

**Student Awards Agency
for Scotland**



Notes to help you apply for the
Disabled Students' Allowance
in session 2011/2012

The closing date for applying for DSA is 31st March 2012.

If you would prefer, we can provide alternative versions of these notes, as well as the DSA application forms, in the following formats:

- Braille
- Large print
- Audio

Student Awards Agency for Scotland
Gyleview House
3 Redheughs Rigg
Edinburgh
EH12 9HH

Disclaimer: *The information in this guide offers general guidance only and is not legally binding, nor does it constitute any right of eligibility for, or entitlement to, funding. We will assess your application on your individual circumstances in accordance with the information provided by you in your completed application form/s.*

Contents

Section 1 – About Disabled Students Allowance

Introduction	Page 3
Eligibility	Page 3
Residency eligibility	Page 3
Course eligibility	Page 3
Part-time and distance learning course eligibility	Page 4
The allowances	Page 4
Allowances – basic allowance	Page 4
Allowances – large items allowance	Page 5
Allowances – non medical help (NMPH)	Page 5
Travel	Page 6
Reasonable adjustments	Page 6

Section 2 – How to apply for DSA

Introduction	Page 7
What evidence is required	Page 7
Completing the DSA form	Page 7
Diagnosis/medical evidence	Page 8
Evidence of disability – payment of diagnosis	Page 8
Assessment of needs	Page 9
Main Support form (SAS3, SAS7 or NMSB)	Page 9
How we use the information you give us	Page 9
Paying DSA	Page 10
Fraud	Page 10
Processing times	Page 10
Appeals and complaints	
How to appeal	Page 11
How to complain	Page 11
What we will do	Page 11
Recording, monitoring and reviewing our appeals and complaints	Page 12
Appealing against recommendations in your needs assessment	Page 12

Section 3 – FAQs and contact details

FAQs	Page 13
Contact us	Page 14
Other useful contacts	Page 14
Your Notes	Page 15

Section 1 – about Disabled Students Allowance

Introduction

The Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is a non means tested allowance intended to cover any extra costs or expenses you might incur while studying, which arise because of your disability. You do not need to be claiming tuition fees and/or living cost support from us in order to claim DSA.

These guidance notes are divided into three sections. Section one gives you more information about what you can claim under DSA, section two explains how to apply and section three contains FAQs, contact details and other sources of helpful information.

Eligibility

To be eligible for DSA you must meet our eligibility criteria, more information about this is given on pages 3 – 4.

Residency eligibility

Our residency conditions are set out in the Students' Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2007 (as amended).

To meet our residence conditions you must have been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for the three years immediately before the first day of the first academic year of your course (the relevant date). For the majority of students who start their course in the autumn term, the relevant date is 1 august.

If you do not meet the usual residence conditions for support you may still be eligible for support in certain circumstances. Residency is a very complicated issue and if you have any doubts at all about your eligibility you should contact our General Enquiry Unit on 0300 555 0505 for advice. Further information about residency can be found on our website at www.saas.gov.uk

Course eligibility

If you are on one of the following courses you can apply for DSA support providing you meet our residency conditions:

- HNC
- HND
- Degree or equivalent level courses
- Foundation year of a degree course, providing you have enrolled for the whole course not just the foundation year and the foundation year is a necessary and compulsory part of the course
- Diploma in Nursing or Midwifery
- Honours degree in Nursing or Midwifery
- Full-time post graduate courses (including PhDs) providing you are not receiving DSA or equivalent support from another source
- Part-time post graduate courses (including PhDs) which are at least 50% of the length of the full time course, and you are not receiving DSA or equivalent support from another source
- Part-time undergraduate courses at HNC level or above which are at least 50% of the length of the full time course
- Distance learning courses providing you undertaking at least 50% of the length of a full time course
- Open University courses providing you are studying at least 60 credits in a year
- Students on Allied Health Profession (AHP) courses who are eligible to claim tuition fee and bursary support from us

If you meet one or more of the following you will **not be entitled** to claim DSA support:

- You are an EU Student receiving a tuition fees only award
- Studying for less than 50% of the length of a full time course
- On an Open University course and undertaking less than 60 credits
- Undertaking a course below HNC level
- Receiving funding from your Local Education Authority, Student Finance England, Student Finance Wales, or your Local Library Board
- Postgraduate students receiving funding from a Research Council or the Social Work Department
- On an Access course
- On an HNC, HND or degree level courses that has not been designated as eligible for support from us
- Do not meet the conditions set out in our residency regulations

If you are not entitled to support from the DSA you might still be eligible for support from your institution. You should speak to your Disability Advisor for advice.

The allowances

The DSA is comprised of 3 elements:

- The basic allowance
- The large items allowance
- The non medical personal help allowance (NMPH)

You may also be able to get extra help with your travel costs if your disability means that you cannot use public transport.

More information about the allowances and extra travel expenses is given on pages 4 – 6.

Allowances – basic allowance

This is an annual allowance. The rate for session 2011-12 for full time students is £1,725. For part-time students the allowance is pro rata, for example if you are studying for 50% of the length of a full time course you will be entitled to £863 (50% of the basic allowance).

The basic allowance is intended to cover small items of equipment and consumables such as:

- Dictaphones
- Excess photocopying costs
- Braille Paper

We do not pay for:

- Adaptations to course handouts

Any unspent portion of the basic allowance can also be used to top up the non medical personal help (NMPH) or large items allowance if necessary.

Allowances – large items allowance

This allowance is available to all eligible students and covers the whole programme of your study. The rate for session 2011-12 is £5,160. This allowance is not proportioned down for part-time students. The large items allowance can include the hire or purchase of items such as:

- Disability related software (for example Dragon voice recognition software)
- Other appropriate software (for example Microsoft Word)
- Printers

- Scanners
- Personal computers (PCs)
- Laptops
- Disability loops
- Radio aids
- CCTV

We do not pay for:

- Equipment that has not been recommended by a validated needs assessor and approved by us
- Phone line installation or rental
- Any equipment that we feel your institution should be reasonably expected to provide
- Equipment that is required by all students on the course for example cameras for students on photography courses or DVD players required by Open University Students
- Wheelchairs
- Scooters

Allowances – non medical personal help (NMPH)

This is an annual allowance. In 2011-12 the rate for full time students is £20,520. For part-time students the allowance is scaled down pro rata for example if you are studying for 50% of the length of a full time course you will be entitled to £10,260 (50% of the basic allowance).

The NMPH allowance is intended to cover personal support such as:

- Readers
- Sign Language Interpreters
- Note takers (including text help operators)
- Scribes
- IT Training
- Study skills support
- Mentors
- Proof readers
- Helpers providing support for you to move around campus or access specific areas such as the library

We do not pay for:

- Subject specific tuition
- Personal help that is required outside class time, for example help with getting dressed in the morning
- Any support that would normally be provided by Social Services
- Any services such as counselling or study support that your institution makes available to all its students
- Asfedic tuning or similar diagnostic services

More information about using a non medical personal helper is available in our booklet Student DSA NMPH allowance Guide. You can download a copy of this guide from our website at www.saas.gov.uk .

Travel

Only students who incur extra travel costs because of their disability are eligible to apply for reimbursement of expenses.

If, as a result of your disability you are unable to use public transport, for example if you have visual or mobility difficulties, we can consider payment of a reasonable cost of travel by private car or taxi.

If you are applying for extra travel help and you travel by private car you must give us a detailed breakdown showing the number of miles per day that you travel, the cost per mile and the number of days per week that you are travelling.

If you travelling by taxi you must provide quotes from two different taxi companies estimating the cost of a daily journey.

We will normally only pay for travel for one single return journey per day between your home and institution during term time. However, we can consider paying for travel outwith term time in certain circumstances for example:

- If a you have to attend your institution to re-sit an exam
- If a you have to come in to your institution to meet with your course tutor

In these cases we require your Disability Advisor to confirm that you were required to attend your institution outwith term time.

We will deduct a travel element of £159 (or £82 for students on Allied Health Profession courses) from all DSA travel claims. We do this because this is the amount that you are expected to contribute towards your travel from your funding. For Nursing and Midwifery students the travel element we deduct is £5 per day.

We do not deduct a travel element from the following students:

- Part-time and distance learning students
- Postgraduate students who are receiving a fees only award under the PSAS scheme
- Students over the age of 55 who are undertaking an undergraduate Loan Bearing course

This is because these students are not eligible for student loans.

Reasonable Adjustments

The purpose of the DSA is to remove any disadvantages you may have when undertaking your course because of the effect of your disability. In other words, the DSA is there to help address any needs you have which arise from the inaccessible elements of your course, by providing specialist equipment and non medical personal help, where appropriate.

The Disability Equality Duty (DED), which came into force in December 2006, places a specific duty on colleges and universities to develop and implement a Disability Equality Scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to narrow the gap between the outcomes and experiences of disabled and non-disabled people. An institution's scheme should include an action plan, arrangements for monitoring progress and an impact assessment. Institutions will have a duty to report annually on the scheme's progress and to review it every three years. The process requires active engagement with and involvement of disabled people in its development and review.

It is expected that institutions should continually anticipate the general requirements of disabled people with a wide range of impairments and health conditions rather than simply waiting until a disabled person requests an adjustment.

If we feel that any part of a DSA claim is something that should be considered as a 'reasonable adjustment' for an institution then we may refuse that element of support. For example if you need to use a specially adapted desk or chair while at university or you require course handouts in a non standard format we would expect your institution to pay for these costs.

Section 2 – how to apply for DSA

Introduction

Applications will be available from our website www.saas.gov.uk or your institution from late April 2011. You should apply as soon as possible, preferably before you course starts, however you can apply at any point during your course up until 31 March 2012. Please make sure you apply within these timescales as we cannot accept late applications.

What evidence do we require?

The following four documents may be needed if you are applying for DSA:

- A DSA application form
- Evidence of your disability
- A needs assessment report
- A main student support application form (SAS3, SAS7 or NMSB1)

More information about each of these is given on pages 7 – 9.

Completing the DSA form

You should read the following carefully. If you need advice about applying or you are not sure what form to complete you should contact us or the Disability Advisor at your institution for advice. Our contact details are on page 14. If you find it difficult to fill in your form someone else may fill it in for you as long as they have your authority to do so.

We have two different DSA application forms: DSA F/T and DSA O.

- You should complete the form DSA F/T if you are studying full time and are applying to us for tuition fees and/or living cost support.
- You should complete the form DSA O if you are studying part-time, by Distance Learning or if you are studying full time but you are not applying to us for help with your tuition fees and/or living costs.

You should complete the personal details section of the form and your Disability Advisor should complete the “Support Details” section (section D in the DSA F/T form and section H (and G if applicable) in the DSA O form).

When completing the form you should ensure that:

- You fill in the form in CAPITAL letters using **black** ink
- You sign and date the form and read the student consent section
- Your assessor or Disability Advisor signs the form
- You send clear **photocopies** (please do not send originals) of important documents such as Educational Psychologist reports.
- If you are a part-time or distance-learning student, your institution has completed the certificate of endorsement on page 6.

If you do not do all of the above it could lead to a delay in processing your application.

DO NOT:

- Use highlighter pens as this shows up as blank text on our system
- Send original copies of documents such as Educational Psychologists reports. We destroy all documents after 30 days.
- Use coloured ink as it does not always show up clearly on our system

Remember:

- Your application is only valid for one academic year of study. You must apply for DSA in each year of your course.
- Tell us if there is any change in your circumstances that might affect any award due to you. For example, if you decide to change your course or leave your course before you have completed it.

Diagnosis/medical evidence

In the first year that you apply for DSA you must provide us with supporting documents to confirm your disability or learning difficulty (please send us photocopies, not original documents). If your disability changes during your course and you require additional support as a result you must also send us medical evidence. The type of evidence we require is listed below:

For dyslexia or specific learning difficulties; a statement or report from one of the following:

- An Educational Psychologist or appropriately qualified professional
- A letter from a previous educational establishment that you attended, such as a school or college, confirming that you have been diagnosed with Dyslexia or a specific learning difficulty by an Educational Psychologist or appropriately qualified professional.

For other medical conditions; evidence in the form of a diagnosis from a qualified professional including:

- GP
- Nurse
- Occupational therapist
- Physiotherapist
- Audiologist
- Psychiatric Nurse

Other forms of evidence:

- We can also accept evidence that you are in receipt of disability support or benefits from another agency such as the Department of Work and Pensions, providing you were required by them to undertake a diagnosis of your disability. For us to be able to accept these documents as proof of disability they must state the nature of your disability and the date the original diagnosis was undertaken. A letter simply stating that you are in receipt of DLA or another benefit is not sufficient.

However, this is not a complete list. If you have evidence from a professional that we have not listed above or you are not sure if the evidence you have will be accepted you should contact us to check before you apply (see our contact details on page 14).

If you are applying for help with travel you must also provide a letter from your doctor confirming that your disability makes it difficult for you to use public transport.

Please note that if you are required to undertake a needs assessment your assessor may ask you to supply additional evidence before they can carry out the assessment. They will discuss this with you when they arrange your assessment.

Evidence of disability – payment of diagnosis

Although we cannot pay for the cost of any diagnosis (including doctor's letters and Educational Psychologists' reports) institutions can offer help from their Discretionary Funds. You should contact your institution for further advice if you have to pay for evidence of your disability.

Assessment of needs

If you are applying for DSA for the first time or if your disability has changed significantly since you last applied you will also need to have a needs assessment carried out.

A needs assessment is a report carried out by a qualified individual which lets us know the type of support and equipment you need to undertake your course.

Many colleges and universities have trained staff who can carry out needs assessments. However, if there is no one at your institution who can undertake a needs assessment we can refer you to an Access Centre near where you live or study.

We will pay for the cost of your needs assessment and the money will not be deducted from your DSA allowance. However, if you have to travel for an assessment you have to pay the travel costs yourself. A list of all of the institutions and Access Centres in Scotland that are validated to carry out needs assessments for the purposes of DSA is available on our website at www.saas.gov.uk.

Please note that Access Centres will not normally give you an appointment for a needs assessment unless we have referred you to them.

If we need to refer you for a needs assessment we will do so straight away. The Access Centre will then contact you to make arrange an appointment.

Your Access Centre or assessor will let you know if they need any additional information to carry out your needs assessment, for example more detailed medical evidence.

Main support form (SAS3, SAS7 or NMSB1)

If you are applying to us for tuition fee and/or living cost support you must also send us a SAS3, SAS7 or NMSB1 form before or at the same time as you apply for DSA. We will not be able to process your DSA application until your SAS3, SAS7 or NMSB1 form has been processed.

SAS3, SAS7 and NMSB1 applications will be available on-line at www.saas.gov.uk from the end of April 2011 and you can apply up until the closing date of 31 March 2012.

How we use the information that you give us

We are governed by the Data Protection Act 1998.

We will use the information you give us on your form to process your application for a DSA. We have a duty to protect the public funds we handle and we may use the information you have given on this form to prevent and detect fraud. We may also share this information for the same purpose with other organisations that handle public funds.

We need the information you give us to work out whether you are eligible for support and we are the data controller for that information. We will assess your entitlement and send you a letter to tell you how much support you will get from us. We keep your personal information so we can audit our assessment of student support.

Where necessary, we will pass the information you give us on your DSA application form (and any accompanying evidence) to an Access Centre or to your institution if they are approved to carry out needs assessments. They will use this to work out what equipment or help you need to do your course. They will send us a full report detailing your needs and how much it will cost.

Paying DSA

We will pay your DSA straight into your nominated bank account.

If you want us to make a payment to a third party, for example an institution or supplier, you must complete a third party agreement form. Your Disability Advisor/needs assessor will provide you with a copy of this form if required or you can download one from our website www.saas.gov.uk

More information about how we pay for NMPH is available in our booklet Student DSA NMPH Allowance Guide. If it is recommended that you receive NMPH a copy of this booklet will be sent to you when we process your application for DSA you can also download one from our website www.saas.gov.uk .

Fraud

We require you to submit copies of receipts for **all** items purchased under the DSA within 6 weeks of receiving payment from us. If you fail to provide receipts or the amount on your receipts is less than the amount we awarded you we will seek recovery of all monies that have been overpaid.

We also require that all NMPH invoices are signed by both you and your helper (where the helper is employed directly by you). Again, where the amount claimed differs from the amount we have awarded we will recover any overpayments.

We take all aspects of fraud seriously and have a dedicated Fraud Team to deal with any cases that arise. We will seek recovery of any money we pay out that is subsequently found to have been paid as the result of a fraudulent claim. We will seek to prosecute anybody who makes a fraudulent claim for support.

Processing times

We have the following response times and processing targets:

DSA forms

- Process all fully completed DSA application forms within 21 calendar days
- Process all fully completed needs assessment reports within 21 calendar days

Written correspondence and emails

- Respond to all DSA written correspondence within 21 calendar days
- Respond to all emails within 21 calendar days
- Pay all invoices for NMPH within 21 calendar days

Other

- Deal with any requests under Freedom of Information (FOI) within 20 working days
- Respond to all correspondence clearly marked 'complaint' within 14 working days
- Respond to all correspondence clearly marked 'appeal' within 14 working days

If you do not receive a reply from us within 28 calendar days you should contact us to ensure that we have received your application form or correspondence.

Appeals and Complaints

How to appeal

An appeal is a formal request to review a decision we have made on your entitlement to financial support and/or our assessment of how much you should get. An appeal must allege an error on our part and will only be considered where it is evident that we have made an incorrect assessment of your factual circumstances and/or an erroneous interpretation of the law.

You (or your representative) can make a formal appeal by writing to tell us why you think our decision or assessment is wrong. Address the envelope to "SAAS Appeals" at the address in Annex A and clearly mark the letter "Formal Appeal". Please put your SAAS reference number on your correspondence.

How to complain

We would like to hear from you if you feel dissatisfied with any aspect of our service, for example, if you think we have:

- treated you unfairly
- failed to explain things properly
- given you wrong or misleading information
- have taken too long to deal with your case

We want to know if things go wrong so that we can put them right and make sure that they do not happen again.

You can make a formal complaint by writing to tell us what has gone wrong. Address the envelope to "SAAS Complaints" and clearly mark your letter "Formal Complaint". Please put your SAAS reference number on any correspondence.

What we will do

A senior member of staff will consider your appeal or complaint and will aim to reply to you within 10 working days of receipt. If we cannot do so, we will write to explain why and to tell you when you can expect a full response.

If you are unhappy with the reply you receive, you may write to our Chief Executive asking her to review your case. You will normally receive a reply within 10 working days. The Chief Executive's decision is final in terms of our procedures.

If you are not satisfied with the reply from the Chief Executive, you have the right to refer your case to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for consideration. The Ombudsman can investigate claims of maladministration but will normally only do so once you have exhausted the Agency's procedures as detailed above. You should contact the Ombudsman, preferably in writing, within 12 months after the day you first became aware of your grounds for complaint. The SPSO's office is based at 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7NS.

The SPSO's contact details are:

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
Freepost EH641
Edinburgh
EH3 0BR
Tel: 0800 377 7330
Fax: 0800 377 7331
Text: 0790 049 4372
E-Mail:ask@spsso.org.uk
www.spsso.org.uk

Recording, monitoring and reviewing appeals and complaints

If appeals or complaints reveal shortcomings on our part we will use this information to review and improve our procedures.

Our Management Board review the complaints we have dealt with every 3 months to assess whether there are any patterns or trends that suggest we ought to change our procedures. We keep a record of all the complaints we receive and publish details in our annual report.

Appealing the recommendations in your needs assessment

If you wish to appeal against the recommendations in your needs assessment you should first of all appeal directly to the institution or Access Centre that carried out your assessment. The institution or Access Centre that provided your assessment will be able to provide you with a copy of their appeals process. If they are not happy with their response we can appoint an Independent Arbitrator to look at your assessment.

If you are unhappy with the reply you receive from the Independent Arbitrator, you can write to our Chief Executive and ask her to review your case. She will normally reply within 10 working days. The Chief Executive's decision is final in terms of the Agency's procedures. If you are not satisfied with the reply from the Chief Executive, you (or your representative) have the right to refer your case to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) for consideration.

Please see the section *What we will do* on page 11 for details of how to contact the Ombudsman.

Section 3 – FAQs and contact details

FAQs

How do I find out what equipment or other help I need?

We cannot offer advice about equipment or other types of help. If you need advice you should first contact the Disability Advisor at your institution.

What happens once you have approved my claim for DSA?

Once we have approved your claim for DSA we will send you a letter letting you know what we have agreed to pay for. We will also send a copy of this letter to the person who carried out your needs assessment.

Can I buy different items/equipment to the ones that have been approved?

No, you must buy the items/equipment exactly as your assessor recommends. If you are not happy with the equipment that has been recommended you should contact your assessor to discuss this before you purchase any items/equipment.

Can I buy equipment before my course begins?

Once we have dealt with your application we will tell you what equipment we have approved. We may pay for approved equipment shortly before the start of your course so that it is available at the beginning of your studies. We will only make a payment if there is a strong case for you receiving equipment before your course starts. Payment will be made on the clear understanding that you will repay the money in full if you do not start/continue on your course.

We will not pay you for any equipment that you buy which we have not approved and has not been recommended by a needs assessor.

What happens to the equipment when I complete my course?

All the equipment you buy with the DSA is and will stay your property. You may decide to offer the equipment to your institution for other students to use but you do not have to do so.

If we have paid for the hire of equipment you will have to return the equipment to the provider once the hire period is over.

Will I have to repay my DSA if I leave my course early?

Possibly; we may recover some or all of your DSA if you withdraw from your course. It will depend on what point of the course you withdraw at and whether we have given you money for support that you have not yet bought or received.

What do I do once I have bought all of my equipment?

You must send us receipts for all the equipment you have purchased as soon as possible. If this is going to be longer than 6 weeks you must contact us to explain why.

If the equipment you have purchased comes to less than the amount we have given you you must send us a cheque or postal order made out to "Student Awards Agency for Scotland" for the unspent portion.

Please send us photocopies of all receipts as you will need to keep the originals for warranty purposes.

What happens if the amount of NMPH I need changes during the year?

If the amount of support you require changes you must contact your disability advisor as soon as possible to discuss it. If any changes are to be made your Disability Advisor must notify us in writing. We will write out to you to tell you if we have approved the changes.

We will not pay for more NMPH than the amount recommended by your Disability Advisor. If you send us an invoice for more hours we have originally recommended we will restrict the amount we pay to the number of hours originally approved.

Contact us

The contact details for the DSA team are:

Telephone: 0300 300 3135
Fax number: 0131 244 5109
Address: DSA team
Room 210
Gyleview House
3 Redheughs Rigg
Edinburgh
EH12 9HH

Email: saas_4@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.saas.gov.uk

Other useful contacts

Skill Scotland: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

Norton Park
57 Albion Road
Edinburgh
EH7 5QY

Tel: 0131 475 2348
Email: admin@skillscotland.org.uk
Website: www.skill.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

58 Robertson Street
Glasgow
G2 8DU

Tel: 0845 604 5510
Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

National Union of Students Scotland

29 Forth Street
Edinburgh
EH1 3LE

Tel: 0131 556 6598
Email: mail@nus-Scotland.org.uk
Website: www.nusonline.co.uk

