

## Your questions answered

### DSA application process

**Question:** When should a student apply for DSA? Do they need to wait until they have confirmation of their offer?

**Answer:** In order to speed the DSA Process it would be beneficial for students to apply for DSA at the same time as they apply for their maintenance grant, maintenance loan and or tuition fee loan (if applicable). The student should tick the box indicating that they have a disability and would like to receive more information. A pre-populated DSA1 form will then be sent to the student to allow them to sign the declaration, tick the relevant boxes for consent to share and attach evidence of their disability. The student should return the completed form and evidence in the pre-paid envelope to our Darlington office.

**Question:** Can students apply for DSA before they receive an offer?

**Answer:** Yes and we would encourage partners and colleagues to advise their students to do so, following the advice in the previous answer.

**Question:** There will be students who will need to change their course and or their institution once they receive an offer. How do they update Student Finance England with this information?

**Answer:** Students can update their course and / or institution information by logging into their online account and making their changes or by completing a change of circumstance form.

**Question:** Do students need to complete a 'top up' DSA1 form if they will not graduate until after the start of a new, Autumn academic year (for example a postgraduate student due to graduate in October)?

**Answer:** No. Academic years begin in the Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer and last for 12 months, students only need to complete one DSA application form for the year they are attending.

### The renewal application process for students applying for DSA

**Question:** For returning students who have applied for DSA in previous years, do they need to re-apply?

**Answer:** No. The only students who need to re-apply for DSA each year are students who are part time, post graduate or 'DSA only' students (i.e. students who are not applying for maintenance loans / grants or a tuition fee loan). These students need to apply each year by completing the DSA1 form available on [direct.gov.co.uk](http://direct.gov.co.uk).

Undergraduate students who are applying for maintenance loans / grants and / or a tuition fee loan do not need to complete a DSA1 form to renew their application for DSA. Support will automatically be in place for each year of their course as per the recommendations of the Needs Assessment report. Any general allowance claims need to be accompanied by the [claim form](#) which is downloadable from the direct.gov website and submitted with the receipts. This will only cease if the student withdraws, suspends or transfers and the DSA Team has to review the Needs Assessment recommendations.

## Consent to Share

**Question:** If a student has not indicated 'consent to share' on their DSA1 application form, can they subsequently give consent for their HEI, Needs Assessor or supplier/s to access information about their DSA application?

**Answer:** Yes. The student needs to download and complete a copy of the 'consent to share' page of the DSA1 application form, sign the declaration, ensure their Customer Reference number is entered on to the form and send it back to us.

Students must tick the three relevant boxes to give consent for our customer advisors to speak to the HEI, Needs Assessment Centre and or supplier. If the student does not tick the box relating to a specific area of consent, we cannot share their information.

Once this has been uploaded onto our systems, we can share information about the student's DSA application.

## Eligibility

**Question:** Are HEIs able to send proof of disability electronically? For example: scanned information.

**Answer:** Yes we will accept disability evidence electronically. Please make sure the electronic version is legible.

**Question:** Can proof of disability, sent electronically, be submitted by the disability practitioner, the disability officer or the student?

**Answer:** Yes, from all of the above.

## Needs Assessor recommendations

**Question:** What is meant by a needs assessor 'recommendation'?

**Answer:** A needs assessor's recommendation is a proposal from a needs assessor detailing the specific support which they feel is required, based on their expertise, to meet the needs of a disabled student.

**Question:** Will Student Finance England accept all the recommendations of the needs assessor?

**Answer:** Each case needs to be reviewed individually but we will support recommendations where there is clear justification. There may be times where we need to seek further clarity from the Needs Assessment Centre.

**Question:** What is meant by justification and how much information is required?

**Answer:** We require a clear explanation why the recommendation is being made and how it is relevant to the student's specific need (what is the benefit over other options etc).

The amount of information required will differ on a case by case basis dependant upon the student's circumstances, but we do not require extensive paragraphs of information. If, upon review, we feel more information is required, we will contact the needs assessor to discuss.

**Question:** I have had recommendations declined - why?

**Answer:** We cannot agree recommendations for support which conflict with our working guidance. DSAs are not intended to pay for:

- disability related expenditure that the student would incur even if they were not attending a course of higher education;
- costs that any student might have regardless of disability; and
- Services which can reasonably be expected to be provided by the student's institution.

There may also be other circumstances where it is felt what is being recommended is unreasonable or the justification does not adequately explain the relation to the student's need. In these circumstances, SFE will liaise with the needs assessor to seek further clarification.

**Question:** Can I make recommendations for specific suppliers?

**Answer:** The One Stop Shop suppliers (OSS) are accredited by DSA-QAG and operate within an assurance framework. SFE expect these suppliers to all adhere to the same agreed levels of service provision and would expect quotations to be 'like for like'. We would therefore question why a OSS supplier is being recommended over another.

SFE expect recommendations to be linked to meet the specific needs of the student but do accept that it may be appropriate in some circumstances to recommend specific suppliers over others i.e. no other supplier can offer that particular product/service which is a requirement to meet the student's need. There may also be cases where the student makes a specific request to use the specified supplier.

All recommendations are considered on a case by case basis.

**Question:** What about cases where suppliers are known to have delivered poor or faulty goods?

**Answer:** SFE understand that the One Stop Shop suppliers (OSS) operate within an assured framework and their performance is measured by a set of key performance indicators. If it is known that a student has received poor service or goods, then these cases must be brought to the attention of SFE so further investigation can take place.

**Question:** I'm unhappy that a recommendation has not been agreed. What can I do?

**Answer:** Please speak to your Assessment Centre Manager to discuss this. If it is felt appropriate to escalate further, please get in touch with Anthony Hill (DSA Manager – SFE).

## **Non-medical helper (NMH)**

**Question:** How do we communicate to students that they have a choice in who their non-medical helper is?

**Answer:** The assessor should recognise that where a student has already been working closely with a specific non-medical helper, the student can choose to continue working with this non-medical helper. Where this is a preference or choice of the student, this should then be recommended in the needs assessment report.

**Question:** Does that expand to other services, for example, if a particular trainer is more effective?

**Answer:** The regulations allow the students to make a choice about their preference. The needs assessor will advise the student of their options and a joint decision will be made within the recommendation of the needs assessment report. Provided there is appropriate justification within the needs assessment report, this will be supported by Student Finance England.

**Question:** With the change of the 10 hours rule, Needs Assessment Centres are now recommending a variety of hours to suit the individual students' needs. If 30 hours per year has been recommended, will Student Finance England support this?

**Answer:** We rely on the needs assessor to give us the information. If the needs assessor recommends 30 hours per year, we will support 30 hours per year where there is clear justification.

**Question:** If the Needs Assessment Centre recommend a flexible approach but up to a maximum of 30 hours per year, will Student Finance England support the recommendation?

**Answer:** We are aware that some students may need support one week and perhaps none for the following week. We will support flexibility where this suits the needs of the student.

**Question:** If we need to increase the amount of NMH support a student receives, how do we do this?

**Answer:** If, in consultation with the student and the NMH provider, it is considered appropriate to increase a student's previously recommended non-medical helper provision, we require written justification detailing the number of additional hours and the hourly cost. We will accept this

justification from the Disability Practitioner within HEI, the NMH provider or the Needs Assessment Centre.

**Question:** How will you counterbalance the very obvious fiscal incentive for the support provider to persuade the student that they require an increase in the previously recommended NMH?

**Answer:** We allow NMH suppliers to agree additional support recommendations (with clear justification) on the understanding that NMH suppliers are often in the best place to understand the student's requirements. We have a responsibility to closely monitor costs and there may be times where we need to contact the supplier, the Disability Officer or the student for further information about NMH recommendations. We want to build good working relationships with all parties involved and will use our own experience to identify 'the reasonable' from the 'unreasonable', contacting the supplier, Disability Officer or student if necessary.

**Question:** If an HEI asks for additional resources, other than NMH support, does the HEI need to notify the needs assessment centre of the student's requirements? Or can the disability practitioner make a request straight to Student Finance England?

**Answer:** SFE will accept recommendations from the Disability Team within the HEI for a change to the General Allowance. For additional equipment or software, the HEI will need to refer back to the Needs Assessment Centre and ask that they submit notification, with justification, direct to Student Finance England.

**Question:** If a student starts their course at an HEI before they have their Needs Assessment, will Student Finance England support non-medical helper support put in place by the HEI?

**Answer:** If Non-medical Helper support is put in place with the HEI's assistance, prior to the student's Needs Assessment Report being implemented or agreed, Student Finance England will agree to reimburse the HEI's costs where there is a recommendation within the Needs Assessment Report for the support. Student Finance England acknowledge that there maybe circumstances where a student's non-medical helpers support may have to be put in place prior to the student attending a Needs Assessment Centre. Student Finance England will support the student, and their choice of non-medical helper supplier, whether this is the original provider for continuity or an alternative choice. As highlighted at the recent DSA Seminars May 2010, Student Finance England will agree to fund non-medical helper costs where the student has identified their choice even if that means the choice is more costly.

**Question:** Who takes responsibility for monitoring a student's DSA spend, where they might exceed the maximum for non-medical help support and where money might be paid to more than one supplier?

**Answer:** We have put in place a new process to make us more proactive in monitoring spending and alerting the HEI / NMH supplier and the student when support levels are rapidly diminishing. We have established a dedicated payments and claims team who are responsible for managing all payments and monitoring spend and have set tolerance levels which, when reached, will trigger the escalation of the case and result in contact being made.

**Question:** Do we still need to submit Individual Learning Plans?

**Answer:** No, we no longer need Individual learning plans.

## **Non Medical Helper - invoicing and timesheets**

**Question:** Can HEIs and NMH suppliers send scanned copies (electronic versions) of invoices to SFE? Are signed timesheets still required?

**Answer:** Yes, we accept scanned / electronic versions of invoices and they must be accompanied by signed timesheets from the student and the NMH support worker which can also be sent electronically.

**Question:** What if a student has not signed their timesheet or has not attended a session?

**Answer:** Generally, we must have signed timesheets before we can make a payment. However, in exceptional circumstances, we may accept confirmation from the Disability Adviser along with an explanation of the circumstances for a non signature. This is at the discretion of the DSA Manager at Student Finance England.

**Question:** What happens if a student misses a session and does not contact the provider to cancel?

**Answer:** SFE expects that providers of NMH support have robust procedures for monitoring attendance and reasons for any non-attendance should be reported on the timesheet. If a student has missed a session and did not give notice within the provider's cancellation timeframe, SFE will still make payment as long as clear justification has been provided.

If the student has missed more than two sessions in the academic year, without any justification, we require that support be put on hold whilst the circumstances are looked into. SFE will look to work in partnership with the Disability advisor at the HEI and/or NMH provider to seek reassurance that the circumstances have been discussed with the student and attendance strategies are agreed for the future.

SFE will only pay up to a maximum of two missed sessions where no justification has been provided. We do advise the student of this and inform them that they may be liable for the cost of future cancelled sessions where no justification is given. We also remind the student of the importance of cancelling the session with proper notice - although we do appreciate that this is not always feasible.

**Question:** Can NMH suppliers charge additional costs for travel and parking on top of their agreed rates?

**Answer:** No, these costs should be quantified and factored into business costs by NMH providers.

## Foundation courses

**Question:** Do students who have completed a foundation degree and are doing a top up year need a new needs assessment?

**Answer:** If the needs assessment report is more than two years old we will ask for a new needs assessment. However, if the course doesn't differ very much from the foundation degree the original needs assessment may be sufficient, we would ask the student to contact Student Finance England for further advice.

## NHS courses

**Question:** If a student is on an NHS course can they apply for DSA?

**Answer:** If a student is undertaking an NHS course and has received a bursary they can't apply for DSA through SFE. These students should be encouraged to contact the NHS to discuss further support. The exception to this is students seconded to the NHS.

**Question:** For students on a secondment with the NHS, what do they need to provide to apply for DSA?

**Answer:** NHS secondees are eligible to apply for the Disabled Students Allowance. They need a letter from the NHS or the Trust they are working for to confirm their status.

## Sandwich Courses

**Question:** Can students on sandwich courses apply for DSA?

**Answer:** Students on part-year or unpaid placements where the period of study is 10 weeks or more in aggregate can apply for DSA.

Where, in any academic year of a sandwich course, a student's period of full-time study is less than 10 weeks, the student is not eligible to receive DSA unless the period of work experience is an unpaid placement.

For more information on eligibility for students on sandwich courses see:

HE Student Finance Disabled Student Allowances guidance for 2011/2012  
[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2009/uksi\\_20091555\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2009/uksi_20091555_en_1)