full-time rate in the same way as the non-medical helper's allowance, to a maximum of £1,230 a year.
- Reasonable spending on **extra** travel costs (see page 16 for details on travel costs).

For full-time and part-time postgraduate students

There is one allowance to meet all costs of up to £5,915 a year for both full-time and part-time postgraduate students. You can use this for specialist equipment, non-medical personal helpers, extra travel costs or other course-related costs. The amount of DSA you receive will depend on the DSA needs assessment.

Specialist equipment allowance

This allowance is to help you buy any items of equipment you may need. You can also use it to pay for any repair, technical support, insurance or extended warranty costs arising from owning that equipment. **We recommend that you insure your specialist equipment, and you can use your DSAs to pay the extra insurance premiums.** Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) can also reimburse costs you have to pay to rent, rather than buy, items of equipment if this is more economical.

You can apply for the specialist equipment allowance at any time during your course. The DSA needs assessment report may advise that you get some initial training in using any equipment that is recommended. The cost of this training would come from your non-medical helper's part of the DSAs. You should note that if you have a support contract or warranty with the supplier of your equipment, it might not be honoured if a computer you have received fails because you have loaded extra software that has not been recommended in the DSA needs assessment report.

If you apply for help towards the end of your course, you may still be able to get a new piece of equipment if there is evidence of need, but your local authority (or the SLC or OU) may ask you to consider if there are more economical alternatives to buying equipment. For example, you could rent or hire equipment from a supplier or borrow it from your university or college. Non-IT options, such as human support, may be more effective when only a few weeks of the course are left.

Non-medical helper's allowance

This allowance may provide for any helpers, such as readers, sign-language interpreters, note-takers and other non-medical assistants you need to benefit fully from your course. DSAs are not meant to help with disability-related spending which you would have to pay, whether you were following your course or not. Your local social services department may help you with these personal costs.

If you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you could receive funds from your local authority (or the SLC or OU) under this allowance. You can use this to pay for tuition in study skills to help you overcome problems which arise from your dyslexia if this has been recommended in a DSA needs assessment carried out by a suitably qualified person. Tuition in study skills should be provided by specialist tutors, who may be available at your college or university, although you are entitled to arrange another provider if that is more appropriate. You cannot use the allowance to pay for extra tuition in subjects which are part of your course.

General Allowance

This allowance may be paid towards other disability-related spending. You can use it to buy items such as tapes and Braille paper, or to top up the other two allowances, if necessary.

Travel costs

If you have to pay extra travel costs to attend your university or college because of your disability, your local authority (or the SLC or OU) may be able to help with them. You will not normally be eligible for help with everyday travel costs which any student would expect to have. Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) can give you more advice.

11 How can I find out what I will need?

Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will ask you to have a DSA needs assessment carried out. This is so that your particular needs can be matched with those of your proposed course so that you can get the help that you will need.

The DSA needs assessment will be carried out by a person with specialist experience at an independent assessment centre, or at a centre within your college or university. If you need help with travel costs to the DSA needs assessment, you should ask your local authority (or the SLC or OU) whether they can help as this can be paid from the general DSA.

You should not arrange for a DSA needs assessment without first confirming with your local authority (or the SLC or OU) that they agree for you to do so, and that they approve of your choice of assessment centre. The local authority (or the SLC or OU) will often have their own preferred source (see **appendix 2** on page 29).

The fee that assessors charge for carrying out a DSA needs assessment may be paid from the DSAs. You will receive a report for this to help your local authority (or the SLC or OU) assess your entitlement. We strongly advise that your university or college, especially if it employs a disability adviser, should be involved in your DSA application and should see the report and its recommendations. This will help to make sure you get the support you need.

A DSA needs assessment should identify 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 need to be agreed by your local authority (or the SLC or OU). The report should also identify any training you might need to make best use of the equipment recommended. You can also use the report as supporting evidence in establishing special examination arrangements when you are on your course.

If later on in your course your disability becomes more severe, you can apply to have another DSA needs assessment carried out to identify any extra support you might need.

12 How soon can I have a DSA needs assessment done?

Once your local authority (or the SLC or OU) has established your eligibility for student support and you have provided supporting evidence of your disability or specific learning difficulty from an appropriate specialist, a DSA needs assessment can be arranged well before the start of term, and even before you have a confirmed place at a university or college.

Ask your local authority (or the SLC or OU) for more information. You may then need a top-up assessment when you start your course to make sure that the particular needs you have on your course are met. Students who are already on a course can apply at any time.

13 Can I receive equipment before my course begins?

Possibly. Once your local authority (or the SLC or OU) has established that you are eligible for DSAs, it can pay for items of special equipment recommended in a DSA needs assessment report shortly before the start of your course so that you may use them from the very beginning of your studies. However, your local authority (or the SLC or OU) will ask for evidence that you have been accepted on your course before they will consider doing so. If you do not go on the course, you must return any equipment you have received to your supplier. If you do not or cannot do this, you may have to pay the cost of the equipment.

14 What happens to the equipment when my course ends?

All equipment bought with DSAs is, and will stay, your property. At the end of your course you may decide to offer the equipment to your university or college, or to your local authority (or the SLC or OU), for other students to use. However, if you are intending to study another course (for example, an 'end-on' or postgraduate course) any previous equipment you have received will be taken into account when your application for support is considered.

15 Will I have to repay my DSAs if I leave my course early?

Possibly. Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) may have to recover some or all of your DSAs if you withdraw from your course. They should only ask you to return money you have received for support that you have not yet bought or used.

16 What if I transfer to another course and need different equipment?

Once you have received the maximum special equipment allowance from your local authority (or the SLC or OU), you cannot receive any further special equipment allowance. If you have not used up all your special equipment allowance, the remaining amount will be available for your second course, if you need it. You will still be eligible for the other allowances and travel costs on your new course. Remember, you may not yet have been given the maximum equipment allowance or you might be able to top it up from the general allowance on your new course.

17 What if I have to repeat part of my course?

Your local authority (or the SLC or OU) may be able to continue making payments of your DSAs if you have to repeat periods of study or you need extended study.

18 What do I do if my application is turned down or I am not satisfied?

If your local authority (or the SLC or OU) turns down your application for DSAs, find out their reasons. If you do not agree with their decision, ask them to review your case.

If you give your local authority (or the SLC or OU) all the information they ask for and meet their deadlines, you have a right to expect a prompt and efficient assessment of your claim. If you are happy with the way the local authority (or the SLC or OU) has dealt with your application (they have been efficient and polite and so on) but feel that the wrong decision has been reached in your case, ask the local authority (or the SLC or OU) to give you information on how to appeal. Your university's or college's disability adviser, Student Services Department or Students' Union may help you with an appeal.

If you are unhappy with the way in which you have been dealt with, ask the local authority (or the SLC or OU) to give you details of their system for dealing with complaints.

19 What other financial support is available?

The financial support available is explained in the following publications.

Information about higher education student finance - get the DfES guide 'A Guide to financial support for higher education students in 2007/08'(reference S/FSHE/V7).

Help for full-time undergraduate students with children or adult dependants - get the DfES guide 'Childcare Grant and other support for full-time student parents in higher education' (reference S/CCGB/V7).

Information about student loans - get the DfES guide 'Student Loans - a guide to terms and conditions' (reference S/SLTC/V7).

Information about help for part-time undergraduate students - get the DfES guide 'A guide to financial support for part time students in higher education' (reference S/FSPT/V7).

You can get copies of these guides from your local authority (or the SLC) or by phoning our free order line on 0800 731 9133, or textphone 0800 328 8988. You can get large print, Braille and audio-tape versions of all these guides free of charge by phoning our order line. You can also download them from our website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

Access to Learning Fund

The Access to Learning Fund is available through your university or college. It can provide help for students in financial difficulties who may need extra financial support for their course and to stay in higher education. It can provide financial help to both full-time and part-time students, including postgraduate students. More specifically, the funds can:

- pay particular course-related and living costs which are not already being met by other grants;
- help students who are in financial difficulty;
- provide emergency payments for an unexpected financial crisis; and
- help students who may be thinking about giving up their course because of financial problems.

To apply for support from the Access to Learning Fund, part-time students must generally be on a course of at least 50% of an equivalent full-time course. But disabled students **whose disability prevents them from following 50% or more of an equivalent full-time course** can also apply for support from the Access to Learning Fund, as long as they are following at least 25% of an equivalent full-time course.

And students taking 'taster' modules of at least 12 credits (10% of an equivalent full-time course) who are on low incomes may be able to get help with fees and course-related costs, such as books and travel.

You may get help in meeting the cost of an assessment for a specific learning difficulty, sometimes called a diagnostic assessment, including travel to and from the assessment centre, through the Access to Learning Fund.

You should contact your university's or college's student services department to find out if you can get help from the Access to Learning Fund.

Benefits

The information given here is general. If you think you may be eligible for any of the following benefits, please contact your local Jobcentre Plus office, Housing Benefit office or student advisory service.

Full-time students in higher education are not generally entitled to income-related benefits unless they fall into one of the groups of people treated as 'vulnerable' by Jobcentre Plus. This includes lone (single) parents and some people with a disability (see table on page 21).

However, if you have a partner who is not a student and they are eligible for any of the income-related benefits, your partner can claim on behalf of you both - if your partner claims Jobseeker's Allowance you may need to go to an interview at the Jobcentre, although as a full-time student you will not need to be available for work. (Your income will be taken into account when assessing your partner's entitlement to any means-tested benefit.)

Many students who are eligible for income-related benefits, will find their income from student support is higher than the amount of benefit they would receive.

However, certain types of support are not taken into account when working out a student's income. Since September 2004, students in one of the vulnerable groups who are living in accommodation owned by the university can now apply for Housing Benefit during term time.

You may also find it helpful to ask the advisory services in your students' union or student services department for advice.

The first table below shows the relevant vulnerable groups for income-related benefit and which benefits they may be eligible for. The second table shows two other situations when full-time students may be eligible for income-related benefit.

Vulnerable groups	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (see note 1)	Income Support	Jobseeker's Allowance
Lone (single) parents	✓	✓	
Disabled people who get disability or severe disability premium	✓	✓	
Disabled people who receive Disabled Students' Allowance (a grant paid under the student support system) because of deafness	✓	✓	
Pensions (State retirement age)	✓	(see note 2)	

Other full-time students who may be eligible for income-related benefit	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (see note 1)	Income Support	Jobseeker's Allowance
Student couples with dependent children	✓	✓ (see note 3)	✓ (see note 3)
Students intercalating (see note 4) after a period of sickness or caring for someone	✓		✓

Note 1 - since April 2004, most full-time students should not have to pay Council Tax unless they are owner-occupiers who have another person living with them and paying them rent.

Note 2 - from 6 October 2003, pensioners should be getting the Pension Credit instead of Income Support.

Note 3 - one of the couple may claim during the summer holiday.

Note 4 - intercalating is when a student has suspended their studies (for example, because of sickness or to care for someone) but even though the reason for the suspension has ended, the student cannot continue the course yet.

How does the Jobcentre Plus or local Housing Benefit office work out what I am eligible for?

In most cases, student support replaces benefits as the main source of support for students, whether they decide to take out a student loan or not. To assess your entitlement to benefit the Jobcentre Plus or Housing Benefit office works out your weekly income and compares this with the weekly benefit you would receive. However, because the student loan also provides help towards course-related costs, when working out your weekly income, the cost of books, equipment and travel will not be taken into account. An extra £10 of your weekly income is also not taken into account. For the 2006/2007 academic year, the deductions were £361 towards the cost of books and equipment and £285 for travel costs. From August 2007, your university's or college's advice service will be able to tell you the amounts for the 2007/2008 academic year.

Payments from the Access to Learning Fund may not be counted as long as they are not intended for

day-to-day living costs. The Higher Education Grant, Special Support Grant, Childcare Grant and Parents Learning Allowance should also not be counted. If you receive a bursary from your university or college, you will need to ask your local authority or your university's or college's advice service whether any of this will be taken into account. Your local Jobcentre Plus or Housing Benefit office will also be able to give you more advice.

Since April 2004, Income Support and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance have changed to become benefits paid for adults only. The parts previously paid for children will be covered by the tax credits paid by HM Revenue & Customs. You can get more information from your local Jobcentre Plus office.

There is a free and confidential Benefit Enquiry Line 0800 88 22 00 - for people with disabilities and their carers. If you use a textphone, dial 0800 24 33 55. You can also contact **Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities**, for information on benefits and studying.

20 Where can I get more information?

There are a range of contacts that can answer your questions.

- For **general** questions about student finance and how to apply, contact your local authority or the Student Loans Company's Customer Support Office (CSO) on 0845 607 7577.
- For **detailed** questions about your entitlement to help, contact your local authority or the Student Finance helpline.
- To apply **on-line or monitor your application**, go to www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk.
- For a **paper** copy of the application form, contact your local authority. Or, if you live in one of the local authorities testing new student finance arrangements named in the introduction section, contact the CSO on 0845 607 7577.
- For a copy of one of our **guides**, contact the Student Support Information Line on 0800 731 9133.
- For OU students contact the Financial Support Team on 01908 653411.

The Customer Support Office

Students in **England** can now use the SLC's **Customer Support Office** to get a range of information about student finance.

The Customer Support Office answers general questions about things such as:

- what financial help is available;
- the application process and timetable;
- questions about the on-line services at www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk;
- progress in assessing your application; and
- paying your loan.

You can phone the CSO on 0845 607 7577 between 8am and 8pm. Monday to Friday, Saturday and Sunday 9.00am to 5.30pm.

You can also use the on-line services at www.studentfinance.direct.co.uk to:

- find out how much loan and help towards your fees you are likely to receive using the 'entitlement calculator';
- track the progress of your application;
- update your address and other contact details;
- see copies of letters that have been sent to you;
- check when you are next due to be paid; and
- ask questions.

Local authorities

Students living in **England** can contact their **local authority**. Local authorities provide detailed advice on the support you are likely to be entitled to and the result of the assessment of your application. Check if your local authority is testing new student-finance arrangements (see page 5) as you may need to contact the SLC's Customer Support Office.

You should also contact your local authority if you need a paper copy of an application form. Contact the Customer Support Office for a paper copy if your local authority is testing new student-finance arrangements.

You can see a list of local authority contacts at www.studentfinancedirect.co.uk.

If you are still at school, your careers teacher can give you the address and phone number of your local authority.

Student Support helpline

We run a helpline for students, parents and members of the public living in England. We can answer detailed questions about student finance and eligibility and can explain the information in our booklets. You can phone the helpline on 0845 602 0583 between 10am and 4pm from Monday to Friday.

Student support information line

Students living in England can phone **0800 731 9133** to order a free copy of any of our guides. There is a free textphone service available on **0800 328 8988**. You can also get any of our guides in large print, Braille and on audio-tape free of charge by phoning our information line.

If you normally live in Wales, you should contact the local authority for the area you normally live in about student finance arrangements. You can find contact details for local authorities along with other information about student finance on the Student Finance Wales website.

- www.studentfinancewales.co.uk (in English)
- www.cyllidmyfyrwycymru.co.uk (in Welsh)

Or, you can phone the bilingual Student Finance Wales helpline on 0845 602 8845.

If you normally live in Scotland, you should contact the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to find out about student finance arrangements in Scotland.

Their address is:

The Student Awards Agency for Scotland

Gyleview House

3 Redheughs Rigg

South Gyle

Edinburgh EH12 9HH.

Phone: 0845 111 1711

Email: saas.geu@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.saas.gov.uk

If you normally live in Northern Ireland, you should contact the Education and Library Board for the area you normally live in.

You can find contact details for the Education and Library Boards at www.studentfinancenir.co.uk

If you are an Open University student, you should contact the OU. Their address is:

For questions about DSAs

The Open University

Disabled Students' Allowance Office
Walton Hall

Milton Keynes MK7 6ZN.

Phone: 01908 654136

Textphone: 01908 659955

Fax: 01908 659956

E-mail: DSA-queries@open.ac.uk

Website: www.open.ac.uk

For questions about financial support

The Open University

Fees and Financial Support

PO Box 197

Milton Keynes MK7 6BJ

Phone: 01908 653 411

Fax: 01908 654 914

E-mail:

general-enquiries@open.ac.uk

Website:

www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport

Other useful contacts

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Chapter House

18-20 Crucifix Lane

London SE1 3JW.

Information Service

(Tuesdays 11.30am to 1.30pm,

Thursdays 1.30pm to 3.30pm)

Phone: 0800 328 5050

Minicom: 0800 068 2422

Fax: 020 7450 0650

E-mail: info@skill.org.uk

Website: www.skill.org.uk

Skill is a national charity promoting opportunities in further or higher education, training and employment for young people and adults in the UK with any kind of disability. It has published a number of information booklets on DSAs and higher education for disabled students and students with specific learning difficulties. The booklets are available on the Skill website at www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets.asp

Skill's information service can answer questions on higher education and disability.

For information about organisations which have expertise in your disability or specific learning difficulty, Skill has also published an information booklet '**Organisations Offering Advice or Services to Disabled Students**' which gives contact details. It is available on the Skill website at <http://www.skill.org.uk/info/infosheets.asp#acrosssectors>

Disability Rights Commission (DRC)

DRC Helpline
Freepost MID 02164
Stratford-upon-Avon
CV37 9BR.
Phone: 08457 622 633
Textphone: 08457 622 644
Fax: 08457 778 878
E-mail: use one of the mailforms available on the DRC website at www.drc-gb.org/whatwedo/helplineenquiry.asp

National Union of Students (NUS)

2nd Floor
Centro 3
19 Mandela Street
London NW1 0DU.
Phone: 0871 221 8221
Fax: 0871 221 8222
E-mail: nusuk@nus.org.uk
Website: www.nusonline.co.uk

Appendix 1

Conditions for receiving student finance including DSAs

If you want more information about the conditions for receiving student finance including DSAs, you can get a leaflet called 'Student Finance - how you are assessed and paid' which explains this.

You can get a copy from your local authority (or the SLC) or by phoning our free order line on 0800 731 9133, or textphone 0800 328 8988. You can get large print Braille and audio-tape versions of the leaflet free of charge by phoning our order line. You can also download this leaflet from the website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

Appendix 2

DSA Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG)

The Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG) is a non-profit-making Regulatory Company Limited by Guarantee. DSA-QAG is made up of representatives from local authorities, universities and colleges, DSA assessment centres, DSA equipment suppliers, SKILL and the NUS. It has devised a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for assessment centres and equipment suppliers. More information about the work of DSA-QAG including a list of registered and accredited assessment centres and suppliers is available on the website at <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/>.

Registered centres and suppliers are those waiting for an initial accreditation audit. Accredited centres and suppliers are those which had satisfied an audit inspection. We are treating all registered assessment centres as being within the framework and recommend local authorities (or the CLS or OU) to use registered or accredited centres to carry out DSA needs assessments.

Appendix 3

Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group

The Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group was set up in 2003 to review the arrangements for identifying and assessing specific learning difficulties in higher-education students. The group was asked to produce a report recommending a framework to guarantee the quality of assessments which diagnose specific learning difficulties. The final report is published on our website at www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport/dsa__1.shtml.

The report's recommendations are being phased in over three years.

The following schedule shows dates for introducing specific parts of the framework described in the report.

From September 2006

- Local authorities to accept assessments, called diagnostic assessments, from psychologists and suitably qualified specialist teachers. Specialist teachers who assess dyslexia should hold AMBDA (Associate Membership of the British Dyslexia Association) or a qualification from an advanced training course which assesses adults for dyslexia and is recognised by the British Dyslexia Association's (BDA) Accreditation Board.
- Diagnostic reports to be in the format recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group report.
- Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group report.

From September 2007

- Local authorities to accept diagnostic reports from psychologists and specialist teachers who hold a current practising certificate in assessing specific learning difficulties. That certificate must be issued by their professional association. For example, the British Psychological Society or Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS) or Dyslexia Action.
- Diagnostic reports to use the report format recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group's guidelines.
- Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group's guidelines.

From September 2008

- Procedures as from September 2007 above plus the following.
- All training for assessing specific learning difficulties to incorporate the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group's guidelines.

Appendix 4

Support from other organisations Undergraduate and postgraduate NHS students

This guide is not intended for students who will get an NHS bursary for their course. Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) are available as part of the NHS Bursary Scheme, for which NHS bursary degree and diploma students may be eligible. (If you are a medical or dental student who started your course in 2003, you will become eligible for an NHS bursary in September 2007.) If you will receive an NHS bursary, or plan to apply for one, you should contact your university or college for details of the support that is available to disabled students under the NHS Bursary Scheme.

You can get more information about the NHS Bursary Scheme, and the DSAs this offers, in the Department of Health's guide '**Financial Help for Health Care Students**'. You can get a copy of the booklet on-line at www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk or by writing to:

The NHS Pensions Agency
Hesketh House
200-220 Broadway
Fleetwood FY7 8LG.

For information about NHS bursaries in England, contact:
The Customer Services Team
The NHS Student Grants Unit
Hesketh House
200-220 Broadway
Fleetwood FY7 8LG.
Phone: 0845 358 6655
Fax: 01253 774490
E-mail: enquiries@nhspa.gov.uk
Website:
www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk

NHS secondees

Please note that health-care students who are employed by NHS trusts and seconded (transferred temporarily) onto health-care courses are not eligible for NHS bursaries and so cannot receive NHS DSAs. These students, who continue to receive their salary and have their tuition fees paid by the NHS, can receive DSA support under the Student Support Regulations if they meet the usual conditions.

Postgraduates funded by research councils

DSAs are available to students funded by research councils if the student has to pay extra costs in their postgraduate study as a result of their disability. Details of the level and type of DSA support offered, and information about how to apply for it, are available on each research council's website.

- Arts and Humanities Research Council (visit www.ahrc.ac.uk)
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (visit www.bbsrc.ac.uk)
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (visit www.epsrc.ac.uk)
- Economic and Social Research Council (visit www.esrc.ac.uk)
- Medical Research Council (visit www.mrc.ac.uk)
- Natural Environment Research Council (visit www.nerc.ac.uk)
- Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (visit www.pparc.ac.uk)

You should speak to the disability adviser at your university or college if you want to apply for DSAs from the research councils as they will be able to offer information and help. You will usually need to provide proof of your disability or specific learning difficulty and a recent DSA-needs assessment where appropriate.

The research councils will normally help meet the cost of a DSA-needs assessment.

Bursaries for full-time graduates studying an approved postgraduate social-work course

The General Social Care Council's 'postgraduate bursary' is available to graduates (or those with an equivalent qualification recognised by universities) studying an approved college-based full-time postgraduate social-work course. There are allowances within the postgraduate bursary to support students with disabilities. For more information on the postgraduate bursary, visit the bursaries page of the website at www.gsccl.org.uk

Support for a postgraduate course from your university or college

If your university or college provides support equivalent to DSAs for postgraduate courses, you will not be able to get a postgraduate DSA from your local authority. You should **not** include any payment you will receive from your university's or college's Access to Learning Fund.

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