

**STUDENT SUPPORT INFORMATION NOTE
(SSIN)**

**ARRANGEMENTS FOR STUDENTS FUNDED
UNDER THE EDUCATION (STUDENT
SUPPORT) REGULATIONS**

SSIN 03/15

June 2014

To:

Student Finance administrators and practitioners in institutions of higher education;
DSA assessors, assessment centres and suppliers;
Student Finance advisors, and
The Student Loans Company

Dear Colleagues

**CHANGES TO DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCES (DSA) FOR ENGLISH
STUDENTS APPLYING TO STUDENT FINANCE ENGLAND FOR DSA FOR THE
FIRST TIME IN RESPECT OF AN ACADEMIC YEAR BEGINNING ON OR AFTER
1 SEPTEMBER 2015**

Introduction

You will have received a previous SSIN (01/15 April 2014) outlining the announcement on DSA funding for students applying for DSA for the first time in respect of an academic year beginning on or after 1 September 2015.

HE practitioners may have already started to receive enquiries from existing and prospective students about what this might mean for them. This note is to help practitioners respond to enquiries.

It should be noted that the details of changes are still being developed and the Equality Impact Assessment is still being updated in light of stakeholder input. BIS is engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to discuss the policy and what the changes might mean in particular circumstances and settings. Discussions with stakeholders will help inform detailed guidance for 2015/16 which will be published in autumn this year.

Background

The support offered to students through DSAs has not been reviewed for nearly 25 years. During that period there have been a number of key changes in higher education: rapid technological advances, increases in the use of technology and the

introduction of anti-discrimination legislation culminating in the Equality Act 2010. In light of these developments BIS has considered whether the current system of DSAs provides the right balance of support between institutions, students and government and whether it offers value for money.

Key points to note:

- This change will apply to all full-time, full-time distance learning, part-time and postgraduate English students applying to Student Finance England for DSAs for the first time in respect of an academic year beginning on or after 1 September 2015.
- Existing DSA students and DSA students for 2014/15 entry will remain on the current system of support for 2015/16. No decision has yet been made regarding funding in subsequent years.
- The maximum amounts payable under DSA allowances will be maintained in 2015/16.
- The application process for students will remain essentially the same. Students will be required to complete a DSA application form, as now, and submit it to their funding body with the relevant medical evidence.
- The definition of disability will be aligned to that set out in the Equality Act 2010. This brings the regulations into line with other Government departments and is the definition already used by institutions when considering reasonable adjustments. This will help ensure consistency across both types of support. The change clarifies existing practice and will not result in disabled students becoming ineligible for DSAs.
- Students should continue to book their DSA study needs assessment once they have received their letter from Student Finance England asking them to do so.
- The DSA study needs assessor will discuss with the student the nature of their disability and the impact it will have on access to their studies. This process reflects the current arrangements. Where it is identified that HEI reasonable adjustments will not meet the student's needs, then the DSA study needs assessor may recommend appropriate support to be funded through DSAs.
- The DSA study needs assessor will have regard to the new DSA regulations and new guidance when setting out their recommendations for the support the student will need. Those recommendations will take into account the HEI reasonable adjustments that are available as standard and will also consider the reasonable adjustments that are available to the student on an individual basis from the HEI. This information will be drawn from the new DSA guidance on expected reasonable adjustments and the student's specified institution, where known.
- Where a student's needs exceed what can be met by reasonable adjustments, a recommendation for DSA support should be made. Students will continue to receive the support they require, but the support may be delivered differently, or be provided by the HEI rather than through DSAs.

- The study needs assessment fee will continue to be paid from the DSA general allowance whether or not the study needs assessment outcome includes recommendations for DSAs funded equipment or support.
- BIS are not intending to fund standard computers. BIS are currently considering how best to manage the process of supplying assistive software for computers already purchased by the student. Some universities provide students with the opportunity to buy computers direct from them. Such universities will wish to consider the guidance on minimum specifications when selecting equipment available for sale or loan to students.
- BIS are currently considering how to support students who require additional funding to purchase a higher cost computer to meet their disability related needs.
- BIS are in discussion with the Department of Health and the Devolved Administrations about the new BIS arrangements for English students.
- Full guidance is currently being developed and will be circulated this autumn. The guidance will include examples of when DSA funding will continue to be available in relation to accommodation, equipment and non-medical help support.

Further information

Colleagues wishing to read the full Ministerial statement can access this via the following address:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140407/wmstext/140407m0001.htm>

Further updates will be issued in due course.

Elaine Underwood
Higher Education Student Funding Policy
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills