

Bridging the Gap:

A guide to the Disabled
Students' Allowances
(DSAs) in higher education
2010/2011



student finance england

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What is Student Finance England?

Student Finance England is a partnership between the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills and the Student Loans Company Ltd. It provides financial support, on behalf of the UK Government, to English students entering higher education in the UK.

What is student finance?

If you're thinking about going into higher education, you're also probably thinking about how you are going to pay for it. Student Finance England offers all kinds of financial help so that you can make the most of your time at university or college without having to worry about money.

Student finance can be money or services to help you with your tuition fees and living costs while you're studying in higher education. It can include grants, loans and bursaries. But different student finance packages are available depending on whether you are studying full-time or part-time, or on an undergraduate or postgraduate course. There's also extra help, in the form of Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs), for people with disabilities, mental-health conditions (for example, depression or anxiety) or specific learning difficulties (for example, dyslexia or dyspraxia).

Who is this guide for?

This guide provides information about DSAs for current and prospective students in higher education whose homes are in England. Similar arrangements apply if you live in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Wales: **www.studentfinancewales.co.uk**

Northern Ireland: **www.studentfinancenir.co.uk**

Scotland: **www.saas.gov.uk**

JENNY, 19

I'm currently studying

AS Level Music and Drama

The best thing about the courses I'm taking is

being able to perform, I love being the centre of attention!

I want to go to university because

it's the first step in my television career

At university I want to study

BA Media Studies

When I'm at university I want to live

at home with my family

At the moment I live with

my mother, stepfather and two brothers

I've been told that our household income is

£25,000 and because I am dyslexic I can get Disabled Students' Allowances to help buy a laptop and help with other course related costs.



What are DSAs for?

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

DSAs can be awarded if you:

- are on full-time or part-time undergraduate courses (degree or HND-level) including Open University and other distance-learning courses; or
- are on certain full-time or part-time postgraduate courses (which you need a degree or equivalent to get onto) including Open University and other distance-learning courses; and
- can prove that you have a disability, mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty which affects your ability to study.

This guide explains:

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

The information in this booklet is for guidance only and does not cover all circumstances.

If you need more help and you applied for student finance through your local authority last year, you should contact your local authority. If you are a new student or you have previously applied through Student Finance England, phone us on **0845 300 50 90** (textphone: **0845 604 4434**). If you are an Open University (OU) student, phone the OU on **01908 654 136**.

You can get versions of this guide in large print, braille and audio, free of charge, by phoning our publication line on **0800 731 9133** (textphone: **0800 328 8988**) quoting reference SFE/BTGB/V10.

What if I do not want to tell my university or college about my disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty?

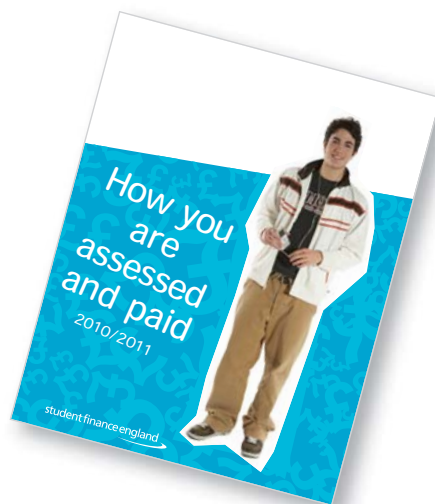
The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) has made it illegal for universities and colleges to discriminate against disabled students by treating them less favourably when offering places and providing services. Under the act, universities and colleges must make 'reasonable adjustments' so that disabled students are not seriously disadvantaged compared with other students who are not disabled.

This means that you can tell your university or college about your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty, in complete confidence, to make sure that you receive the support you need. However, if you do not want to tell your university or college, you should include a letter with your DSA application form to tell us this.

Do I qualify?

Summary

This section gives some brief information about the rules governing whether you are eligible to receive DSAs. If you would like more detailed information about whether you can get student finance, you can also get a copy of the guide 'How you are assessed and paid' from the website at **www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance** or by calling our publication line on **0800 731 9133** quoting reference S/HYAP/V10.



You may be eligible for DSAs if all of the following apply.

- You meet the personal eligibility conditions for receiving student finance.
- You are on an eligible:
 - full-time **undergraduate** course (including a distance-learning course);
 - part-time **undergraduate** course (including a distance-learning 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;
 - taught or research **postgraduate** course (including a distance-learning course); or
 - Initial Teacher Training course
- To study on your course you have to pay extra costs because of a disability, mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty.

You **cannot** get DSAs if:

- you are an EU student and are only eligible for support with your fees;
- you are a sandwich-course student on a full-year paid placement;
- you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student and are eligible for a Department of Health, NHS or other health-care bursary;
- you are a postgraduate student receiving a bursary or award from a research council;
- you are a postgraduate student who will get the NHS Business Services Authority's bursary for students on postgraduate social-work courses; or
- you are a postgraduate student receiving a bursary or award from your university or college which includes support that is equal to DSAs.

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.

You cannot have DSAs for more than one course at the same time.

Any previous study will not affect your eligibility for DSAs, even if you received financial support. However, if DSAs provided any specialist equipment for a previous course, this will be taken into account.

There is no age limit on receiving DSAs, and if you are 60 or over you may be eligible for them even if you are not eligible for a Maintenance Loan.

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. However, you may be able to study fewer than 60 credit points in some years as long as you make up the difference in other years and can still complete the course in no more than twice the time it would take to complete an equivalent full-time course.

How do I show that I am eligible?

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.

If you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you must provide evidence in the form of a 'diagnostic assessment' from a psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher. If you have had a diagnostic assessment in the past, it may need to be updated. Your diagnostic assessment must meet certain requirements. For more information, contact us, your local authority or the Open University (if you are an OU student).

You will have to pay for any tests to prove that you are eligible for DSAs. If you need a test but cannot afford to pay for it, you may be able to get financial help through your university or college's Access to Learning Fund.

What help can I get?

Summary

Disabled Students' Allowances can help pay the extra costs you may have on your course because of a disability, mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty. There is a range of help available and a description of this help is set out below. The rates on this page are the maximum amounts you can get. The DSAs you receive will depend on a 'needs assessment' (see page 23 for more details).

This section only gives details of the DSAs available. For details of all other student finance you should see our other publications. These are listed on page 25 of this guide.



Undergraduate students

Specialist equipment allowance

What is it for?

To help buy any equipment you may need. You can also use it to pay for repairs, technical support, insurance or extended warranty costs arising from owning that equipment.

How much can I get?

How much you can get does not depend on your income, or that of your family, but it will depend on your needs assessment.

The table below shows the maximum amount of help available.

Full-time	Up to £5,161 for the whole course
Part-time	Up to £5,161 for the whole course

Specialist equipment allowance continued

How is it paid?	The money will be paid into your bank account or direct to the equipment supplier.
Do I have to pay it back?	No.
Anything else?	<p>The rates shown are the maximum you can get. The amount that you get will depend on your circumstances.</p> <p>Student Finance England (or your local authority or the OU) can also refund any costs you have for renting, rather than buying, items of equipment if this is more economical.</p> <p>You may be able to get items of specialist equipment recommended in your needs assessment before the start of your course so that you can use them from the very beginning of your studies. However, you will need to prove that you have been accepted on your course.</p> <p>If you need more help or advice, you can call us. Or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your university or college.</p>

Non-medical helper allowance

What is it for?	This allowance may provide for helpers such as readers, sign-language interpreters, note-takers and other non-medical assistants you need to use to benefit fully from your course.	
How much can I get?	How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family, but it will depend on your needs assessment. The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.	
	Full-time	Up to £20,520 a year
	Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate, depending on the workload of a part-time course, up to £15,390 a year
How is it paid?	The money will be paid into your bank account or direct to the supplier of the service (for example, your university or college).	
Do I have to pay it back?	No.	
Anything else?	The rates shown are the maximum you can get. The amount that you get will depend on your circumstances. If you need more help or advice, you can call us. Or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your university or college.	

General allowance

What is it for?	This allowance can 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 specialist equipment and non-medical helper allowances, if necessary.					
How much can I get?	<p>How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family, but it will depend on your needs assessment. The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.</p> <table><tr><td>Full-time</td><td>Up to £1,724 a year</td></tr><tr><td>Part-time</td><td>A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,293 a year</td></tr></table>		Full-time	Up to £1,724 a year	Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,293 a year
Full-time	Up to £1,724 a year					
Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,293 a year					
How is it paid?	The money will be paid into your bank account or direct to the supplier of the services (for example, your university, college or equipment supplier).					
Do I have to pay it back?	No.					
Anything else?	<p>The rates shown are the maximum you can get. The amount that you get will depend on your circumstances.</p> <p>If you need more help or advice, you can call us. Or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your university or college.</p>					

Travel allowance

What is it for?	This allowance is to pay for any extra travel costs you may have to attend your university or college because of your disability. You will not be eligible for help with everyday travel costs which any student would expect to pay.	
How much can I get?	How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family.	
	Full-time	Reasonable spending on extra travel costs
	Part-time	Reasonable spending on extra travel costs
How is it paid?	The money will be paid into your bank account or direct to the supplier of the services (for example a taxi firm).	
Do I have to pay it back?	No.	
Anything else?	If you need more help or advice, you can call us. Or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your chosen university or college.	

For full-time and part-time postgraduate students

For both full-time and part-time postgraduate students there is a single DSA allowance to meet costs of up to £10,260 a year. You can use this for specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, extra travel costs or other course-related costs. The amount of DSA you receive will depend on your needs assessment.

Initial Teacher Training Courses (ITT)

If you are already on an ITT course, you can apply for the same package of DSA support you have received in previous years. From 1 September 2010, students who start a full-time ITT course will be eligible for the standard full-time support package, including the full-time DSA package. Students who start a part-time ITT course on or after 1 September 2010 are eligible for the standard part-time student support package, including part-time DSA.

Benefits

Most full-time students cannot get income-related benefits such as Income Support or Housing Benefit. However, certain groups (including single parents, student couples with dependent children and some disabled students) may be able to get income-related benefits while they are studying. Jobcentre Plus and your local authority's Housing Benefit section will take account of most of any Maintenance Loan (and some student grants) that you are entitled to. If you receive the Special Support Grant, this will not be taken into account.

There is a free and confidential Benefit Enquiry Line for people with disabilities and their carers. The number is **0800 882 200** (textphone: **0800 243 355**).

You can also contact **Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities**, for information on benefits and studying. You can find contact details for Skill on page 26 of this guide.



How do I apply?

Summary

So now you know what financial support is available, how do you get it?

This section tells you how and when to apply for DSAs, who you should send your application form to, and how to get a needs assessment.

Note: if you applied for student finance through your local authority last year, send your application to your local authority. If you are a new student or you have previously applied through Student Finance England, send your application for DSAs to us. Open University Students should apply direct to the Open University's DSA office.



Step 1

Fill in the Disabled Students' Allowances application form.

Send your form and evidence to us or your local authority.

Step 2

We (or your local authority) will assess your application and send you a letter to let you know if you qualify.

Step 3

You should have a needs assessment.

Step 4

We will send you a letter to let you know what DSAs you can get.

Key to the diagram

 **The student**

 **Student Finance England**

Full-time undergraduate students

Step 1

You should apply for DSAs as soon as possible. You do not have to wait until you have a confirmed place, although you can apply for DSAs at any stage of your course.

When you are applying for student finance, the application form asks if you want to apply for DSAs. If on your application you have stated that you want to apply for DSAs, we (or your local authority) will send you a separate Disabled Students' Allowances application form for you to provide information about your disability, mental-health condition, or specific learning difficulty.

If you are applying for DSAs only, you can download the application form from the website at www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance. You can also get copies from your local authority or by phoning our publication line on **0800 731 9133** (textphone: **0800 328 8988**). You can get versions in large print, braille and audio by phoning our publication line.

We (or your local authority) will need evidence of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty (see 'How do I show that I am eligible?' on page 11). If you don't have evidence yet, you can always send evidence of your disability at a later date.

Step 2

We will assess your application and send you a letter to let you know whether or not you are eligible for DSAs. If you are eligible for DSAs you will need to have a needs assessment to identify the help you need on your course.

The needs assessment will be carried out at an independent assessment centre, or at a centre within your university or college, by a person with specialist knowledge. The assessment can be arranged well before the start of term, and even before you have a confirmed place at university or college. However, you should not arrange a needs assessment until we (or your local authority or the OU) tell you to do so and that your choice of assessment centre is approved. Details of your nearest needs assessment centre are given on the Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG) website at **www.dsa-qag.org.uk**.

Step 3

After your needs assessment you will receive a report which identifies 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 have to be agreed with Student Finance England (or your local authority or the OU). The report will also identify any training you might need to make best use of the equipment recommended.

Step 4

We will send you a letter to tell you whether any specialist equipment and other support that has been recommended in your needs assessment can be paid for from DSAs. We will also give you instructions for ordering equipment or arranging other support.

Part-time undergraduate students and postgraduate students (but not OU students)

If you are a part-time undergraduate student, or a postgraduate student, and you want to apply for DSAs, you should fill in the Disabled Students' Allowances application form and send it to us (or your local authority). You can download the form from our website or get one by phoning our publication line on **0800 731 9133** (textphone: **0800 328 8988**). You can get versions in large print, braille and audio by phoning our publication line. You should then follow steps 2 to 4 shown on the previous page.

Open University students

You should apply direct to the Open University's Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) office. If you have told the Open University that you have a disability, mental-health condition or a specific learning difficulty, the OU's DSA Office will automatically send you all the information you need to apply for DSAs. You will need to send your filled-in form, and any relevant documents, back to the Open University's DSA Office. Or you can apply online at **www.open.ac.uk/financialsupport/apply**

How to find out more

You can get extra copies of this guide and the following student finance guides by:

- calling our publication line on **0800 731 9133** (textphone: **0800 328 8988**); or
- visiting the website at **www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance** and downloading a copy.

You can also get copies in braille, on audio and in large print.

Information about help for new full-time students

Get the guide 'A guide to financial support for full-time higher education students – new full-time students' (reference S/FSHE/V10).

Information about help for existing full-time students

Get the guide 'A guide to financial support for full-time higher education students – existing full-time students' (reference S/FSHER/V10).

Information about help for part-time student

Get the guide 'A guide to financial support for part-time students in higher education' (reference S/FSPT/V10).

Help for students with children or adult dependants

Get the guide 'Childcare Grant and other support for full-time student parents in higher education' (reference S/CCGB/V10).

Information about student loans

Get the guide 'Student Loans - a guide to terms and conditions' (reference S/SLTC/V10).

Contacting us

You can phone us on **0845 300 5090** (textphone: **0845 604 4434**) between 8am and 8pm Monday to Friday, and between 9am and 5.30pm on Saturdays and Sundays.

Other useful contacts

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Skill is a national charity promoting opportunities in further or higher education, training and employment for young people and adults with any kind of disability or long-term medical condition.

Unit 3, Floor 3
Radisson Court
219 Long Lane
London
SE1 4PR

Phone: **0800 328 5050**

Textphone: **0800 068 2422**

Email: info@skill.org.uk

Website: www.skill.org.uk

Skill's information service is available from 11.30am to 1.30pm on Tuesdays and from 1.30pm to 3.30pm on Thursdays. It can also answer questions on higher education and disability.

Open University (OU)

The OU DSA office deals with OU students who live in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Phone: **01908 654136**

Textphone: **01908 659955**

Email: DSA-queries@open.ac.uk

9am-5.30pm Monday - Thursday

9am - 5pm Fridays

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The **EHRC** helpline can give information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues.

EHRC Helpline

Freepost RRLL-GHUX-CTRX

Arndale House

Arndale Centre

Manchester

M4 3EQ

Phone: **0845 604 6610**

Textphone: **0845 604 6620**

Fax: **0845 604 6630**

(Lines are open from 9am to 5pm on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and from 9am to 8pm on Wednesdays.)

Visit the EHRC website at **www.equalityhumanrights.com**.

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