

# Disabled Students' Allowances

## Higher Education Student Finance in England 2013/14 Academic Year

March 2013

Dear Colleague

**2013/14 HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT SUPPORT IN ENGLAND IN 2013/14:  
DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCES (DSAs).**

Attached is revised guidance for the 2013/14 student finance implementation project: '**Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)**'. The attached chapter contains guidance on DSA legislation and the administration of DSA applications.

The chapter provides guidance on full-time DSAs, DSAs for full-time distance learning students, part-time DSAs and DSAs for postgraduate students (Part 12) as provided in **The Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011** as amended by the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2012. Guidance on other grants for living and other costs payable under Part 5 of the Regulations is provided separately in the guidance chapters 'Assessing Financial Entitlement' and 'Grants for Dependants and Travel Grants'. Also refer to the LA Portal User Guide for information on processing Non-Loan Products on the single system.

**This March version 1.2 has been updated at paragraph 77 in relation to study needs assessment for part-time students.**

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## Introduction

1. The Regulations referred to throughout this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 (as amended). This chapter provides guidance on the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for full-time students (regulation 40 & 41), full-time distance learning students (regulation 127), part-time students (regulation 147) and postgraduate students (Part 12 of the Regulations).
2. DSAs for full-time students are one of the grants for living and other costs payable under Part 5 of the Regulations. Guidance on the other grants payable under Part 5 can be found in the following guidance chapters:
  - 'Assessing Financial Entitlement' (Maintenance Grant, Special Support Grant and Higher Education Grant); and
  - 'Grants for Dependants and Travel Grants' (Adult Dependants' Grant, Childcare Grant, Parents' Learning Allowance and Travel Grant).

## Policy

### Full-time DSAs (regulation 40 & 41)

3. Under regulation 40 & 41, an eligible student qualifies for DSAs to assist with the additional expenditure that the Student Loans Company (SLC) is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to attend and undertake a designated course because of a disability. The four elements of DSAs detailed in the above regulations are intended to help a disabled student undertake their course on an equal basis to other students. The Regulations do not define disability, but all cases where extra costs are incurred in studying because of a disability (including a long-term health condition, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia) should be considered.
4. 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.

Further guidance about the scope of DSAs can be found at paragraph 87.

### Eligibility

5. The personal eligibility criteria for receiving full-time student support, including DSAs, are set out in the 'Assessing Eligibility Guidance' chapter.
6. DSAs are not subject to:

- an age limit;
  - previous study rules; or
  - income assessment.
7. A student can only receive support for a designated course. Where the eligible course does not appear on the HEI database, it will not be possible to fully process the application. Information on what action should be taken in this situation is covered in the 'General Eligibility and Financial Assessment Administration' guidance.
  8. Students are potentially eligible for DSAs whilst attending an overseas institution as part of their UK course, whether obligatory or optional.
  9. Students who are personally eligible for student support under paragraph 9 of Schedule 1 (i.e. nationals of member states of the European Community) but not under any other paragraph of that Schedule, are not eligible for DSAs.

#### **Prisoners**

10. Full-time students who are prisoners and who began designated course before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 are potentially eligible for DSAs but will not generally qualify for other grants for living and other costs under Part 5 of the Regulations (regulation 109(8) & (9)). See 'Grants for Dependants and Travel Grants' guidance chapter. No Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) (including DSAs for postgraduate courses) will be available to any prisoner who starts a course on or after 1 September 2012. The responsibility to provide assistance for disabled prisoners will lie with the Prison Service.

#### **Means-tested NHS bursaries**

11. Under regulation 38(4)(a), students are not eligible for grants for living and other costs for any academic year during which they are eligible to apply for NHS means-tested bursaries or similar awards bestowed under section 63 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968, article 44 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972 or sections 73(f) and 74(1) of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (if the latter is granted in respect of a course leading to a qualification in a healthcare profession other than as a medical doctor or a dentist). Students who are eligible to apply for an NHS bursary should be directed to the NHS Student Bursaries website at [www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk](http://www.nhsstudentgrants.co.uk) for information about the financial support available through the NHS Bursary Scheme. Or they can phone the NHS Student Bursaries Helpline on 0845 358 6655.

#### **Students who began an ITT course before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010**

12. Students who began an ITT course before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 which:
  - is at least one academic year in length; and
  - involves periods of full-time attendance (including teaching practice) that are in aggregate six weeks or more in the academic year;

are potentially eligible for grants for living and other costs. However, special rules apply to the Maintenance Grant and Special Support Grant (see 'Assessing Financial Entitlement' guidance chapter).

13. Students who began an ITT course before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 which:
- is at least one academic year in length; and;
  - involves periods of full-time attendance (including teaching practice) that are in aggregate less than six weeks in the academic year;

are not eligible for grants for living and other costs (regulation 38(4)(b)), with the exception of DSAs (regulation 38(5)). There are separate rates of DSAs for such students (regulation 41(4)) which are set out at paragraph 22. Students who do not qualify for a grant for living and other costs under regulation 38(4)(b) are eligible for a reduced rate maintenance loan which is not subject to income assessment (regulations 80(1)(b) & 80(2)(b)).

#### **Students who begin an ITT course on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010**

14. Where a student begins an ITT course on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010, the student support package available will depend on whether the course is either full-time or part-time. Designated full-time first degree and postgraduate ITT courses of at least one academic year in length will attract the same support package as full-time non-ITT first degree courses. Designated part-time first degree and postgraduate ITT courses of at least one academic year in length will attract the same part-time package as other part-time non-ITT first degree courses: for courses starting before 1 September 2012, a fee grant and a course grant and for courses starting on or after 1 September 2012, an up-front fee loan (see 'Support for Part-time Students' guidance chapter). Part-time ITT courses will also attract DSAs.

#### **Sandwich courses and work placements**

15. Students on part-year paid or unpaid placements where the periods of full-time study in the academic year are 10 weeks or more in aggregate are potentially eligible for DSAs. For example, DSAs could pay for additional disability related travel costs to and from the institution using the travel allowance and the additional support required for course work undertaken during the work placement. When a student is going on a work placement as part of their course, the DSA needs assessment should take this into account and, for example, consider the portability of equipment if students need to take it with them on the placement.
16. Under regulation 38(6) students are not eligible for grants for living and other costs, including DSAs, in any academic year of a sandwich course where the periods of full-time study are in aggregate less than 10 weeks (unless the period of work experience is an unpaid placement of a type specified in regulation 38(7)). Students who do not qualify for grants for living and other costs under regulation 38(6) are eligible for a reduced rate maintenance loan which is not subject to income assessment (regulation 80(1)(b) & 80(2)(b)).
17. Under regulation 38(7) students undertaking certain types of unpaid work experience in the public or voluntary sectors are potentially eligible for grants for living and other costs, including DSAs (even where the periods of full-time study in the academic year are less than 10 weeks in aggregate). See 'Assessing Eligibility Guidance'.

### Students who become eligible during the course

18. Under regulation 38(8) & 38(9), a student **may qualify** for DSAs from and including the academic year during which:
- the student's course becomes designated;
  - the student, their spouse, civil partner or their parent is recognised as a refugee or becomes a person with leave to enter or remain (in this context 'spouse' or 'civil partner' does not include a co-habiting partner of the student - also refer to the 'Assessing Eligibility' guidance);
  - the state of which the student is a national accedes to the European Community where the student has been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and Islands throughout the three-year period immediately preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course;
  - the student acquires the right of permanent residence;
  - the student becomes the child of a Turkish Worker;
  - the student becomes a person described in paragraph 6(1)(a) of Schedule 1; or
  - the student becomes the child of a Swiss national.

However, such a student is not eligible retrospectively. With the exception of the allowance for major items of specialist equipment, a student is not eligible for DSAs for quarters falling before, or in which, the date eligibility was acquired due to an event listed above. A student is not eligible for DSAs for academic years of the course falling **before** the academic year in which the events listed above occur.

### Full-time distance learning courses

19. Where disabled students undertake a full-time course by distance learning because their disability prevents them from attending an institution, they are treated as being in attendance on the course. Such students are potentially eligible for DSAs under regulation 40 & 41. They are also potentially eligible for the other elements of the full-time student support package (except travel grant).
20. Where disabled students undertake a full-time course by distance learning but are not compelled to study in this way because of their disability, they cannot be treated as being in attendance on the course. Such students are potentially eligible for DSAs under regulation 127 which are payable at the same full-time rates as those provided under regulation 41. Where the student commences their full time distance learning course prior to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012, they are also potentially eligible for a fee grant and course grant similar to those offered to eligible part-time students. Where the student commences their full time distance learning course on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 they will potentially be eligible for a tuition fee loan to cover the tuition fee charged, but no maintenance support. Such students will continue to be potentially eligible for DSAs under regulation 127 which as mentioned above are payable at the same full-time rates as those provided under regulation 41.

21. There is further guidance about full-time distance learning courses in the 'Assessing eligibility guidance 2013/14'.

**DSAs for students attending full-time courses or part-time courses of ITT (which began before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010)**

22. There are four allowances for students attending full-time courses or part-time ITT courses which began before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010. The maximum allowances that such students may receive in 2012/13 are given in the table below. Two of the allowances (non-medical helper allowance and general allowance) are lower for students attending part-time ITT courses which began before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 where the period of full-time attendance, including teaching practice, during the academic year aggregates less than six weeks.

Allowance	Maximum payable	
	Full-time	Part-time ITT course which began before 1 <sup>st</sup> September 2010 (less than 6 weeks attendance)
Specialist equipment allowance (for the duration of the course)	£5,161	£5,161
Non-medical helper allowance (each academic year)	£20,520	£15,390
General allowance (each academic year)	£1,724	£1,293
Travel allowance	Unlimited	Unlimited

23. There is no provision to pay more than the maximum allowances set out in the Regulations. It is not possible, therefore, to use unspent DSAs from a previous academic year or anticipate grant entitlement for a future academic year to pay more than the maximum allowances in the current academic year. Moreover, only the general allowance may be used to supplement expenditure on specialist equipment and non-medical helpers should the student's needs exceed the maximum allowances under the Regulations. The specialist equipment allowance, non-medical helper allowance and the travel allowance should be used for the sole purpose as named and should not be used to supplement other DSAs.

**Specialist equipment allowance**

24. The specialist equipment allowance (regulation 41(2)(b)) may be used to pay for major items of specialist equipment which the student will need, because of a disability, to undertake their course on an equal basis to other students. It may also be reasonable to meet associated insurance, extended warranty, repair and modification costs from the equipment allowance. Where students do not take out insurance and their equipment is stolen, the cost of replacing the stolen equipment will not normally be met from the DSAs. Students should therefore be advised to take out insurance cover for their DSA equipment. The insurance premiums can be paid from the DSA.

25. Students should also be advised to consider receiving some initial training in the use of any equipment to be purchased. Research has shown that many students start their courses without becoming familiar with specialist equipment and can face difficulties that could be avoided. The cost of training in the use of specialist equipment may be set against DSAs, subject to the maxima specified in the Regulations.
26. The specialist equipment allowance is for the duration of the course but, like other grants, has in the past been increased annually (however since AY 2009/10 this element of student finance has remained at the same level). This means that a student who had received the maximum grant for specialist equipment (£5,030) in 2008/09, could, subject to need, receive a further £131 for specialist equipment in **2013/14 (£5,161 - £5,030)** (maximum specialist equipment grant in 2008/09) = **£131**).

### **Course transfers and specialist equipment allowance**

27. It should be made clear to students that the specialist equipment allowance covers the whole course duration. If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any amount awarded for specialist equipment in relation to the first course would still need to be taken into account as the period of eligibility has not been broken. For example, a student receives £3,000 from the specialist equipment allowance but then transfers their eligibility to another course. Their specialist equipment entitlement for the second course should not exceed **£2,161**, as £3,000 has already been awarded for specialist equipment and given that **£5,161** for 2013/14 is the maximum specialist equipment allowance.
28. All equipment purchased with the help of this allowance is and remains the property of the student. It is open to the student, at the end of their course, to offer the equipment to their institution for the use of other students. Institutions are perfectly free to suggest that students make such gifts.

### **Non-medical helper allowance**

29. The non-medical helper allowance (regulation 41(2)(a)) may be used to pay for helpers such as readers, lip-speakers, note-takers, campus specific mobility trainers, and any non-medical helpers necessary for the student to undertake the course on an equal basis to other students and where the specialist support assessor is satisfied that they are needed because of the student's disability. Where the student has to make regular or frequent payments for a non-medical helper, it may be helpful to arrange for some of their grant payments to be made in corresponding instalments. If grant payments are made in instalments, inform the student, or their institution, how such transactions should be recorded and verified for audit purposes.
30. The provision for the non-medical helper allowance does not remove the duty of local social services to provide assistance towards personal care costs that would have been incurred irrespective of a student's attendance on a course. However, in some circumstances a personal carer may also provide course-related help for a student. In such cases it may be appropriate to share the cost of the course-related help provided by the carer with the social services. The non-medical helper allowance should not be

used to pay for support that should properly be funded by social services.

### **General allowance**

31. The general allowance (regulation 41(2)(d)) may be used both for miscellaneous expenditure not covered by the other allowances and to supplement the specialist equipment allowance and non-medical helper allowance, if necessary.

### **Travel allowance**

32. The travel allowance (regulation 41(2)(c)) may be used to pay the additional costs of travel to and from the institution which are incurred because of a disability. For example, if a student needs to travel by taxi rather than by public transport because of mobility or visual difficulties, then the DSAs will cover the additional expenditure that represents. In this instance, the amount of travel allowance should be any excess between public transport costs and taxi costs for the journey.
33. Some students may be required as a result of a disability to use a private car to travel to and from the institution. In this instance, the amount of travel allowance should be any excess between public transport costs and the cost of the same journey by car. For the purpose of deciding the cost of the journey by car, it is recommended that the cost of the journey is calculated by using the mid point range of AA motoring costs which includes an element for wear and tear on the car. This is currently (financial year 2012/13) **28p per mile**.
34. The specialist support assessor will need to be satisfied that the travel expenditure arises in each case solely by reason of a disability to which the student is subject. The travel allowance should not be used to meet non-disability related travel expenditure incurred by a disabled student. For example, it is unlikely that a dyslexic student will incur additional travel expenditure as a result of their specific learning difficulty. A disabled student may still qualify for Travel Grant (regulations 48 - 55) in the same way as any other student (see the 'Grants for Dependents and Travel Grants' guidance chapter 2013/14).

### **Processing DSAs on the LA Portal**

35. A payment limit is set for each of the DSAs up to the maximum for each allowance, including top ups from the general allowance. Once the payment limits have been set in accordance with the needs assessment recommendations, payments will be made against those limits.

### **Part-time DSAs (regulation 147)**

36. Under regulation 147 an eligible part-time student qualifies for DSAs to assist with the additional expenditure that SLC is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake (i.e. to attend or study by distance learning) a designated part-time course because of a disability. DSAs for students undertaking a part-time course with the Open University are currently administered by the Open University and not by SLC.

37. The part-time DSA scheme closely follows that for full-time students. However there are, necessarily, some differences and these are explained below.

### Eligibility

38. Like the full-time DSAs, previous study rules do not apply to part-time DSAs; they are available to eligible part-time students regardless of age and are not income assessed. For details of the personal eligibility criteria for receiving part-time support, including part-time DSAs, please refer to the guidance chapter 'Grants for part-time students'.
39. From AY 2013/14, students who begin part time courses on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 must be studying at a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the academic year to be eligible for PT DSAs. (Regulation 147(4))

### Designated part-time courses

40. To be eligible for support, including DSAs, a student must be undertaking a designated part-time course. The criteria for course designation in respect of part-time support, including part-time DSAs, are set out in the 'Support for part-time students – policy guidance 13/14' guidance chapter.

### DSAs for students undertaking part-time courses

41. There are four allowances for students undertaking part-time courses. The maximum allowances that part-time students may receive in 2013/14 are given in the table below. However, the maximum amount of the non-medical helper allowance and general allowance will be calculated as a percentage of the full-time rates, according to the actual intensity of study. Some examples of the maximum amounts available are given below.

Allowance	Maximum payable	
Specialist equipment allowance (for the duration of the course)	£5,161	
Non-medical helper allowance (each academic year)	£15,390	75% of a FT course = £15,390 60% of a FT course = £12,312 50% of a FT course = £10,260 25% of a FT course = £5,130
General allowance (each academic year)	£1,293	75% of a FT course = £1,293 60% of a FT course = £1,034 50% of a FT course = £862 25% of a FT course = £431
Travel allowance	Unlimited	

42. There are no provisions within the Regulations to pay more than the maximum allowances for the academic year. Please refer to the guidance in respect of full-time DSAs at paragraphs 23 & 25.

**Students whose status as an eligible (full-time) student is converted to that of an eligible part-time student (regulation 152(1)-(4))**

43. When a student transfers from a full-time to a part-time course, their status must be converted from an eligible full-time student to that of an eligible part-time student. Where a student transfers from a full-time to a part-time course part way through the academic year:
- a) no instalment of **full-time** DSAs is payable after the student became an eligible part-time student;
  - b) the maximum amounts of part-time DSAs are reduced by one third where the student became an eligible part-time student during the second quarter of the academic year and by two thirds where they became an eligible part-time student in a later quarter of that year; and
  - c) where full-time DSAs have been paid to the student in a single instalment, the maximum amount of the corresponding part-time DSAs payable to them are reduced by the amount of full-time DSAs already paid (or further reduced if paragraph (b) above applies). If the resulting amount is nil or a negative amount, the part-time DSA is not payable.

**Students whose status as an eligible part-time student is converted to that of an eligible (full-time) student (regulation 152(12)-(13))**

44. When a student transfers from a part-time to a full-time course, their status must be converted from an eligible part-time student to that of an eligible full-time student. Where a student transfers from a part-time to a full-time course part way through the academic year:
- a) no instalment of **part-time** DSAs is payable after the student became an eligible full-time student;
  - b) the maximum amounts of any full-time DSAs are reduced by one third where the student became an eligible full-time student during the second quarter of the academic year and by two thirds where they became an eligible full-time student in a later quarter of that year; and
  - c) where part-time DSAs have been paid to the student in a single instalment, the maximum amount of the corresponding full-time DSAs payable to them are reduced by the amount of part-time DSAs already paid (or further reduced if paragraph (b) above applies). If the resulting amount is nil or a negative amount, the full-time DSA is not payable.

DSAs for postgraduate students

45. Under part 12 of the Regulations an eligible postgraduate student qualifies for DSAs to assist with the additional expenditure that SLC is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake (i.e. to attend or study by distance learning) a designated full- or part-time postgraduate course because of a disability. DSAs for students undertaking a postgraduate course with the Open University are currently administered by the Open University and not by SLC.
46. The postgraduate DSA scheme closely follows that for undergraduate students. However there are, necessarily, some differences and these are explained below.

47. Regulation 166 provides for a DSA of up to **£10,260** for the academic year **2013/14** to be paid to eligible postgraduate students undertaking designated full- and part-time postgraduate courses. There is no statutory provision to pay a postgraduate student in excess of **£10,260** during academic year 2013/14. There are no specific limits within the maximum **£10,260** on particular items or type of help on which the grant can be spent. The allowance is awarded depending on the recommendations of the needs assessment carried out by an assessment centre or other such body. The cost of the needs assessment can be paid for from the postgraduate DSA, but as with undergraduate DSAs, it cannot be used to pay for establishing a student's disability. The postgraduate DSA may be spent on specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, other general support or additional travel costs, or a combination of the above, up to the maximum amount for the academic year.

### Eligibility

48. Like the undergraduate DSAs, previous study rules do not apply to postgraduate DSAs; they are available to eligible postgraduate students regardless of age and are not income assessed. To be eligible for the postgraduate DSA students must meet the personal criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations and undertake a designated postgraduate course (see paragraph 53).
49. Postgraduate students studying by distance learning are eligible for DSAs, but only if the course is undertaken in the United Kingdom (regulation 159(11)). Students undertaking courses on a distance learning basis are deemed to be studying at their home address. Therefore, to receive DSAs postgraduate distance learners must remain living in the United Kingdom whilst undertaking their course.
50. Under regulation 159(4), a postgraduate student is not eligible for DSAs if they:
- a) are eligible to apply for a -
    - NHS bursary or award under section 63 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 or article 44 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972;
    - allowance under the Nursing and Midwifery Student Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 1992;
    - allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by a Research Council (a list of the relevant Research Councils is provided at Annex 1);
    - allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by their institution which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability (excluding financial assistance received from their institution's Access to Learning Fund);
    - the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) bursary for students on postgraduate social-work courses which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability;
  - b) are in breach of an obligation to repay a student loan;
  - c) have not ratified an agreement for a student loan made with them when they were under the age of 18; or

- d) have shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support.
51. Under regulation 159(18) an eligible postgraduate student is not eligible for support for more than one designated course at a time.

### **Designated postgraduate courses for DSAs**

52. Regulation 161(1) provides the criteria for course designation in respect of postgraduate DSAs. The requirements are:
- a first degree or higher qualification should be an entry requirement to the course;
  - a course duration of at least one academic year;
  - where the course commences on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012, if the course is part-time, it must be of a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the academic year and ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than four times the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course;
  - where the course commences before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012, if the course is part-time, it must be ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than twice the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course;
  - the course is provided by a UK institution maintained or assisted by public funds;
  - the course is not an initial teacher training course or a course taken as part of an employment-based teacher training scheme.
53. Courses need to be provided by publicly funded institutions in order to be automatically designated, although courses at other institutions may be designated on application to the Department. Full and part-time Legal Practice courses and Bar Vocational courses are designated courses under the Regulations as the entry requirement to such courses is a first degree or higher. However, some of these courses are provided by private institutions which have been designated specifically for postgraduate DSAs. A list of postgraduate courses provided by private institutions which have been designated so that students may receive DSA support is provided on SFE practitioners website at <http://practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PPIPG001/PPIPS001/PPIPS036/PPIPS069/1.DOC>
54. Students on postgraduate ITT courses are potentially eligible for DSAs under the full-time or part-time scheme. They *are not* therefore eligible for the postgraduate DSA.
55. The Secretary of State may designate courses for the award of postgraduate DSA that are not automatically designated under the Regulations. An institution will be required to apply to the Department in the same way as for undergraduate courses, giving evidence of course aims and validation of the qualification. Eligible students on courses that are designated during the academic year will only be eligible for DSAs for the quarters following the award of designation, with the exception of the specialist equipment allowance.

## Periods of eligibility

56. Regulation 162 provides for DSAs to be paid for the period ordinarily required to complete the course (subject to the course satisfying the requirement of regulation 161). If a student withdraws from the course, abandons or is expelled from the course the period of eligibility is terminated and no further support should be paid.
57. Where the part-time course begins before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 and where a student intends at the outset to complete a part-time postgraduate course in not more than twice the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the academic year during which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe. (See examples 1, 2 and 3 below). Where the part-time course begins on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012 and where a student intends at the outset to complete a part-time postgraduate course in not more than four times the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the academic year during which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe. (see example 4)

**Example 1:** Student A studies part-time for a Masters degree (which takes 1 year to complete studying full-time) for two years and then studies part-time for a PhD (which takes three years to complete studying full-time) for a further six years. As the duration of each of the two part-time postgraduate courses does not exceed twice the period normally required to complete its full-time equivalent, student A is eligible to receive support for the whole of that time.

**Example 2:** Student B undertakes the same two courses. However, while student B studies part-time for the Masters degree for two years, they then study part-time for the PhD for eight years. As the PhD normally takes three years to complete full-time, the duration of the part-time PhD exceeds twice the period normally required to complete its full-time equivalent and is therefore not designated for support. Student B is only eligible for support for the two years of the Masters degree.

**Example 3:** Student C states an intention to study part-time for a PhD for six years. The equivalent full-time PhD would take three years. The student is awarded the DSA in years one to five of the course as the part-time study is at least 50% of a full-time course. However during the fifth year the student's pattern of part-time study changes so that they now require a further three years part-time study to complete the course, making eight years in total. This period exceeds twice the period normally required to complete an equivalent full-time course and so the student cannot receive DSA support for the final three years of the course. Their eligibility will cease at the end of the fifth year.

**Example 4:** Student D states an intention to study part-time for a PhD for 12 years. The equivalent full-time PhD would take three years. The student is awarded the DSA in years one to eleven of the course as the part-time study is at least 25% of a full-time course. However during the 11<sup>th</sup> year the student's pattern of part-time study changes and they reduce intensity to below 25%. This will effectively make the period of study exceed four times the period normally required to complete a full-time course and means the student cannot receive any further DSA

support. Their eligibility will cease from when the intensity drops below 25%.

58. It is for higher education institutions (HEIs) to decide whether a postgraduate course is full-time or part-time and whether a part-time course takes more than twice (where the course begins before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012) or where the course takes more than four times the period ordinarily required (where the course begins on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012) to complete a full-time course leading to the same qualification.
59. The period of eligibility may be terminated where the eligible postgraduate student has shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support.
60. SLC may also terminate the period of eligibility or decide that a student no longer qualifies for an amount of grant if a student has failed to comply with a request to provide information or provided information that they know is false. If the provisions in regulation 162(8) are used, support already paid to the student may be treated as an overpayment for recovery under regulation 168.

#### **Transfer of eligibility**

61. Regulation 163 provides for eligible postgraduate students to transfer their eligibility to another postgraduate course. A transfer is permitted provided that the period of eligibility for the first course has not expired or been terminated and a request to transfer eligibility is made by the student. It is also a requirement that the exporting institution recommends a transfer in writing and that the importing institution agrees to the transfer. If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any DSA amount awarded for the first course would need to be taken into account for the second course as the period of eligibility has not been broken. For example, a student receives support of £3,000 but transfers to another course. For the remainder of the academic year, the student has **£7,260** remaining (**£10,260** maximum grant available less £3,000 already received for the first course). Students transferring courses may continue to receive support without the necessity of a further needs assessment unless their disability has changed in some way or the course is substantially different.

#### **Students moving directly from undergraduate to postgraduate study**

62. Where a student has just graduated and is proceeding directly to postgraduate study, the DSA needs assessment that was undertaken in respect of the undergraduate course should in most cases be sufficient to identify the student's support needs in respect of the postgraduate course. This means, for example, that the student could continue to receive support from non-medical helpers without the necessity of a new needs assessment. If any student wishes to undergo a new needs assessment because their disability has changed in some way or the course is substantially different, this can be paid for from the postgraduate DSA. However, any needs assessment must be agreed by SFE before it takes place. DSAs will not cover the cost of needs assessments that are undertaken without prior approval from SFE.

63. If a student is recommended new equipment via a new needs assessment, any equipment the student received as an undergraduate must be taken into account, having regard to how recently the equipment was bought. Requests for any new equipment should be considered very carefully.
64. Students who have not studied recently (those with a break of at least two years since graduating) should be assessed in the same way as undergraduate students are currently. They should provide evidence of disability and then have their course related needs assessed.

#### **Postgraduate students completing dissertations after their course ends**

65. A student retains their status as an eligible postgraduate for a period equal to that which is ordinarily required to complete the relevant designated postgraduate course. If the ordinary duration of the course includes a period to complete a dissertation or thesis, the Regulations provide for the student to be eligible to receive a postgraduate DSA for the period spent completing their dissertation or thesis. For example, if a course ordinarily takes two years to complete and the second year of the course is writing up the thesis, the postgraduate student will qualify for support during the writing up period.
66. Generally the period of eligibility is limited to the ordinary duration of the course. However, regulation 162(9) provides some discretion to extend or renew a student's eligibility for such further periods as may be considered appropriate after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course. Such discretion will be considered on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the reasons for the request to extend the course after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course.
67. In the case of part-time designated postgraduate courses which began before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean that the overall duration of the part-time course will be more than double the time needed to complete a full-time equivalent course, the part-time course would then cease to be designated. Consequently, the student would not qualify for any further DSA support. Where the part-time postgraduate course begins on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean the overall duration of the part-time course will be more than four times the time needed to complete the full-time equivalent course, the part time course will cease to be designated and the student will not qualify for further DSA support.
68. In the case of part-time postgraduate designated courses regulation 159(9) provides that where the course begins on or after 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012, an eligible student will not qualify for postgraduate DSAs where the course intensity of study in the academic year for which the support is requested is less than 25%.

## The Administration of DSAs

### Evidence of a disability

- 69.** For most applicants, there should be little difficulty establishing their eligibility for DSAs. Their disability will have been identified and documented at an earlier stage, in many cases while they were at school. However, it is not essential for an applicant's disability to have been identified at school in order to be eligible for DSAs. Nor is there any requirement or provision within the Regulations to apply the definition of disability contained in the Equality Act.
- 70.** The DSAs are not intended to provide assistance to members of the general student population who suffer temporary illness or injury. Assisting such students would properly be the responsibility of HEIs and the NHS, as appropriate.
- 71.** Students can become eligible for DSAs at any point during their course, not just at the start of their first year. Some students become disabled or have a disability identified after their course has started. Others may decide to disclose their disability only after their course has started. Additionally, equipment needs for some disabled students may only arise later in the course. Therefore, a policy of only accepting applications for the DSAs at the beginning of a course should not be adopted.
- 72.** Students wishing to claim DSAs will need to provide medical evidence of their condition, such as a letter from their doctor or an appropriate specialist. Medical evidence should state the nature of the student's disability and ideally should also briefly explain how the student's disability will affect their ability to study on their chosen course. Students with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia will need to provide evidence of this in the form of a diagnostic assessment from a psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher (see paragraphs 104-110). However, any cost a student incurs obtaining the necessary expert evidence or opinion cannot be met from the DSAs. This is because such costs are not incurred by the student to attend or undertake their course; they are incurred to substantiate their claim for DSAs. However, students might be able to receive assistance with such costs from their institution's Access to Learning Fund.
- 73.** Cases may arise where the evidence that the student has a disability is deemed unsatisfactory. In such cases, the student should be invited to provide further evidence, perhaps in the form of a diagnosis undertaken by a professional body or another acceptable person. In making such an invitation, it must be made clear to the student that they will normally be liable to meet the cost of providing the necessary evidence. Assistance may be available from their institution's Access to Learning Fund.
- 74.** Once satisfactory evidence is received, the student is required to undergo a DSA needs assessment to identify the appropriate course-related support. The cost of the assessment is met from the DSA. Once the initial evidence of a disability has been accepted, in most cases there should be no need for students to provide updated evidence of their disability at a later stage in the course. An

exception would be if the student's condition changes or if there is reason to believe that the student's condition may change later in the course. Sometimes an expert may also include recommendations for DSA support with their medical evidence. Given that the expert is unlikely to be aware of course requirements and technologies, there is still a requirement for the student to receive a separate full assessment of their course needs.

#### Assessment of course-related needs

- 75.** Once the student's personal and course eligibility has been established and they have provided satisfactory evidence of their disability, they are eligible at that stage for DSAs and should be invited to arrange a needs assessment as soon as possible. The needs assessment will help determine what support the student might require and the amount of DSA grant for which the student is eligible. During the DSA needs assessment interview, needs assessors are requested to explain the role of Disability Adviser. Given that the assessment may be carried out some months before the start of the course, some students may subsequently attend a different institution or course. In such cases, SFE will seek further information via a top-up assessment or disability advisor as appropriate.
- 76.** A DSA needs assessment report will contain information about the student's disability which is classed as sensitive personal data under the Data Protection Act. This means that the written consent of the student should always be obtained before releasing the DSA needs assessment report or any other disability-related information to a third party. A copy of the needs assessment report should be sent to the Disability Adviser and SLC by the assessment centre once agreed. It would also help assessors if they are provided with a copy of the letter to the student which sets out the agreed DSA support. However, this is subject to the student giving their consent. This information would make assessors aware of any recommendations which have fallen outside the scope of the Regulations and reduce the likelihood of similar inappropriate recommendations in the future. There are two DSA application forms; both entitled 'Disabled Students' Allowances 2013/14 Application Form'. The full form - DSA1F - is aimed at students who have not applied for other student support and the slim form - DSASL - is aimed at those students who have already completed an application for student support and therefore do not need to provide some information again. Both forms ask students to give their consent to the release of information about their DSA application to third parties such as disability advisers and DSA assessors (see paragraph 149).
- 77.** The cost of the DSA needs assessment should be met from the general allowance. The general allowance may also be used to pay the student's travel costs to the needs assessment. Where students do not subsequently start a course, they are not required to repay the needs assessment fee. If they reapply for a higher education course the following year, the needs assessment already carried out should be sufficient to process their new DSA application. SFE should determine if a new study needs assessment is needed and inform the student whether or not to attend a new assessment. **For AY 2013/14, the cost of the study needs assessment for part-time students will be taken from the general allowance, before the general allowance is pro-rated according to the intensity of**

**study. Please see paragraph 41 for information regarding the part-time maxima.**

- 78.** When notifying students that they will need to undergo a DSA needs assessment, SFE inform the student what is involved in the assessment and that if they do not attend an assessment they will not be able to receive the additional support they may require. Students should be encouraged to use DSA-QAG registered or accredited assessment centres (see paragraph 81). Where students are asked to arrange their own DSA needs assessment, they should be directed to the DSA Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG) website, which holds an up-to-date list of assessment centres and allows students to select their nearest centre. However, if SFE arrange the appointment, students should also be consulted about the date and time of the appointment to help to reduce the number of missed appointments and increase the availability of appointments
- 79.** The DSA covers the cost of only one study needs assessment, other than in such circumstances as SFE deem a top-up assessment is needed. Students should be advised that they cannot have a second assessment without prior permission from SFE.
- 80.** Providing that students have granted permission, a copy of the needs assessment and awards letter should be sent to the Disability Adviser at their institution once they have received confirmation of a place. This will help ensure that the support the student requires is put in place.

DSA Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG)

- 81.** DSA-QAG is a non-profit making company with charitable status. Its board is made up of representatives from HEIs, DSA needs assessors, DSA equipment suppliers and the NUS, with observers from BIS and the SLC. A central administrative unit supports this work. DSA-QAG has responsibility for a quality assurance framework against which levels of service for both DSA assessment centres and equipment suppliers are audited. SFE recommends that needs assessments are undertaken by DSA-QAG registered or accredited assessment centres, and any equipment provided under DSAs is provided by DSA-QAG registered or accredited equipment suppliers. More information on DSA-QAG and a list of registered and accredited assessment centres and suppliers is available at the following website: <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/>.

Needs assessments for students studying in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

- 82.** Some English students who intend to study in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland may attend a DSA needs assessment in their home area before they start their course. This should be carried out by a DSA-QAG registered or accredited assessment centre.
- 83.** However, there will be some occasions when students who are domiciled in England but study in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland require a needs assessment during term time. In these circumstances, SFE may accept needs assessments carried out by centres used by the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS)

and the Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland). Students studying in Wales are covered by the DSA-QAG administered list of assessment centres.

- 84.** SAAS operate a 'Toolkit of Quality Indicators for Needs Assessments' under which institutions and centres become validated as assessors recognised by SAAS. A list of institutions and centres validated by SAAS to undertake DSA needs assessments can be found on the SAAS website: [www.saas.gov.uk](http://www.saas.gov.uk) (click on 'disabled students', and then 'needs assessment').

#### Disability Advisers

- 85.** Most higher education institutions have someone responsible for advising on disability matters in support of students. The job title varies (for example, they could be Disability Officers or Disability Co-ordinators as well as Advisers) but they are expected to play an important role in the DSA process. If requested to assist a student with their DSA assessment of needs it is essential that they liaise with SFE before making any arrangements, primarily to ensure the student is an eligible student under the Regulations. Disability Advisers have an understanding of the institutional environment and will have access to academic teaching staff and to detailed course information. SFE should particularly note that Disability Advisers could provide useful advice when there is uncertainty about recommendations in the assessment of needs report. As well as the job title, the role of Disability Advisers may vary between institutions. In the main, Disability Advisers may:
- support students with their DSA applications;
  - offer disabled students advice on other sources of funding and support that may be available;
  - advise or support students to arrange needs assessment appointments;
  - ensure that the institutional and non- medical helper support that is recommended in the needs assessment report is put in place;
  - advise on particular needs that may arise from specific courses;
  - help arrange diagnostic assessment for students who feel they may have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia;
  - explain and give advice to students on diagnostic assessment reports of specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia;
  - explain and give advice to students on DSA needs assessment reports;
  - co-ordinate the network of support workers;
  - work with Accommodation Services, Social Services, SFE and academic departments;
  - make recommendations to central departments in relation to students, for example, extended library loans, networked adaptive software or alternative timetabling arrangements;
  - supervise and arrange the recruitment and training of support workers;
  - administer the payment of support workers and maintain records of the support provided and payments made;

- research, develop and help implement institutions' policy for exams, physical access and field work; and
  - develop and put into practice disability elements of various institutional strategies.
86. Disability advisers will have an up-to-date knowledge of the level and type of support offered by their institution as reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act, or more generally as part of the institution's support for disabled students or students in general. Needs assessors must take account of what help is available from the institution (for example transcribing services) when assessing what additional type and level of support to recommend.
87. It is the view of the Department that it is not appropriate for a disability adviser to carry out the DSA needs assessment of students for whom they are responsible.

#### The scope of DSAs

88. SFE must be satisfied that the student is obliged by reason of their disability to incur additional expenditure to be able to attend or undertake their course. SFE must also be satisfied that all such expenditure is reasonably incurred and appropriate to the individual needs of the student. DSAs are not intended to assist with disability-related expenditure that the student would continue to incur if they were not following their course. The local social services department may well continue to provide assistance towards personal care costs that will be incurred irrespective of whether or not the student is attending their course.
89. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocates a Disability Premium to HEIs in England (£13m in 2011/12), through the widening participation allocation. Allocations are made to HEFCE-funded HEIs and FECs on a pro-rata basis, based on the proportion of students recruited who are in receipt of DSAs. The aim of the funding is to support the recruitment and retention of disabled students. The funding is not ring-fenced but the investment in disabled students and activities supported are recorded through institution's Widening Participation Strategic Assessment submission to HEFCE. Although institutions are accountable for showing that their funds have been spent appropriately, institutions are autonomous in the way they distribute funds internally. HEFCE does not produce detailed guidance on how institutions should use their disability-related funding allocation but draws institutions' attention to its guidance on base-level provision and the Equality Act.

#### The Equality Act 2010

90. The Equality Act 2010 came into force from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2010. The Equality Act generally carries forward the protection that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 provided for disabled people.
91. It is for SFE, higher education institutions and further education colleges to take their own advice on how the Equality Act and related legislation applies to them.

## The Equality Act 2010 and work placements

92. Work placements are currently included in the Equality Act 2010 which means that college and university staff must also take into account a person's disability when arranging work placements and liaise with the work placement providers to implement the support. This includes people who are on a work placement as part of a vocational training programme. A vocational training programme is likely to include most students who are undertaking a work placement as an integral part of a further or higher education course. The providers of work placements are now required to ensure that they do not have discriminatory practices and also to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people on a work placement. The length of the work placement may be a factor when determining whether an adjustment is reasonable.

### Support appropriate to the DSAs

93. The following provides examples of the disability-related support that *might* be considered appropriate to the DSAs in some circumstances. This list is not exhaustive, nor is it the case that such elements will be appropriate in all cases.

#### Special Equipment – for example:

- Computer hardware/laptops
- Disability software
- Ergonomic furniture required for study purposes within the student's residence

#### Non-medical helper allowance – for example:

- Training in use of disability software
- Note-takers
- Specialist Support
- Library Support
- Human assistance with carrying course-related materials and mobility around the HEI
- Payments to non-medical helpers comply with statutory employment rights (e.g. tax, holiday pay)
- Support for course practical work
- Interpreters to access lectures and other academic areas where learning takes place
- Administration costs incurred in recruiting and organising helpers
- Readers/scribes and proof readers

#### General Allowance

- The general allowance can cover other disability-related items which are not covered elsewhere or to provide extra funds in relation major items of specialist equipment or non-medical helper support.

#### Travel Allowances

- The cost of the student's travel to and from an institution
  - The cost of the student's travel to and from a work placement
  - The cost of the student's travel to and from a field trip.
94. Given the complexities surrounding disability-related support, it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of support appropriate to DSAs. In many cases, a separate decision would need to be taken, taking into account circumstances and the purpose of the disability-related support. The following principles could be used to decide if the support is appropriate for DSA funding when it is unclear if the funding should be met from the DSAs or the institution's own funding allocation:
- the support in question is not provided by the institution for all other students; and
  - the equipment is provided for use exclusively by the disabled student in relation to their course.
95. The Department recommends:
- DSAs should not be used for charges for support, counselling or tutorial services which the institution makes available to all students;
  - DSAs are not intended for the costs of extra academic tuition or support in the main subject area(s) being studied. Institutions should normally meet these costs as part of providing the course;
  - Similarly, where an institution makes special adaptations to course handouts or other course equipment for use by a disabled student during the delivery and assessment of the curriculum, it should meet any associated costs as part of providing the course;
  - The cost of any special arrangements that institutions may need to make to enable a disabled student to take examinations (e.g. providing physical access to the examination hall or allowing the examinations to be taken and invigilated somewhere else) should not be set against DSAs. Additional costs which the disabled student themselves needs to incur in taking their examinations (for example, a helper or item of specialised equipment) would however fall within the scope of DSAs; and
  - DSAs may be used only where a student is obliged by reason of their disability to incur costs in receiving specialised individual support. Some students will require additional support to develop appropriate learning strategies because of their disability, for example specific learning disability or a mental health condition. The aim of this support is to maximise their ability and remove the barriers caused by the impairment. The costs of extra tutorial support to improve their study skills (e.g. in essay construction and writing, examination techniques, revision skills) would be appropriate for DSAs. However, SFE should be satisfied that the cost is reasonable and appropriate. If such study skills or IAT support or IAT installation and training are provided through the summer, it would seem reasonable to use DSAs to pay for it. However, any such training undertaken outside term time would not count as attendance on the course and therefore would not trigger Long Courses Loan / extra weeks' Maintenance Loan.

## Social Services

96. Social Services may continue to provide assistance towards personal care costs that would be incurred in the UK, regardless of whether or not a student is attending a course. Support needs can be reassessed by Social Services when there is a change in a person's personal circumstances, such as leaving home to attend a course or a change in health. In the event of a student moving away from their home area to attend a course, funding responsibilities for personal care would continue to rest with the Social Services Department in the student's home area. Social Services receive money from Central Government to fund personal care support for disabled people and are responsible for deciding how their budget allocation is spent (see also paragraph 29).

## Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

97. "Specific learning difficulty" is often used as an umbrella term to cover the following:

- Dyslexia
- Dyscalculia
- Dysgraphia
- Dyspraxia or Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)
- Attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD or ADHD)

As with any disability, no two individuals experience the same combination of difficulties and some students may exhibit signs of more than one SpLD.

There are two forms of SpLD

- a) Developmental SpLD – a neurologically based problem with particular aspects of learning despite appropriate educational opportunity and intellectual ability.
- b) Acquired SpLD – is characterised by a loss of skills as a result of a neurological trauma, illness or brain disease.

98. The following characteristics have been noted in connection with SpLDs;
- a marked inefficiency in the working or short-term memory system which may result in, for example, problems with reading comprehension and written composition;
  - inadequate phonological processing abilities (innate difficulty linking sound and symbol) which affects the acquisition of fluent reading and spelling skills;
  - difficulties with motor skills or coordination which might affect tasks which involve simultaneous use of several skills;
  - problems with visual processing which can affect reading (for example, causing the print to appear distorted or the reader to lose their place excessively) and handwriting (for example losing track of place when copying. This can be termed visual stress);

- reading problems which may include slow reading speed, difficulty extracting sense from written material without substantial re-reading, inaccurate reading, omission of words;
- writing problems which may include poor handwriting and slow writing speed, omission of words, spelling problems, difficulties categorising information and sequencing ideas;
- difficulties with mathematical skills and concepts: can also be seen in difficulties with abstract concepts of time and direction, following sequential instructions, sequencing events affects, ability to acquire arithmetical/mathematical skills;
- lack of structure in oral presentations, seminars and discussion and difficulties with word retrieval;
- short attention spans and a high level of distractibility; and
- poor organisation making time management very difficult.

### Screening for SpLDs

99. Screening for SpLDs usually precedes a diagnostic assessment and the purpose is to determine whether a full diagnostic assessment would be warranted. Screening for SpLDs does not constitute a diagnostic assessment and therefore a screening for SpLDs as the sole evidence of an SpLD should not be accepted. There is no requirement for a student to undergo a screening for SpLDs when providing their evidence for HE purposes.

### Full diagnostic evidence of SpLDs

100. A Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) Working Group was set up in 2003 to review the arrangements for identifying and assessing SpLDs in higher education students. The Working Group was asked to produce a report recommending a framework to guarantee the quality of assessments which diagnose specific learning difficulties. The final report has been published and is available on the Student Finance England practitioners' website at:  
[http://practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk/portal/page?\\_pageid=133,4210339&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL#section7](http://practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=133,4210339&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL#section7).
101. The SpLDs Working Group asked a committee to take a lead in implementing a number of the report's recommendations. This committee is the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC). A sub-committee of SASC, the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC), will review periodically the list of suitable tests contained in the SpLDs Working Group report and consider new tests for inclusion. Further information about SASC and STEC is provided at Annex 2 p45
102. The framework recommended in the report has been adopted by the SFE. The table below sets out the criteria a diagnostic assessment must meet depending on when it was carried out.

Diagnostic assessments carried out before September 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept diagnostic assessments carried out by 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</li> </ul>
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	recognised by the British Dyslexia Association's Accreditation Board (see the table in Annex 1).
Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2006 and August 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept diagnostic assessments carried out by psychologists and suitably qualified specialist teachers as above.</li> <li>• Diagnostic reports to be in the format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's report.</li> <li>• Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See p45</li> </ul>
Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2007 and August 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept diagnostic reports from psychologists and specialist teachers. Specialist teachers must hold a current practising certificate in assessing specific learning difficulties issued by their relevant professional association (for example, the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS), Dyslexia Action or the British Dyslexia Association). Psychologists must hold a current practising certificate issued by their relevant professional association (for example, the British Psychological Society).</li> <li>• Diagnostic reports to be in the report format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines</li> <li>• Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See p45</li> </ul>
Diagnostic assessments carried out from September 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Procedures as from September 2007 above plus the following.</li> <li>• All training for assessing specific learning difficulties to incorporate the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines.</li> </ul>
From 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychologists will be registered with the HCPC (the Health and Care Professions Council, formerly the Health Professions Council) as practitioner psychologists.</li> </ul>

**103.** Further information on identifying specific learning difficulties through assessment can be found in the regularly updated guidance issued by SASC and its SpLD Test Evaluation Committee see [www,sasc.org.uk](http://www.sasc.org.uk)

**104.** Once the diagnostic report has been accepted there is no requirement for a student to undergo a new diagnosis later in the course. A diagnostic report accepted for a first course should also

be acceptable for subsequent courses, including postgraduate courses.

105. Diagnostic assessments conducted from the age of 16 would be appropriate for the purposes of DSA eligibility. If the diagnosis was carried out before the age of 16, the student will require a top up assessment. The top up assessment should focus on those areas where there are likely to be difficulties that impact on study, in particular working memory, information processing and phonological awareness. It should include exploring effects on literacy skills, (speed and accuracy in reading and writing individual words and prose, also incorporating reading comprehension). The report should identify strengths, current strategies and anticipated difficulties that impact on study at HE level.
106. If assessments conducted before the age of 16 are incomplete or inconclusive further testing should be conducted at the discretion of the assessor. Further testing may also be indicated if many years have past since the last assessment (e.g. assessment at 40 following diagnosis at 15, or assessment at 18 following diagnosis at 7)
107. The top up diagnosis should be based on tests recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group's guidelines and updated by SASC and its SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See 'SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) and the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee' p 45. This post-16 assessment is part of the diagnosis and the cost should be met by the student, although an application may be made to the institution's discretionary Access to Learning Fund to meet the cost. This assessment should be carried out by a qualified specialist assessor as noted in the table at paragraph 102 above.
108. The Diagnostic report should state that because the student has a specific learning difficulty they should receive extra support to compensate for these difficulties. The judgement on eligibility made by a qualified professional should be accepted unless it can be shown that the supporting evidence is inadequate to have reasonably formed a view; for example, the evidence is out of date or very cursory. In such circumstances further information should be sought.

#### **Specialist support for students with SpLDs**

109. Students with SpLD may be eligible for the following support from the DSAs subject to the nature of their learning difficulties and their needs assessment.
  - Specialist Support (1:1 support and Group workshops)
  - Individual 1:1 support addresses the effects of language processing (acquiring, retaining and recalling information) in written and spoken language as well as the range of memory, organisational, attention and numeracy difficulties that students with specific learning difficulties often face when producing academic work in a HE context. These particular difficulties may only become evident when these students encounter the range and increasing complexity of academic tasks inherent in studying at HE level.

- Whilst a ceiling has not been set on the number of hours of 1:1 specialist SpLD support that may be provided through the DSAs, this support should, in conjunction with the specialist equipment provided and incorporating IT strategies, aim to develop the students' skills for autonomy in the learning environment. This specialist support should be tailored to the student's individual needs which will require the professionals delivering the support to set out clear goals and timescales for achieving those goals, taking the student's individual needs into account. Some students' may need additional 1:1 specialist SpLD support as their course progresses and recommendations for this should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Whilst this guidance refers to specialist 1:1 support for students with SpLDs, similar 1:1 support may be considered for students with mental health difficulties where recommended in the needs assessment report.
- Group workshops should not be considered as an alternative to specialist 1:1 support, but may be effective for some students to share strategies and develop peer support or for some generic information sessions such as stress relief exercises for exam anxiety or speed reading courses. Whether additional support of this type can be funded from the student's DSAs must be considered on a case-by-case basis.
- A computer with a word processing package, spell-checker, dictionary and/or voice recognition software, text help software and mind-mapping software reduces the need for redrafting. A scanner with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software linked to text-to-speech software may also be appropriate where students have particularly poor reading skills.
- Training in the use of disability software.
- Readers to read text to students either in person or on tape.
- Scribes to note down the student's ideas for early drafts.
- Proof readers to correct minor technical errors.
- An allowance for additional textbooks so that the student may use them to implement various reading strategies, such as book-marking and highlighting key words. Extended library loans are useful but inadequate as substitute strategies.
- Photocopying allowances so that students can obtain enlarged copies of text to alleviate visual discomfort. Extended library loans are useful but inadequate as substitute strategies.
- Portable spell-checkers.
- A tape-recorder, mini disk or digital recorder to record lectures or to compose orally before writing onto a computer.

### **Students diagnosed after the start of their HE course**

110. Students who might previously have attained high levels of academic achievement without any additional support may request DSA support after entering higher education. In order to gain entry to higher education, most dyslexic students have developed compensatory strategies. Although these strategies may have been adequate in their previous learning environment, they may be inadequate for coping with the greater demands of higher education. The switch to independent learning and self reliance in the organisation of study can present extreme difficulties. Students with SpLDs typically have greater problems in adjusting to

independent learning because the necessary organisational capacity is weak. A student with SpLDs who has used compensatory strategies will usually need to put in more time and effort than other students to complete the same academic work. As they progress through their courses, the quantity and volume of work increases and it is likely that they will be unable to cope without additional support.

The arrangements for engaging non-medical helpers

### **Students employing their own non-medical helpers**

111. Students in receipt of DSA for non medical help will in the vast majority of cases utilise helpers who are employed by their institution, employed by an outside organisation, or are self employed. A small number of students may choose to employ their own non medical helper (i.e. to act as the non-medical helper's direct employer), but as the rules regulating employment are complex **BIS and SFE do not recommend that students directly employ non medical helpers.**
112. However, students who do wish to employ their own non medical help should seek independent advice before so doing, but the following gives an outline of some areas for consideration and where further advice may be found.

**Minimum wage** - Students will need to ensure that they comply with legislation regarding the minimum wage. Further information can be found on the Gov website at <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>.

**Tax and National Insurance Contributions (NICs)** - The employers of non-medical helpers are responsible for calculating the amount of tax and NICs, deducting it from the employee's wages and making payments to HMRC. Employers may also be required to pay Employer's National Insurance contributions. Further information on tax and national insurance is available from HMRC.

**Employment rights** - Employees have certain other employment rights. Some examples of these are itemised pay statements, time off for public duties, maternity and paternity leave, paid holiday entitlements, and so on. Further information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/browse/working>.

**Insurance** - It is also the employer's responsibility to take out insurance against liability for bodily injury or disease sustained by their employees during the course of employment. More information about employer's liability insurance is available from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

### **Using non-medical helpers employed by HEIs**

113. Many universities already employ non-medical helpers on behalf of disabled students or administer a register of non-medical helpers who are self employed. This involves advertising, recruiting, training, organising and paying the non-medical helpers. Some universities operate a register of support workers and have formal contracts or agreements with the non-medical helpers. In such arrangements, as well as paying the non-medical helper's wages, the DSA could also pay for

the non-medical helpers' tax, national insurance contributions and other employer-related costs.

### Using self employed non-medical helpers

114. Non-medical helpers who are self-employed are responsible for their own tax and national insurance contributions etc. Using a self-employed non-medical helper would mean that students, or any other body, are not the employer of the non-medical helper. **For the purpose of tax and National Insurance contributions it is the engager's responsibility to decide whether someone is an employee or self-employed.** HMRC can provide advice and, in deciding whether to approve a non-medical helper as self employed, HMRC would look at what the job involves. If a person negotiates their own fees, runs their own business and works for a number of people it is more likely they would be classed as self-employed. If the non-medical helper has regular payments from the student and works under the student's direction this would indicate that they are more likely to be employed.

### Administration charges for arranging non-medical helpers

115. In the context of DSAs, many HEIs arrange and administer non-medical helper support; and HEIs may incur extra costs in providing this service. Such costs might include recruiting potential non-medical helpers, advertising for helpers, selecting suitable candidates, training unqualified non-medical helpers and maintaining records of their personal and financial details. The Department accepts that it is legitimate for HEIs to add the relevant element of these administration costs into their charges for non-medical helper support. Furthermore the Department accepts that such charges, as an integral part of the provision of non-medical helper support, constitute a cost that a student requiring non-medical helper support is obliged to incur and can therefore be met from the student's DSA.
116. However, although it is permissible for HEIs to recover administrative costs associated with the provision of non-medical helpers funded through DSAs, DSAs cannot be used as a contribution towards the infrastructure, general administration and pastoral costs of the HEI. That is, DSAs must not be used to cross-subsidise the infrastructure of HEIs' disability services.
117. HEI governing bodies are responsible for the proper stewardship and value for money of public funds, and the amount HEIs claim for DSA administration needs to be relevant and proportionate, and to have been incurred by the HEI specifically in providing the DSA service. Fixed percentages without an evidence base do not provide a sound basis for the calculation and award of relevant administration costs. Finding the clearly calculated cost of activity is a more transparent and sustainable means of funding than arbitrary fixed percentages.
118. Costs should be based on actual delivery and not assessed delivery. It is reasonable for students or SFE to ask for evidence that the support for which they are invoiced by HEIs or other providers was delivered. Administration charges and associated overheads should be claimed only once: the same activity should not be claimed twice. A reasonable level of actually-incurred marginal costs should be the maximum. HEIs should clearly distinguish the types of services and their costs on the invoices submitted. SFE will need to assure themselves about the amounts claimed by individual providers and might, for example, ask

providers to submit details of how their administrative costs have been calculated with the first claims each year.

119. A fundamental review of costs should be undertaken by HEIs periodically to ensure that the service continues to provide value for money (for example, that efficiency improvements are effectively managed, to avoid a "last year plus x per cent" approach, and to assess whether the level of resources used to provide the service remain appropriate in the light of changing demand and other factors) and to avoid double-counting.
120. SLC should be satisfied that claims for DSAs are made in accordance with guidance and should challenge costs which do not appear to them to be reasonable.

#### **Cancellation charges when students fail to attend a pre-arranged session with a non-medical helper**

121. As a general rule NMH provision will only be paid for if the student has taken up that support. There will of course be occasions where a student fails to attend NMH sessions at short notice for reasons such as illness, etc, and in such circumstances a cancellation charge could be met from the student's DSA, for example, where the terms of a contract the student has entered into with an HEI or other provider of NMH support stipulate that a charge will be made for missed sessions if less than 24 hours' notice of cancellation is given.
122. However, SFE will not pay for NMH provision that is repeatedly not being used, or where students indicate that they no longer need or want NMH support. Repeatedly could mean, for example, where 3 or more sessions are cancelled by the student. Sessions cancelled by the HEI or the provider will not be covered by DSAs.

#### Payments of DSAs

123. Regulation 108 (full time DSAs), 127 (full-time distance learning DSAs) 147 (part-time DSAs) and 167 (postgraduate DSAs) provide discretion as to the timing of DSA payments and also whether payments should be paid in instalments. Where high costs in respect of a non-medical personal helper's allowance are incurred, consideration should be given to the practical implications for the student who may have to make frequent payments to support workers. However, it is not appropriate to provide payment of the full allowance available to the student in advance of the services being carried out. SFE will decide whether provisional monthly or termly payments can be paid, basing this on an estimate, where appropriate. SFE would need to be satisfied that the student had attended the sessions for which provisional payments had been made.

#### Timing of payments for specialist equipment

124. There is no bar under the Regulations to making such payments in advance of the student's actual attendance on their course. In some cases, it may be necessary or desirable for students to purchase items of special equipment before the start of their courses, so that they may make use of them from the very beginning of their studies. Once it has been established that a student who meets the criteria of an eligible student under the Regulations is eligible specifically for DSAs, and the type and level of support required has been

determined, the purchase and supply of equipment may be arranged shortly before the start of the course, once the student's place is unconditional. In particular, students with severe disabilities, such as blind students, may need longer time for training in the use of their DSA equipment and software. Needs Assessors may recommend that equipment is supplied before the start of the course to allow time for training in the use of the equipment. However, it is not expected that payments of DSAs are made well in advance of the start of the course, particularly where the student is still at school.

#### Payments to third parties and directly to students

- 125.** It is recommended to pay DSAs directly to assessment centres and suppliers of services and equipment after obtaining the student's written consent. Students should not be asked to purchase recommended DSA equipment using their own funds and then reimburse the student from the DSAs, where consent is held to pay the supplier direct. The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (section 22) and the Student Support Regulations authorise the payment of DSAs directly to students. Therefore, payment directly to a third party would not satisfy the statutory requirements unless the student consents to this arrangement. Consent could be inferred if a student was written to advising that payment would be made directly to a supplier and the student accepted delivery of the equipment. Acceptance of the equipment could be inferred as the student giving their consent. However, it is recommended that the student's explicit consent is obtained prior to making the payments directly to the supplier or assessment centre. Students should not expect reimbursement of costs for any equipment they have purchased without the prior consent of SFE.

#### DSA applications received in the final stages of a course

- 126.** Some students may apply for DSA support in the latter stages of the final year of their courses. Many of the students who apply late for DSA support do so because they have been reluctant to disclose their disability and now have concerns about their impending examinations or are struggling with dissertations. If a need for disability-related support is identified in the latter stages of the course, it is important the student receives the appropriate support, even if it is only for a short period until the end of the course.
- 127.** A concern is that students applying late may not receive their DSA support before the end of their courses. It is recommended that students applying near the end of their courses are also referred to their Disability Advisers for further advice. Disability Advisers may be able to arrange institutional support, such as exam support, study support or revision skills, at short notice. However, a study needs assessment would be required to identify any assistive technology requirements. Although it is reasonable for special equipment needs to arise at the end of a course, it is advised to treat with caution, applications for the equipment allowance towards the end of a student's course. Institutions may be able to arrange for the loan of equipment, and failing that, suppliers may be willing to rent out equipment and if rental is better value for money, rental or hired equipment can be allowed under the Student Support Regulations. Assessment centres can offer information on equipment suppliers who provide equipment for hire or rental.

However, it is important that students receive the necessary support until the completion of their course.

### **Student leaves a course after receiving equipment**

- 128.** If a student receives DSA equipment whilst on their course and then withdraws from or abandons the course, there is no provision within the Regulations for recovery of the equipment, regardless of the length of time the student spent on the course. This is because the award was made with statutory authority and the purpose for which the equipment was supplied had already materialised.

### **Equipment supplied before the student starts the course / delivered after the student has left the course**

- 129.** A DSA assessment may be provided before a student has started their course to ensure that any equipment or other support they need can be arranged and delivered for the beginning of term. In some cases it may be appropriate to supply DSA equipment before the start of term where training on the equipment is necessary before the student starts their course. However, if the student subsequently does not start the course, this will constitute an overpayment for the purposes of regulation 117 (full-time students), regulation 135 (full-time distance learning students) regulation 156 (part-time students) and regulation 159 (postgraduate students).
- 130.** Similarly, a student may start their course, then abandon it and then receive DSA payments or equipment after they have abandoned the course (possibly because SLC had not been notified that the student had left the course). This will constitute an overpayment for the purposes of regulation 117(7) (full-time students), regulation 135(8) (full-time distance learning students), regulation 156(7) (part-time students) and regulation 168(6) (postgraduate students).
- 131.** SFE can accept the return of the equipment to the supplier, a monetary repayment or a combination of both against the overpayment. For example, where the student has received two items of equipment through the DSA and it is possible to return one item to the supplier and secure a full refund but it is not possible to return the other item, the student should only have to pay for the second item of equipment.
- 132.** It should be clearly explained to students who are supplied with equipment before the start of their course that they may be liable for the cost of the equipment if they do not subsequently begin the course.

### **VAT and Disabled Students' Allowances**

- 133.** Under VAT law, equipment and appliances are VAT zero-rated if:
- i. they are designed *solely* for use by a disabled person;
  - ii. the supply is to a disabled person for their personal or domestic use; and
  - iii. the equipment is relevant to a person's disability.
- 134.** If the supplier has received advice/confirmation from the 'designer and/or manufacturer' that the goods are '*designed solely for use by*

a *disabled person*' (condition 'i' above) and the supplier is satisfied that conditions ('ii' & 'iii' above) for VAT relief are met, they should not charge VAT on the goods at *the time of supply*. Before zero-rating the goods, a supplier should ask a purchaser to complete an 'eligibility declaration' contained in VAT Notice 701/7/2002 *Reliefs for disabled people*.

135. The services of adapting goods that have not been designed solely for use by disabled people, to suit the condition of a disabled person can also be zero-rated. The goods themselves however remain standard-rated and the value of those goods and of the zero-rated services of adaptation can be apportioned when calculating the VAT chargeable.
136. For the purpose of VAT relief, a disabled person is:
- a person with a physical or mental impairment which has a long term and substantial effect on their ability to carry out everyday activities;
  - a condition which the medical profession treats as a chronic sickness (for example, diabetes); or
  - a person who is terminally ill.

#### **Computer Equipment that may be zero-rated when supplied to a disabled person for personal or domestic use**

137. In general, computer equipment is only zero-rated if it is designed solely for use by a disabled person. Examples of equipment which might qualify for zero-rating include special items of furniture, Braille embossing printers and speech synthesisers. A central processor can **by concession** be zero-rated if it has software installed which enables a disabled student to use the computer effectively or to carry out tasks effectively when otherwise they could not do so and is sold as part of a computer system.
138. When a computer system is purchased that contains both elements on which VAT is chargeable as well as zero-rated, the supplier may decide **by concession** to apply a 'composite rate' of VAT to the whole system. Suppliers who decide to apply a composite rate of VAT for computer packages may do so after consulting HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Please refer to Section 9 of VAT Notice 701/7/2002 *Reliefs for disabled people*.
139. General purpose goods and services such as standard recording or computer equipment (standard printers, keyboards, VDUs or software) are not eligible for VAT relief even when purchased for, or by a disabled person. There is no provision for VAT relief on taxi fares and VAT will be chargeable in the usual way.
140. Under VAT notice 701/7/2002, the following are listed as services which might be zero-rated to a disabled person: installation of qualifying goods, adaptation of general goods, repair and maintenance of qualifying goods, **some** building alterations, goods supplied in connection with **qualifying** services and letting of goods on hire or lease.

### **DSA equipment ordered and paid direct by SLC**

141. DSA funds belong to the student and items purchased with these funds remain the property of the student. If SFE orders and pays for the equipment on behalf of the student, VAT relief may be available where all the relevant conditions are met. VAT relief, if appropriate, is applied at the time of purchase by the supplier. Where VAT is charged, it cannot be reclaimed from HMRC by SFE or the student.
142. Further advice and help on VAT relief for disabled people can be obtained from VAT Notice 701/7/2002: VAT reliefs for disabled people. A copy of this notice and further advice may be obtained from the HMRC Charities Helpline, that also deals with VAT relief's for disabled people, on 0845 3020203 or by visiting the HMRC website at:  
[http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=pageVAT\\_ShowContent&id=HMCE\\_CL\\_000184&propertyType=document](http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=pageVAT_ShowContent&id=HMCE_CL_000184&propertyType=document)

Information to help with frequently asked questions

### **Internet connection**

143. Internet connection may be necessary for some disabled students. However, it is recommended that access to the Internet should only be considered if it is recommended in the students DSA needs assessment. It is not recommended to approve Internet access on the basis of a request by the institution alone unless it is part of a DSA assessment. When satisfied that the student's need for connection to the Internet arises because of a disability, the recommended view is that support for associated costs (e.g. subscribing to an Internet provider) may be met from the DSA, subject to the limits of the particular allowance.

### **DSAs and laptop computers**

Non-recommended suppliers and upgrades

144. There is currently no statutory requirement that students should purchase the DSA equipment or other support they need from a particular supplier. However, although a student is free to use a different supplier from that recommended in the DSA needs assessment report, they may only use DSA funding to purchase support which has been agreed by SLC. Students are advised to discuss potential changes of supplier ahead of putting arrangements in place. SLC will need to be satisfied that the expenditure is reasonable. Purchases made directly by students should always be supported by receipts which SLC may request under the provisions of Schedule 3 of the Student Support Regulations. If a student wishes to purchase equipment of a higher specification than that recommended, they must use their own funds to meet the extra costs. Students will not be reimbursed for any equipment or services that are not recommended in a study needs assessment.

### **Electrically powered wheelchairs and scooters**

145. Generally the cost of purchasing wheelchairs and scooters would be incurred regardless of whether the student is attending a course and

therefore will not normally be covered through DSA funding. Individuals may receive support from the health authority or through DWP benefits to meet such mobility needs.

#### **Using DSAs to support participation in extra curricular activities**

146. The Regulations allow for the DSAs to be used for additional expenditure which SLC is satisfied the student is *obliged* to incur in connection with their attendance on (or their undertaking) a designated course. This would not allow the DSAs to be used to support a student when participating in Freshers' week or other extra curricular activities where there is *no link* with the course of study. However, in the event that the extra curricular activity is a course requirement, the payment of DSA to enable the student to participate in that activity may be considered. Examples might be a music student participating in a choral society, or a drama student involved in a drama group. It is recommended that the DSAs can be used to provide support for students during induction meetings they might have with their course tutors during Freshers' week (as well as during other parts of their course) as long as this is course-related.

#### **Reimbursing HEIs for support provided before a DSA assessment was carried out**

147. Where a disabled student has a clear need for non-medical helper and/or other support, HEIs will sometimes provide this support whilst the student's DSA application is still being processed and before a DSA needs assessment has been carried out. This might occur when the application for DSAs is made after the course has started and a DSA needs assessment is not immediately available. The HEI can be reimbursed from the student's DSA (where subsequently awarded) but only where the type of support provided was later recommended in the DSA needs assessment report.

#### **Student fails to pay an assessment centre or supplier**

148. Although it is recommended to obtain the consent of the student to make payments direct to suppliers and other service providers, some students have insisted on exercising their rights to receive their DSA funding and make payments direct. In some cases, the DSA assessment has been undertaken but the student has not paid for the assessment. This would not constitute an overpayment and is a matter between the assessment centre and the student. There are no provisions in the Regulations which would enable, in such circumstances to set the student's debt to the provider against future grants or to make other arrangements for recovery. The same advice would apply if a student failed to pay a supplier for equipment.

#### **Supplier of equipment becomes bankrupt**

149. Where DSA funding has been paid to a supplier of specialist equipment (paid either by SFE or the student) and the supplier has gone bankrupt before supplying the equipment, under insolvency law, the student could become a creditor of the bankrupt's estate and potentially recover the monies subject to prior creditor's claims or receive the equipment already paid for, assuming the supplier still has the equipment. Students in this position may need to seek legal advice. If the student is unable to obtain their equipment or recover

their monies, a further grant could be paid, but subject to the statutory maxima.

#### The role of disability organisations

150. There are a number of useful organisations which can often provide specialist support and advice to students and practitioners, including Disability Alliance, RNIB (Royal National Institute of the Blind) and RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People). A list of organisations is at Annex 2.

#### Guidance for students

151. The Department has published a supplement to its 'A Guide to Financial Support for Higher Education Students in **2013/14**' booklets which provides information about the DSAs. The booklet 'Bridging the Gap: a guide to the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) in Higher Education. Guide for **2013/14** is available by calling the Department's free publication line on 0800 731 9133. Bridging the Gap can also be downloaded from the website at: <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance>

#### The DSA Application Process

##### Application procedures for students applying for DSAs in respect of full-time courses

152. It is important that applications for DSA are dealt with quickly, to ensure students are properly equipped to embark on their course.
153. Students are asked on the PN1 and the PR1 if they wish to apply for DSAs. Continuing students applying for the non-income assessed element of the student loan are asked on the PR1a if they wish to apply for DSAs. These questions allow DSA applications to be prioritised. Where a student answers 'yes' to these questions, the SLC user at data entry is prompted to raise an 'Issue Information Pack' task.

#### Information for students

154. It is important that students are provided with sufficient information on the stages in the DSA process, the DSA support awarded to them, the arrangements for delivering and paying for support, the importance of the DSA assessment and the support available from Disability Advisers at their institutions.
155. Letters issued to students should include the following.
  - Information on the evidence of disability required from students together with a brief outline of the DSA process. This letter should be issued with 'Bridging the Gap' when students enquire about DSAs or have indicated on their application forms that they wish to apply for DSAs (samples available in the DSA letter catalogue). The DSA application form for 2013/14 should also be sent at this stage. (DSA1F for students who have not yet submitted a student support application or DSASL, which can be requested via the

correspondence screen in the student's account, for those who have.)

- A brief outline of the DSA assessment process and its importance. This letter would confirm that SLC accepts the evidence of disability provided by the student and clearly sets out the arrangements for obtaining a DSA assessment..
- Full details of the DSA support awarded, delivery arrangements and method of paying for DSA support. This letter would be issued once SLC has agreed the DSA support to be awarded.
- A reference to Disability Advisers at HE institutions as a source of further assistance for the student. Whenever possible it would be helpful to include the name and contact details of the Disability Adviser at the student's institution.

**156.** Continuing students who received a DSA earlier in the course are not required to resubmit evidence of their disability unless their condition has changed and they are seeking reassessment. In order to minimise: a) an increased demand on assessment centres for needs assessments over a shorter period of time; and b) delays in general DSA processing. To minimise the risk of delays in the DSA application process the following action is taken.

- identify students wishing to apply for DSAs by checking the PN1, PR1 or PR1a and the accompanying evidence of a disability (if supplied) immediately on receipt of applications;
- determine eligibility for student support from potential DSA applicants as a priority, if necessary fast tracking such applicants;
- Once established that a student is eligible for support and if the student has provided acceptable evidence of their disability with their application forms, contact the student with a view to arranging an assessment of course needs (see sample letters in the catalogue);
- If a student has indicated they wish to apply for DSAs on their application form but not included evidence of a disability, establish eligibility for support and then issue a DSA application pack, consisting of the booklet 'Bridging the Gap', 'Application for Disabled Students' Allowances 2013/14' (form DSA1F or DSASL) and a covering letter, requesting the student returns evidence of their disability.

**157.** The DSA application form for 2013/14 (either DSA1F for students who have not yet submitted a student support application or DSASL for those who have) will ask the student to agree that SLC can:

- release information about their application to the Disability Adviser at their institution and to their DSA needs assessors;
- discuss the application with the supplier; and
- pay suppliers of equipment and support direct.

**158.** Where an application for DSAs is rejected or allows only part of the application, it should provide clear reasons to the applicant for the decision. This rejection should not delay the student's application for other types of student finance provided all the relevant eligibility criteria have been met. The student should be sent information on appeals policies and procedures. SLC should make full use of the

notes facility on the student's record on the system to detail information that may assist with enquiries from students.

### **Application procedures for students applying for DSAs in respect of full-time distance learning courses, part-time courses and postgraduate courses**

- 159.** Students wishing to apply for DSAs in respect of a full-time distance learning course or a part-time undergraduate course are requested to complete the DSASL if they have already completed a PTG1. (from AY 12/13 New FTDL students apply for their tuition fee loan only on the PN1, however still complete the DSASL for their DSA support) Postgraduate students will be required to complete the DSA1F. In order to expedite the application process it is recommended to issue a cover letter with the DSA application forms, requesting that students provide evidence of their disability with their completed application form.
- 160.** The DSA application process for students undertaking full-time distance learning, part-time and postgraduate courses involves completion of the DSA1F / DSASL form by the student and endorsement of course details by institutions (DSA1F only). Under the Equality Act 2010, disabled students have the right to confidentiality which means that they are not required to reveal their disability to their institution. We expect that most students will not object to asking their institutions to endorse their application form. However, some disabled students may object to asking their institution to complete the form because this would disclose that they are disabled and deny their rights to confidentiality under the Act.
- 161.** In the event that a disabled student does object to their institution seeing their application form on the grounds that this breaches their right under the Equality Act, we recommend the following action:

  - the student completes all parts of the DSA1F application form except Section 5 and returns the form to SLC;
  - the student obtains a letter from SLC requesting information from the HEI about their course and the student's study pattern.
  - the student passes the letter to the HEI; and
  - the information is returned by the HEI to SLC via the student.

## Annex 1

### LIST OF RESEARCH COUNCILS

#### Research Councils

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) at [www.ahrc.ac.uk](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk)

Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) at [www.bbsrc.ac.uk](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk)

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)

Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) at [www.epsrc.ac.uk](http://www.epsrc.ac.uk)

Medical Research Council (MRC) at [www.mrc.ac.uk](http://www.mrc.ac.uk)

Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) at [www.nerc.ac.uk](http://www.nerc.ac.uk)

Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) at [www.scitech.ac.uk](http://www.scitech.ac.uk)

### COURSES ACCREDITED BY BDA FOR DYSLEXIA ASSESSMENTS CARRIED OUT BY TEACHERS

#### Courses Leading to SpLD Assessment Practicing Certificate-

The following courses will qualify successful candidates to apply for SpLD Assessment Practicing Certificate from Patoss or Dyslexia Action.

- All courses leading to AMBDA
- University College London - Certificate in the Diagnostic Assessment & Management of Literacy Difficulties [from 2000 through 2004]
- Evesham & Malvern Hills College Postgraduate Certificate in the Assessment of Specific Learning Difficulties validated by University of Worcester
- London South Bank University LLU+ Postgraduate Diploma in Adult Dyslexia, Diagnosis and Support M Level (7) [from November 2006]
- Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations OCR Level 7 Certificate in Assessing and Teaching Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia)

Below are tables that give details of the specific institutions and courses that meet the above requirements.

Accredited AMBDA Courses

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Level</b>
Bath Spa University	Professional Masters Programme, Module One Identifying and supporting Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties/Dyslexia and Module Two Assessment Methodology for SpLD/Dyslexia	AMBDA
Bangor University of Wales	Advanced Certificate of Further Professional Studies (8 modules)	AMBDA
Birmingham University	B Phil / PG Dip / M Ed in Dyslexia Studies	AMBDA
Durham County Council	PG Cert in Teaching Pupils with SpLD/Dyslexia within the School Context	AMBDA
Dyslexia Action (formerly Dyslexia Institute)	PG Dip in Dyslexia and Literacy	AMBDA & AMBDA FE/HE
East Sussex County Council	Meeting the Needs of Pupils with Dyslexia (SpLD)	AMBDA
Edge Hill College of HE	Postgraduate Certificate in SpLD	AMBDA
University of Gloucestershire	Postgraduate Certificate in SpLD	AMBDA
Leicester University	Postgraduate Certificate in Education Studies	AMBDA
Liverpool John Moores University	PG Cert in SEN (Dyslexia) (with upgrade to AMBDA)	AMBDA
London Metropolitan University	PG Dip: Assessment for Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia)/PG Cert Teaching Adult Dyslexic Learners in Higher Education (PGC: TADHLE)	AMBDA FE/HE & AMBDA
Manchester Metropolitan University	i) PG Dip/Cert in SpLD ii) PG Cert in SpLD (FE/HE)	i) AMBDA ii) FE/HE

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Level</b>
Newport, University of Wales	MA (SEN), Dip SEN (SpLD)/ CFPS (SpLD) (modules G101444, G101511, G101512 & G105688)	AMBDA
OCR (previously RSA)	SpLD Diploma Level 7	AMBDA
Open University	E801: Difficulties with Literacy Development	AMBDA
Oxford Brookes University – Reaccreditation in progress	Working with Children and Young People with Literacy Difficulties: Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Professional Practice (Level M)	AMBDA
Somerset LEA	PG Dip in Complex Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia)	AMBDA
Southampton University	PCES: Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia): Identification and Assessment	AMBDA
Swansea LEA	Teaching Pupils with SpLD (Dyslexia) (with upgrade to AMBDA)	AMBDA
University of Teesside	University Certificate in Advanced Professional Development Dyslexia in Post Compulsory Education Settings	AMBDA

Courses Leading to SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Level</b>
University College London	Certificate in the Diagnostic Assessment & Management of Literacy Difficulties	
Evesham & Malvern Hills College	Postgraduate Certificate in the Assessment of Specific Learning Difficulties	
London South Bank University	LLU+ Postgraduate Diploma in Adult Dyslexia, Diagnosis and Support M Level (7)	
Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations	OCR Level 7 Certificate in Assessing and Teaching Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (Dyslexia)	

For additions check the SASC and BDA websites

## Annex 2

### Disability Rights UK

Disability Rights UK (formerly Disability Alliance) is a national charity which promotes opportunities for disabled people in higher education. It can provide information and advice to disabled students and the people who work with them. They are also able to provide training for Student Support Officers and other LA and SLC staff on the Disability Discrimination Act Part 4 (Post-16 education), the Disability Equality Duty and DSAs. Their Information Service team can answer enquiries and supply information booklets on a range of subjects, such as ‘

Key titles relating to higher education are:

- Into Higher Education – a comprehensive guide to higher education for disabled students (produced annually);
- The Co-ordinator’s Handbook (for Disability Advisers).
- Applying to Higher Education: Guidance for Disabled People, and
- Funding Higher Education for disabled students in higher education.

All of Disability Rights UK information booklets are also available on their website at: [www.disabilityrightsuk.org.uk](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org.uk). Disability publications and information booklets are also available from the online Bookshop at <http://www.radar-shop.org.uk/> or by contacting Disability Rights UK. Telephone 0800 328 5050, textphone 0800 068 2422, email [skill4disabledstudents@disabilityrightsuk.org](mailto:skill4disabledstudents@disabilityrightsuk.org)

### National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP)

The National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP) Ltd is the professional organisation for disability and support staff in further and higher education. NADP is for anyone working in the post-16 education sector and involved in the management or delivery of services for students with disabilities. NADP is available to respond to questions SLC have on the role of disability staff and how they support disabled students.

National Association of Disability Practitioners Ltd  
Moulton Park Business Centre  
Redhouse Road  
Moulton Park  
Northampton  
NN3 6AQ

Tel/Fax: 01604 497933

Email: [admin@nadp.org.uk](mailto:admin@nadp.org.uk)

Website: <http://www.nadp-uk.org>

## The National Network of Assessment Centres (NNAC)

The National Network of Assessment Centres (NNAC) comprises of assessment centres that have registered with DSA-QAG. NNAC represents assessment centre managers and all those who work within centres. NNAC itself does not currently deal with complaints about assessment centres, which should be directed to the individual centre concerned. Queries can be addressed to the NNAC Administration Centre, contact details below.

### NNAC Administration Centre

Email: [admin@nnac.org](mailto:admin@nnac.org)

Website: <http://www.nnac.org>

Tel: 01432 376 630

## Association of Study Aids and Study Strategies Assessors (ASASA)

ASASA is a voluntary organisation of Needs Assessors, Diagnosticians (SpLD), Study Skills Providers and IT Trainers. It is independent of other stakeholders in the sector and its remit is to provide a forum where issues relating to the DSA needs assessment process can be discussed and considered.

Website: [www.asasa.org.uk](http://www.asasa.org.uk)

Email: [admin@asasa.org.uk](mailto:admin@asasa.org.uk)

## SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) and the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC)

The SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) leads in implementing a number of the recommendations contained in the report of the SpLDs Working Group. Membership consists of individuals representing organisations with national roles in promoting standards in SpLD assessment, support and teacher training. SASCs purpose and responsibilities are to:

- implement the recommendations for SpLD assessor training contained in the SpLD Working Group report;
- promote continuing professional development in SpLD assessment;
- oversee and approve processes of awarding SpLD Assessment Practising Certificates;
- maintain list of approved evaluators for Accreditation of Prior Learning and/or Experience (APL/ape) applications;
- provide training for evaluators;
- approve course as meeting standards of SpLD assessor training; and
- draw on expertise across the sector and provide a forum for sharing good practice.

A sub-committee of SASC, the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC), will review periodically the list of suitable tests contained in the SpLDs Working Group report and consider new tests for inclusion. Further information about

SASC and/or STEC can be found on the SASC website at [www.sasc.org.uk](http://www.sasc.org.uk)  
or Email: [info@sasc.org.uk](mailto:info@sasc.org.uk).