



SEN&D and Study in Higher Education

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: What is Access 1st?

A: We are specialist education consultancy bringing experience, knowledge, ongoing research, training, and resources in response to issues in wellbeing and capability in education and employment.

Access 1st was for many years (until 2024) an accredited Assessment Centre for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA), funding provided for eligible students in Higher Education.

Our work operated within the guidance outlined by the Department for Education to carry out Study Needs Assessments for disabled students in higher education. The focus of this work was to work with students in identifying:

- Specific effects of their 'disability' or diagnosed condition on their ability to study;
- Ways of reducing the effect of issues arising from their condition, eg
 - o Adjusting the environment of study using equipment (eg, ergonomic seating/accessories,
 - o assistive technologies,
 - o accessories,
 - o relevant specialist human support, (assistive technology training, specialist study skills, mentoring support)
 - o identifying needs that call for reasonable adjustments within the university environment;

As of February 2024, this service for students applying for support from the DSA has passed to two national providers: Capita and Study Tech. Your funding body will put you in touch with the relevant provider for your region when your eligibility for DSA funded support is confirmed.

Assessment Centres have specialist equipment, assistive technologies and accessories available for demonstration during the study needs assessment, so that students can see how these can be used as study aids. During the COVID period, where assessments may take place online rather than in-person, other methods of familiarising students with relevant study aids can be arranged.

Q: What is a DSA Study Needs Assessment?

The study needs assessment involves a 1:1 meeting between a student and their needs assessor. This involves a conversation to clarify the effects of the disability on study as well as the type and cost of support to facilitate study beyond the limits of presenting issues. Following this discussion, a

needs assessment report (NAR) is produced confirming the findings. This is part of the process of applying for funding under the Disabled Students Allowances. (DSA) Students have the option to read the report and respond within 5 working days with questions or comments before the report is forwarded to the funding body.

Q: What are the Disabled Students Allowances (DSA)?

A: Students can apply for funding from the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) to pay for additional costs arising from study due to a condition defined as a disability, eg, a mental health condition, a sensory impairment affecting vision or hearing, a learning difficulty, (dyslexia, dyspraxia), long term illness or any other condition eligible under the terms of the Equality Act 2010. The terms of the DSA are set out by the Department for Education, and the allowances are in addition to other provisions of student finance, such as maintenance grant or student loan. They are a grant and do not have to be repaid. <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas>

Q: What is considered a Disability?

A: Disability is defined "under the Equality Act 2010 (as) a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities."

From: <https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010>

In student life, the effect of the disability must have lasted or be expected to last at least 12 months or permanently.

The term, 'Disability' includes the full spectrum of conditions that may not ordinarily thought of in these terms.

Students can declare a disability when applying for study in Higher Education using one of the UCAS Codes:

- A No Disability
- B Social/communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder
- C Blind or have a serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses
- D Deaf or have a serious hearing impairment
- E Long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy
- F Mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder
- G A specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D
- H physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches
- I A disability, impairment or medical condition that is not listed above
- J Two or more impairments and/or disabling medical conditions

Q: Who is Eligible for DSA?

A: “Eligibility” You can apply for Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs)

- (1) if you live in the UK and
- (2) have a disability that affects your ability to study, and
- (3) can provide documentary evidence to confirm this.

You must also:

- ☑ be an undergraduate or postgraduate student (including Open University or distance learning)
- ☑ qualify for student finance from Student Finance England/Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- ☑ be studying on a course that lasts at least a year”

<https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/eligibility>

Q: What is the role of the Needs Assessor?

A: Undertaking study needs assessments of disabled students in higher education, including

☑ receiving and considering any relevant documents, eg medical evidence, confirmation of eligibility from the funding body, or any other information, eg research into the effects of a condition, that may be relevant to identifying study needs.

☑ Meeting with the student; - Discussing the impact of disability on study and identifying ways to make the study process easier and more effective; (eg recording lectures, or using screen reading software to assist reading.)

☑ Making recommendations for funding for relevant items of support, eg, cost of equipment, specialist one-to-one support to enhance capacity to study;

☑ Identifying how the disability may affect participation in lectures, seminars, tutorials and other activities within the university. The student can discuss relevant reasonable adjustments with their Disability Adviser. (eg, extended library loans, additional time in examinations). ☑ Responding to post-assessment queries relating to accessing support recommendations in practice, or advice about any new needs arising.

Q: Do students have to attend the Assessment Centre or will staff come to the school / college to work with the students?

A: Students normally attend the Assessment Centre or may opt for an assessment online. If either of these are not possible, due to disability related needs, another solution may be identified.

Q: Who are SFE?

A: The Student Loans Company administer the funding for higher education, including the DSA. SFE is responsible for this process in England, SFW for Wales, and SFNI for Northern Ireland. Students domiciled in Scotland come under the Student Awards Agency Scotland. (SAAS) These details have been produced with a focus on students in England. The DSA process is slightly different in NI and Scotland.

Q: Who pays for the DSA Needs Assessment?

A: The cost of the DSA Study Needs Assessment is paid for by the Disabled Students Allowances.