

Disabled Students' Allowance

Higher Education Student Finance in Wales

Academic Year 25/26 – Version 1.0

Summary

The purpose of this guidance covers the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) legislation and administration of applications in academic year (AY) 25/26.

Disclaimer

This guidance is designed to assist with the interpretation of the Student Support Regulations ('the Regulations') as they stand at the time of publication. It does not cover every aspect of student support, nor does it constitute legal advice or a definitive statement of the law. Whilst every endeavour has been made to ensure the information contained is correct at the time of publication, no liability is accepted with regard to the contents and the Regulations remain the legal basis of the student support arrangements for AY 25/26. In the event of anomalies between this guidance and the Regulations, the Regulations prevail. Please note the Regulations are subject to amendment.

Please note this guidance is for Wales-domiciled students only.

Regulation references

Since AY 18/19 two sets of regulations govern undergraduate student support in Wales. As these regulations have mirroring provisions, the regulation references throughout this guidance chapter will be followed by either (2017) or (2018) to denote which set of Student Support Regulations the regulation is in reference to.

'(2017)' will denote The Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2017 (SI 2017/47), as amended.

'(2018)' will denote The Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/19), as amended.

Further Information

Annex	Content
A	List of research councils
B	Accredited courses
C	Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs)
D	Guiding principles for Non-Medical Helpers

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full
ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
AT	Assistive Technology
ATSP	Assistive Technology Service Providers
AY	Academic Year
BSL	British Sign Language
CMS	Courses Management Service
DL	Distance Learning
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DSA-QAG	Disabled Students Allowance Quality Assurance Group
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EHC	Education, Health and Care
FT	Full-Time
FTDL	Full-Time Distance Learning
GP	General Practitioner
HE	Higher Education
HEP	Higher Education Provider
HMRC	His Majesty's Revenue and Customs
ILE	International Learning Exchange (also known as Taith)

ITT	Initial Teacher Training
NAR	Needs Assessment Report
NHS	National Health Service
NHSBSA	National Health Service Business Services Authority
NI	National Insurance
NMH	Non-Medical Helper
OU	Open University
PC	Personal computer
PG	Postgraduate
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PIP	Personal Independence Payment
PT	Part-Time
RRML	Reduced Rate Maintenance Loan
SAAS	Student Awards Agency for Scotland
SASC	SPLD Assessment Standards Committee
SFW	Student Finance Wales
SLC	Student Loans Company
SpLDs	Specific Learning Difficulties
STEC	SpLD Test Evaluation Committee
TFL	Tuition Fee Loan
UG	Undergraduate
UK	United Kingdom
VAT	Value Added Tax

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1 Introduction

This Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) guidance is for full time students (regulations 24 (2017) and 61-63 (2018)), part time students (regulations 88 (2017) and 61-63 (2018)), full time distance learning students (regulation 71 (2017)) and postgraduate students (Part 13 (2017) and Schedule 4 (2018)).

Guidance on the other grants payable under the 2017 Regulations or 2018 Regulations is provided separately in the following guidance:

- "Assessing Financial Entitlement" (Maintenance Grant, Special Support Grant, Welsh Government Learning Grant and Travel Grant)
- "Grants for Dependents" (Adult Dependents' Grant, Childcare Grant and Parents' Learning Allowance)

It is important that students who may be eligible for DSA be made aware that support is available. Guidance and other information can be downloaded from the Student Finance Wales (SFW) website:

<https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk>

2 Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

2.1 General information

Under regulations 24 (2017) and 61-63 (2018) an eligible student qualifies for DSA to assist with the additional expenditure the student is obliged to incur in relation to their designated course because of their disability. The DSA is intended to help a disabled student benefit fully from their course.

A person is required to provide evidence that they meet the Equality Act 2010 (Equality Act) definition of "disability" to be eligible for DSA. The Equality Act states that "A person has a disability for the purposes of the Act if they have a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (S6(1))." The 2017 and 2018 regulations use this definition of disability for the purpose of receiving DSA. Aligning to the Equality Act definition provides clarity and consistency, particularly where providers are considering adjustments in parallel to DSA.

The Equality Act does not define what is to be regarded as a "normal day-to-day activity." Normal day-to-day activities can include general work-related activities, and study and education-related activities, such as interacting with peers or colleagues, following instructions, using a computer, driving, carrying out interviews, preparing written documents, and keeping to a timetable or a shift pattern. For the purposes of establishing

whether the student meets the definition, SFW consider study and education-related activities as day-to-day activities.

Students who would ordinarily be asked to submit evidence of their disability either for the first time or because their disability has changed in some way or there has been a gap in their studies would be asked to provide evidence that they satisfy the definition of “disability.” Where a student is unable to provide sufficient evidence that they meet the definition of disability under the Equality Act they will be required to submit a completed medical evidence pro-forma. The student’s study needs assessment will still determine the impact the student’s disability may have on their planned studies and make appropriate recommendations.

Students who may be asked to submit new medical evidence will include:

- Students who are applying for DSA for the first time from AY 25/26;
- Students previously awarded DSA who have completed or withdrawn from a previous course and who begin a new course, or top-up, or begin to undertake a PG course but the gap between the two courses is more than one AY;
- Students whose disability is not life-long and has changed in some way; and
- Students who present with a different disability to that already assessed

DSA are not intended to pay for:

- disability related expenditure that the student would incur even if they were not attending a HE course;
- costs that any student might have regardless of disability; and
- services which can reasonably be expected to be provided by the student’s provider (further guidance in this respect is given under the heading “The Scope of DSA”).

2.2 Providers of needs assessments, assistive technology and assistive technology training

Since February 2024, the end-to-end DSA process for needs assessment, delivery of assistive technology equipment, familiarisation and training, as well as ongoing aftercare, has been provided by framework suppliers who SLC have contracted through a procurement exercise. SLC’s framework suppliers are responsible for different regions across the UK. As students can move to different regions for the purposes of study, they will be allocated to the framework supplier who is best able to fully meet their needs at the point they are made eligible for DSA.

3 Eligibility

3.1 General eligibility

The personal eligibility criteria for receiving student support, including DSA, are set out in the “Assessing Eligibility” guidance. DSA are not subject to:

- an age limit;
- previous study rules; or
- household income assessments.

A student can only receive support while studying on a designated course. Where the eligible course does not appear on the SLC’s courses management system, SFW will not be able to fully process the application. Information on what action should be taken in this situation is covered in the AY 25/26 “Assessing Eligibility” guidance. Students are potentially eligible for DSA whilst attending an overseas provider as part of their UK designated course, whether obligatory or optional. Further guidance can also be found in the AY 25/26 “Assessing Eligibility” guidance.

Students who are eligible for student support under:

- Schedule 1 paragraph 2A, 9, 9A, 9BA, 9C or 9D (2017); or
- Schedule 2 paragraph 1(2)(d)(ii), 1(3), 4A(1)(b)(ii), 4A(2)(b)(ii), 6(1), 6A(1), 6A(2)(d)(ii), 6BA, 6BB, 6C, 6D, 7A(c)(ii), 8A(1)(d)(ii) 1 (2018),
- but not under any other paragraph of those Schedules, are not eligible for DSAs.

Since AY 17/18, students studying via DL whilst resident outside of the UK as a result of being a serving member of the armed forces (or a family member of) may be eligible for support including DSA. For more information on this please see the “Assessing Eligibility” guidance.

3.2 Students on overseas placements

As a result of the UK’s exit from the EU, support on an Erasmus+ programme is no longer available to new students as of AY 21/22. However, funding may be provided from AY 21/22 under the Turing Scheme or the Taith:ILE programme.

Note that some support via Erasmus+ may still be available to continuing disabled students on an Erasmus+ programme where it was approved on or before 31 December 2020.

Students undertaking a course funded by Taith or Turing may be eligible to claim DSA from SFW. In the first instance, eligible disabled students on Turing or Taith programmes will be encouraged to apply to SFW for their disability needs to be met. Assessors undertaking assessments for students who will be undertaking overseas placements should confirm in the NAR if the student advises they are on Taith or Turing.

3.3 Prisoners

For FT students who are eligible prisoners and commence their course on or after 1 September 2012, support is only available for tuition fees. No maintenance support (including DSA) will be available to any prisoner (including an eligible 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.

PT and PG students who are prisoners would not be eligible for DSAs for any periods spent in prison but may qualify part way through an AY after release.

3.4 Means-tested NHS bursaries

Under regulations 23(3) (2017) and regulations 44, 62 and 69(2018) , students are not eligible for grants for living costs, including DSA, for any AY during which they receive a NHS means-tested bursary 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 for an NHS bursary should visit NHS Wales at: <https://nwssp.nhs.wales/ourservices/student-awards-services/> for information about the financial support available through the NHS Bursary Scheme. Or they can phone the NHS Wales Student Awards Unit on 029 2090 5380.

If a student eligible for an NHS bursary opts out of taking that bursary, they may be eligible for DSA from SFW.

3.4.1 Graduate entry courses

Under regulation 23(4) (2017) and regulations 44 and 62(2018), students undertaking an AY of an accelerated graduate entry course, other than the first year of the course, will not qualify grants for living costs, including DSA support. Students on these courses who require DSA support will need to apply to the NHS bursary unit.

3.5 ITT courses

Students undertaking a designated ITT course may qualify for DSA support. Note that students undertaking a designated PG ITT course qualify for the UG package of student support.

The student support package available to students depends on whether the course is either FT or PT:

- Designated FT UG ITT and FT PG ITT courses attract the same support package as standard FT UG degree courses (see “Assessing Financial Entitlement” guidance for more detail), subject to the usual previous study rules.
- Designated PT UG ITT and PT PG ITT courses attract the same support package as standard PT UG ITT courses (see “Support for part-time students” guidance for more detail), subject to the usual previous study rules.

3.6 Sandwich courses and work placements

Students on part-year paid or unpaid placements where the periods of FT study in the AY are 10 weeks or more in aggregate are potentially eligible for DSA support. For example, DSA could pay for additional disability related travel costs to and from the HEP 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.

Under regulations 23(6) (2017) and regulations 44, 62 and 69(2018), students are not eligible for grants for living and other costs, including DSA, in any AY of a sandwich course in where the periods of FT study are in aggregate less than 10 weeks (unless the period of work experience is an unpaid placement of a type specified in regulations 23(7) (2017) and 44 (2018)). Students who do not qualify for grants for living and other costs, including DSA, under regulation 23(6) (2017) and regulations 44, 62 and 69 (2018) are eligible for a RRML which is not subject to income assessment (regulation 45 (2017)) or an amount of maintenance loan in accordance with regulation 55, category 2 (2018).

Under regulation 23(7) (2017) and regulations 44 and 62(2018), 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 DSA (even where the periods of FT study in the AY are less than 10 weeks in aggregate).

Under the new procured model under regulation reg 62 para 2 exception 6 (a) ii.(students who have received DSA funded or approved equipment from November 24 onwards (where there is no provision for DSA warranty and insurance available) and who subsequently study a sandwich year, may be eligible to have that item repaired or replaced during that sandwich year.

3.7 Students who become eligible during the course

Under regulations 23(11) and (12) (2017) and 62 (2018), a student may qualify for DSA support from, and including, the date on which they become an eligible student due to one of the events listed in Annex A of the Assessing Eligibility Guidance Chapter.

A student is not eligible for DSA for AYs of the course falling before the AY in which they become eligible in the circumstances mentioned above (regulations 23(12) (2017) and

regulation 62 (2018)). More information about Events can be found in the Assessing Eligibility Guidance Chapter, 2.46 and Annex A.

3.8 Studying courses by Distance Learning

Students who are undertaking a FTDL course or a PTDL course that started on or after 1 August 2018 may be eligible for DSA (regulation 62 (2018)), tuition fee support and maintenance support. They do not qualify for travel grant but since August 2022, new and continuing students studying on FTDL or PTDL courses may qualify for GFDs.

Students undertaking a FTDL that started on or after 1 September 2012 but before 1 August 2018 may qualify for DSA (regulation 24 (2017)) and tuition fee support. They do not qualify for travel grant. As a continuing student post August 2022, these students may qualify for GFDs.

Further information on FTDL courses is available in the Assessing Eligibility guidance chapter.

3.9 DSA for students attending Full-Time courses

Eligible UG and PG students can access up to a maximum DSA of £34,000, subject to their approved recommendations. The allowance is intended to be a contribution towards or meet the combined costs incurred in the following areas of expenditure:

- Non-medical personal help (NMH);
- Items of specialist equipment; and
- Other disability related expenditure
-

A separate uncapped travel allowance is also available for students who incur additional study related travel costs due to their disability.

There is no provision to pay more than the maximum allowance set out in the Regulations. Therefore, a student cannot use unspent DSA from a previous AY or anticipate grant entitlement for a future AY to pay costs in the current AY.

Where the Needs Assessor has identified support and strategies where the total value may exceed the maximum allowance, the Needs Assessor should continue to make the recommendations in the Needs Assessment Report. If SLC approve these recommendations, they will include guidance in the student's DSA2 Entitlement Letter to explain how the total cost of the agreements is above the maximum funding available and that the student may want to discuss this with their HEP to consider if additional support may be available and to discuss prioritising their recommendations.

3.10 Non-medical helper category of allowance (NMH)

The portion of allowance used towards a non-medical helper (NMH) may be used to pay for additional support required because of a disability. NMH can include sighted guides, British Sign Language interpreters, note-takers and any non-medical helpers necessary to enable the student to benefit fully from the course. See Annex 4 for further details of the support DSA is available for. The needs assessment should consider reasonable adjustments made by the HEP before recommending support to avoid duplication of support. Where the student must make regular or frequent payments for NMH, SFW may consider arranging for some of the student's grant payments to be made in corresponding instalments. If grant payments are made in instalments, SFW will inform the student, or the provider, how such transactions should be recorded and verified for audit purposes.

The provision of NMH 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, SFW might agree to apportion the cost to pay for the course-related help provided by the carer.

It is not a requirement for Welsh students that their NMH support is secured from a known supplier. However, if required, needs assessors can refer to the current list of suppliers for DSA-funded NMH which has been published by the SLC on the SFW practitioner page: <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/practitioners/guidance-for-assessment-centres>

Needs assessors can source quotes for NMH directly from suppliers. This can be done in conjunction with confirming that the supplier has the capacity to deliver the support recommended. Needs assessors should provide two quotations for NMH support along with their recommendation as currently, where it is not possible to secure two quotes due to the specialist nature of support, an explanation must be provided in the Needs Assessment Report (NAR).

Needs assessors must also consider any existing support arrangements the student may have for continuity of support and where a student has a preferred NMH supplier, for example, one they have used previously. The award of support to a preferred supplier must still meet the Conflict-of-Interest standards, this may result in SFW being unable to award support using the preferred or existing supplier. Where there is a preferred supplier, this must be documented on the NAR.

Additional guidance for the contracted DSA framework suppliers on what they need to consider when selecting NMH suppliers has been published: [guidance-on-nmh-selection.pdf](#) (studentfinancewales.co.uk)

DSA funding will not be provided for anyone to carry out NMH support who is not suitably qualified and/or experienced and does not have appropriate employment status. They must be registered with HMRC to pay tax and NI on their earnings. This also applies to DSA funded support provided by family members or friends. Needs Assessors are expected to

ensure that all NMH support workers they recommend have an appropriate employment status and are suitably qualified and/or experienced. Where the request to change to an independent NMH or for the support to be provided by family/friends comes direct to SFW, they will request appropriate evidence of HMRC registration, such as a Tax Return, before the request can be agreed.

Due to the potential conflict of interest, DSA funding will not normally be available to any company, partnership or other organisation that is owned or controlled by the student being supported, or in which the student has a financial interest. Where a potential conflict of interest is identified, Welsh Ministers will consider each case based on the information available to them.

Following the introduction of procured contracts on 26th February 2024, the responsibility for the management of conflict of interest within the provision of needs assessments, assistive technology and training is an SLC responsibility. SLC's framework suppliers must comply with the guidance provided to them by SLC.

It is the view of the Welsh Ministers that where a recommendation has been made for Assistive Technology Training, the standard duration recommended should be no longer than two hours per session. Sessions of other lengths may be considered on a case-by-case basis or where a disability related need is clearly demonstrated. Agreement is at the discretion of SFW.

Where a student has not used the NMH in the previous year of study then SFW will not request updated costs for NMH support.

Students must be made aware of any terms and conditions set out by NMH providers before agreeing support. Where known, it is expected that the study needs assessor making the recommendations must make the student aware; and where not known, the NMH provider is responsible for ensuring the student is aware.

If students are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service provided by a supplier, they are encouraged to raise any concerns they have with their supplier and follow their complaints process in the first instance. If a student is unsure on how to proceed in such cases, or requires further help, they may seek assistance from SFW or their disability adviser or a tutor at their HEP. SFW have published a helpful guide for students to understand what they can expect from their NMH provider which is available at:

<https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/media/nsej5ft3/your-disabled-students-allowancefunded-non-medical-helper-support-what-to-expect.pdf>

3.11 Specialist equipment

The allowance may be used to pay for items of equipment which the student will need, because of a disability, to benefit fully from the course.

Prior to November 2024, students were provided with insurance and warranty for their equipment for the duration of their course. In accordance with the commencement of the commercial aspects of DSA, from November 2024, SFW will no longer fund course long insurance and warranty policies. Instead, SFW DSA will meet the cost of essential repairs where the equipment develops a fault, or to fund a replacement where a repair is not possible or economical. Whilst it may be possible to use DSA to meet the cost of replacement equipment which has been subject to theft (evidence required), generally, it is not possible to meet the cost of replacing equipment which has been lost or misplaced by the student. Where equipment has been provided by the new framework suppliers, an annual charge will be taken from the student's allowance to cover technical support services that the student may require (this replaces the previous maintenance and support payments).

Students who choose to upgrade their equipment with the supplier should be informed that the allowance will only pay **for essential repair charges up to what it would cost to replace the standard approved item**. Any excess costs to repair upgraded equipment would need to be met by the student themselves. Similarly, should the student need their upgraded computer replaced, the allowance will only fund up to the cost of the standard computer that was originally approved.

Needs Assessors who make recommendations for specialist equipment should discuss with the student whether they might benefit from 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 DSA, subject to the maximum overall allowance threshold specified in the Regulations.

3.12 Course transfers and specialist equipment funded by the allowance

It is expected that a recommendation made for specialist equipment will last the student for the duration of their course, however, a student may apply for additional/replacement specialist equipment each year if justified by the study needs assessor and approved by SFW.

All equipment purchased with the help of this allowance is and remains the property of the student. The Regulations do not permit SFW to purchase equipment either to donate to providers or to lend to students. Should the student apply for further study following completion of a course, SFW may enquire about the previous equipment supplied.

3.13 General expenditure items within the allowance

The allowance may be used for other expenditure not covered by specialist equipment or NMH. The cost of a study needs assessment is drawn from the overall allowance under general expenditure. Additional costs associated with accommodation appropriate to the student's needs may also be drawn from general expenditure of the overall allowance

threshold where necessary. The general expenditure of the allowance cannot be used to accommodate a student's special diet. Any additional dietary costs incurred as a result of a disability would be incurred regardless of a student's attendance at college or university.

Attending a hospital appointment linked to a disability cannot usually be regarded as being additional expenditure incurred with the undertaking of a course. Travel to medical treatment can be considered where the additional expenditure incurred is:

- by reason of a student's disability; and
- in connection with the undertaking of a designated course

The additional costs that may be considered are if the treatment is only available in a certain location and the student incurs additional travel costs which except for being enrolled on a course the student would not have to incur. The additional cost of travelling would be calculated as the actual cost less the cost of travelling from the student's home address (not term time address) to the appointment.

3.14 Travel allowance (separate to the overall allowance)

The travel allowance may be used to pay reasonable additional costs of travel to and from the HEP which are incurred because of a disability. For example, if the needs assessment identifies that a student needs to travel by taxi rather than by public transport because of mobility or visual difficulties, then the DSA will cover the additional expenditure that represents. In this instance, the amount of travel allowance should be any excess between the public transport costs (regardless of subsidised travel pass) and taxi costs for the journey. This additional cost should be set out in the NAR.

Some students may be required as a result of a disability to use their own car to travel to and from the provider. In this instance, the amount of travel allowance should be any excess between public transport costs (regardless of subsidised travel pass) and the cost of the same journey by car. Reimbursement of travel allowance will be in accordance with the HMRC Fuel Rates, currently set at 45p per mile for cars (can also be applied to electric cars usage where appropriate). Suitable parking facilities should be arranged by the HEP.

SFW will need to be satisfied that the additional travel expenditure arises in each case by reason of a disability. 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 31 to 34(2017) and regulations 64 to 67(2018)) in the same way as any other student (see "Travel Grants" guidance for AY 25/26 which can be found in the "Assessing Financial Entitlement" guidance).

Students can also use the travel allowance to claim disability related travel costs to attend their face-to-face needs assessment. Where necessary, students can claim for any essential

parking to attend their face-to-face needs assessment. Parking costs must be evidenced by receipt of payment.

4 Part-time DSA

Under regulations 88 (2017) and 63 (2018), an eligible PT student qualifies for DSA to assist with the additional expenditure that the student is obliged to incur to undertake to attend or study by DL their designated PT course because of their disability.

4.1 Eligibility

Like the FT DSA, previous study rules do not apply to PT DSA. They are available to eligible students regardless of age or household income. For details of the personal eligibility criteria for receiving PT support, including PT DSA, please refer to the guidance “Support for parttime student.”

4.2 Designated part-time courses

To be eligible for support, including DSA, a student must be undertaking a designated PT course. The criteria for course designation in respect of PT support, including PT DSA, are set out in the “Support for part-time students” guidance.

Students who begin courses before 1 September 2014 must be studying at a minimum intensity of 50% FTE to be eligible for DSA (regulation 83(1c) (i) (2017)). Students who begin PT courses on or after 1 September 2014 must be studying at a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the AY to be eligible for DSA (regulation 83(1c)(ii) (2017)).

4.3 DSA for students undertaking part-time courses

Since AY 22/23, students undertaking designated PT UG and PG courses will have their DSA combined into a single allowance of up to £34,000 covering costs relating to NMH, special equipment and general support, in addition to a separate uncapped travel allowance. This is the same upper cap as in FT.

5 DSA for postgraduate students

Under Part 13 (2017) and Schedule 4 (2018) an eligible PG student qualifies for DSA to assist with the additional expenditure that a student is obliged to incur to undertake a designated FT or PT PG course because of a disability. All students who started their PG course on or after 1 September 2014 will be assessed by SFW.

PG DSA allowance is aligned with that of UG in relation to new and continuing students. Therefore, PG students can access a single annual allowance of up to £34,000 for NMH, specialist equipment and general support, with a separate uncapped travel allowance for reasonable travel costs.

Eligible Welsh PG students can also access loans and grants as a contribution towards costs, subject to when they commenced their course. For more information, please see the AY 25/26 “PGL” guidance. This PG support will not affect the provision of PG DSA.

5.1 Eligibility

Previous study rules do not apply to PG DSA. They are available to eligible students regardless of age and are not income assessed. To be eligible for the PG DSA students must meet the personal criteria set out in Schedule 1 (2017) and Schedule 2 (2018) and undertake a designated PG course (regulations 112 (2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 2 (2018)).

PG students studying by DL are eligible for DSA, but only if they are undertaking a designated course which is provided by a HEP in the UK (regulations 110(8) (2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 4(2018)). Students undertaking courses on a DL basis are deemed to be studying at their home address. Therefore, to receive DSA, PG distance learners must remain living in the UK whilst undertaking their course.

Under regulation 110(4) (2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 5(2018), a PG student is not eligible for DSA if they:

- are in receipt of:
 - an 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
 - an allowance under the Nursing and Midwifery Student Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2007
 - an allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by a Research Council (a list of the relevant Research Councils is provided at Annex 1)
 - an allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by their HEP which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability
 - the Social Care Wales bursary for students on PG social work courses (where the student is continuing on a PG social work course that started before AY

22/23). Note that students starting a designated social work course in or after AY 22/23 who are in receipt of the Social Care Wales bursary may be eligible for PG DSA support.

- are in breach of an obligation to repay a student loan
- have not ratified an agreement for a student loan made with them when they were under the age of 18
- have shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support.

PG students may be in receipt of a bursary or award from another funding body that provides DSA or support equivalent to DSA. PG students are not eligible for the PG DSA if they have been awarded an NHS bursary or a grant from a Research Council. Similarly, PG students are not eligible for PG DSA if they are in receipt of a bursary or award from their provider which includes support equivalent to DSA (excluding financial assistance received from their provider's hardship fund). Under regulation 110(14) (2017) and Schedule 4, (4)(2) (2018) an eligible PG student is not eligible for support for more than one designated course at a time.

Where a serving member of the armed forces (or a family member of such a person) is studying their designated PG DL course from outside the UK, as a result of their being posted overseas, they can be eligible for PG DSA.

5.2 Designated postgraduate courses for DSA

Regulation 112(1) (2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 2 (2018) provides the criteria for course designation in respect of PG DSA. The requirements are:

- a first degree or higher qualification should be an entry requirement to the course
- a course duration of at least one AY
- if the course is PT that began before 1 September 2014, it must be ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than twice the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent FT course (50% study intensity). If the course is PT which began on or after 1 September 2014, it must be ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than four times the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent FT course (25% intensity)
- the course is provided by a UK provider maintained or assisted by public funds
- the course is not an ITT course, or a course taken as part of an employment based teacher training scheme

Courses need to be provided by publicly funded providers in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and approved fee cap providers in England, in order to be automatically designated, although courses at other providers may be designated on application to Welsh Ministers. FT and PT 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 providers in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and approved providers in England which have been designated specifically for PG DSA. PG courses provided by private providers must be designated for the students to receive DSA support. Students on PG ITT courses are potentially eligible for DSA under the UGFT or UGPT scheme; they are therefore not eligible for the PG DSA, however, the maximum allowance available for support remains the same for UGFT, UGPT and PG so there is no difference in the DSA support available.

The Welsh Ministers may designate courses for the award of PG DSA that are not automatically designated under the Regulations. A provider will be required to apply to the Welsh Ministers via the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr), in the same way as for UG courses, giving evidence of course aims and validation of the qualification. Course designation is considered an event and covered under point 17 above.

5.3 Periods of eligibility

The Regulations provide for DSA to be paid for the period ordinarily required to complete the course (subject to the course satisfying the requirement of regulation 112 (2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 2 (2018)). If a student withdraws, abandons, or is expelled from the course the current period of eligibility is terminated, and no further support will be paid. Where a student intends at the outset to complete a PT PG course in not more than twice the period (for courses that began before 1 September 2014) or not more than four times the period (for courses which began on or after 1 September 2014) ordinarily required to complete an equivalent FT course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the AY during/at the end of which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe.

Example 1 (continuing student): Gerwin studies PT for a Master's degree (which takes one year to complete studying FT) for two years and then studies PT for a PhD (which takes three years to complete studying FT) for a further six years. As the duration of each of the two PT PG courses does not exceed twice the period normally required to complete its FT equivalent, Gerwin is eligible to receive support for the whole of that time.

Example 2 (continuing student): Student B undertakes the same two courses as Student A. However, student B studies PT for the Master's degree for two years, and then they study PT for the PhD for eight years. As the PhD normally takes three years to complete FT, the duration of the PT PhD exceeds twice the period normally required to complete its FT equivalent and is therefore not designated for support. Student B is only eligible for support for the two years of the Master's degree.

Example 3 (continuing student): Student C states an intention to study PT for a PhD for six years. The equivalent FT PhD would take three years. The student is awarded DSA in years one to five of the course as the PT study is at least 50% of a FT course. However, during the fifth year the student's pattern of PT study changes so that they now require a further three years PT study to complete the course, making eight years in total. This period exceeds twice the period normally required to complete an equivalent FT 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 (new student): Student D states an intention to study PT for a PhD for 12 years. The equivalent FT PhD would take three years. The student is awarded DSA in years one to eleven of the course as the PT study is at least 25% of a FT course. However, during the 11th year the student's pattern of PT 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 FT course and means the student cannot receive any further DSA support. Their eligibility will cease from when the intensity drops below 25%.

It is for HEPs to decide whether a PG course is FT or PT and whether a PT course takes more than twice the period ordinarily required to complete a FT course leading to the same qualification where the PT course began before 1 September 2014, or four times the period ordinarily required to complete a FT course leading to the same qualification where the PT course begins on or after 1 September 2014.

SFW may terminate the period of eligibility where the eligible PG student has shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support. SFW 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 113(7) (2017) and schedule 4, paragraph 10 (2018) are used, SFW may treat support paid to the student as an overpayment for recovery under regulation 119 (2017) and schedule 4, paragraph 22(2018).

5.4 Transfer of eligibility

Regulation 114(2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 15 (2018) provides for eligible PG students to transfer their eligibility to another PG 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 provider recommends a transfer in writing and that the importing provider agrees to the transfer. If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any DSA amount awarded for the first course, in the AY of the transfer, would need to be considered for the second course as the period of eligibility has not been broken. 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.

5.5 Students moving directly from undergraduate to postgraduate study

Where a student has graduated and is proceeding directly to PG study, the medical evidence provided and DSA needs assessment undertaken in respect of the UG course should be sufficient to identify the student's support needs in respect of the PG course. This means, that the student could continue to receive support from non-medical helpers without the necessity of submitting new medical evidence or undergoing a new needs assessment. However, if new medical evidence is presented or a new needs assessment is deemed

necessary, because the student's disability has changed in some way or the course is substantially different, this may be paid for from the PG DSA.

If the student seeks new equipment, SFW will need to take into account any equipment the student received from their UG DSA, having regard to how recently the equipment was bought and how appropriate it now is for the software necessary to support the student's disability. The Welsh Ministers' view is that SFW could replace equipment provided in the first year of an UG course but would need to look carefully at requests for new equipment if it had been provided in the final year of an UG course. Discretion on whether to agree equipment rests with SFW.

Students who have not studied recently (those with a break of at least two academic years since graduating) should be assessed in the same way as UG students. They may be asked to provide evidence of disability (which will need to meet the Equality Act definition) and then have their course related needs assessed.

5.6 Postgraduate students completing dissertations after their course ends

A student retains their status as an eligible PG student for a period equal to that which is ordinarily required to complete the relevant designated PG 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 PG 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 PG student will qualify for support during the writing up period.

However, there may be occasions when students request payment of DSA to continue when they are writing up a dissertation or thesis after the end of the period ordinarily required to complete the designated course. Regulation 113(8) (2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 11 (2018) provide SFW with discretion to extend or renew a student's eligibility for such further periods as they consider appropriate after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course. This discretion might be used when a student is writing up a thesis or dissertation after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course.

In the case of PT designated PG courses that began before 1 September 2014, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean that the overall duration of the PT course will be more than double the time needed to complete a FT equivalent course, the PT course would then cease to be designated. Consequently, the student would not qualify for any further DSA support after the ordinary duration of the PT course. Where the PT PG course begins on or after 1 September 2014, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean the overall duration of the PT course will be more than four times the time needed to complete the FT equivalent course, the PT course will cease to be designated and the student will not qualify for further DSA support.

6 Administration of DSA

6.1 Evidence of a disability

Most applicants will be able to provide evidence to establish their eligibility for DSA as 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 age to be eligible for DSA. Eligibility for DSA is not dependent on an applicant being registered as disabled and the current Regulations have applied the definition of disability contained in the Equality Act. Where a student is unable to provide evidence that they meet the definition of disability under the Equality Act they will be required to submit a completed disability evidence proforma. DSA are not intended to provide assistance to members of the general student population who suffer a temporary illness or injury. Assisting such students would be the responsibility of the HEPs.

Care will be needed for applicants whose disabilities have not previously been identified. In such cases, SFW will request an assessment of the disability by a suitably qualified person or body for the purposes of establishing eligibility for DSA (see section 7.2).

Students can become eligible for DSA 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. Equipment needs may arise later in the course. SFW must not, therefore, adopt a policy of only accepting applications for the DSA at the beginning of a course.

Students who are physically disabled, or who have a mental health condition, will need to provide medical evidence of their condition, such as a letter from their doctor or an appropriate specialist. Medical disability evidence should state the nature of the student's disability and ideally should also briefly explain how the student is affected by the disability.

Students with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) such as dyslexia will need to provide evidence of this in the form of a diagnostic assessment from a chartered or practitioner psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher (see Annex 3 for more information on SpLD diagnostic assessments). Since AY 19/20 a diagnostic assessment does not need to have been carried out after the student's 16th birthday to be valid for DSA purposes.

For students with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), due to current waiting lists for diagnosis, an Integrated Autism Service (IAS) waiting list letter is suitable evidence for the purposes of DSA eligibility. This letter does not need to include the day-to-day impacts on the student.

For students with ADHD, DSA can be awarded on an educational diagnostic assessment conducted by an appropriately trained individual, there is no requirement for a medical diagnostic assessment or for the educational diagnostic evidence to detail the day-to-day impacts on the student, although this will be accepted if available.

For any condition recognised as life-long, there is no requirement for the evidence to detail the day-to-day impact on the student.

Any cost a student incurs obtaining the necessary expert evidence or diagnosis cannot be met from DSA. 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 DSA.

Cases may arise where SFW is not satisfied with the evidence initially provided. In such cases, the student should be invited to provide further evidence. In making such an invitation, it is important that SFW makes clear to the student that they will normally be liable to meet the cost of providing the necessary evidence. Students can, however, apply for help with such costs from their HEP's hardship fund once enrolled.

Cases may arise where SFW is unclear, from the medical evidence initially provided, how a student's disability affects their ability to study (except for those where they do not need to provide day-to-day impact). In such cases, the student should be invited to provide further evidence. In some cases this could be from an appropriate specialist with knowledge of the student's particular condition or an appropriate professional adviser. An example where this may be appropriate might be where a student who is deaf submits evidence from a teacher of the deaf who would have the specialist knowledge and skills required to be able to make this assessment. As with the above paragraph, in making such an invitation, it is important that SFW make clear to the student that they will normally be liable to meet the cost of providing the necessary evidence.

Where a student is in receipt of a disability related benefit, such as PIP or DLA, and provides a copy of their benefit award letter, SFW can use this evidence when establishing eligibility for DSA. The evidence must still confirm the required criteria under the Equality Act clearly, such as confirming day to day impacts etc. It is unlikely evidence of this type will confirm all the required criteria and so will most likely be used in conjunction with other evidence provided. The medical pro-forma can be considered in support of this type of evidence.

Once SFW is satisfied with the medical evidence, the student is required to undergo a DSA study needs assessment to identify the appropriate course-related support. Since February 2024, all needs assessments and subsequent reviews are delivered by SLC's framework suppliers. As well as offering remote needs assessment options, the framework suppliers must provide suitable physical facilities for in-person assessments across Wales, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The cost of the study needs assessment is met from the overall allowance of 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. 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. All medical evidence is shared with the study needs assessor to aid discussion and assessment.

Where SFW is satisfied with partial evidence, i.e., student has more than one disability, the student's application can be processed based on the approved medical evidence for the accepted condition and the student can choose whether to provide additional information for any other conditions. It is important for the student to understand that providing the additional evidence may or may not add to the support recommendations approved. For instance, the approved disability may provide sufficient support to cover the support required for the other condition and as such, sourcing additional evidence to receive approval for the second condition may not always generate additional support and may result in delays and additional costs. The DSA 1 letter will provide details of the approved and rejected conditions; the study needs assessor can highlight to the student what additional support approval for the additional conditions may attract for them to consider the value in obtaining additional evidence. If the student presents additional evidence or evidence of a new condition during their needs assessment, the study needs assessor can recommend support for that condition which will be considered by SFW as part of the Needs Assessment Report review.

6.2 Needs assessment

Once SFW has established that a student is an eligible student, the student is potentially eligible at that stage for DSA, subject to receipt of DSA evidence. A study needs assessment should be arranged as soon as possible after it is established that the student is eligible for DSA. Where students provide their consent to SFW, SFW will allocate the student to a framework supplier who will contact them and invite them to register online where they can book a study needs assessment appointment. Where consent is not provided, SLC will provide contact details of the appropriate supplier, and the students will need to make contact themselves to arrange an appointment. The needs assessment outcome is a Study Needs Assessment Report (NAR) and allows SFW to determine the amount of DSA for which the student is eligible. Given that the assessment may be carried out some months before the start of the course, some students may subsequently attend a different HEP or course than identified during their assessment. Students can contact their allocated supplier or SFW if they feel their agreed support needs to be reviewed.

The cost of the DSA needs assessment is met from the overall allowance. The allowance may also be used to pay for the student's travel and parking costs to attend their face to face needs assessment. Where students do not subsequently start a course, they should not be asked to repay the needs assessment fee, nor any travel claim paid. If they reapply for a HE course the following year, the needs assessment already carried out should be sufficient to process their new DSA application unless the course is significantly different or their circumstances have changed.

SFW will notify students that they will need to undergo a DSA needs assessment, ensuring that the student understands what is involved and that if they do not attend an assessment, they cannot progress their DSA application and will not receive the additional support they require. With the explicit consent of the student, the needs assessor may send a copy of the agreed needs assessment report and DSA 2 award letter to the Disability Adviser at their

provider once they have received confirmation of a place. Again, where consent is provided (captured on the SFW application form) SFW will send a copy of the DSA 2 letter to the HEP noted on the application form for information. This will help ensure that the support the student requires is put in place.

As part of the assessment booking process, the student is offered a choice on whether they want their assessment in-person or remotely via video call. Students are provided with information to help them make an informed choice on whether an in-person or remote assessment is best for their needs. Where there is an explicit need, agreed with the student and subject to the appropriateness of the student's disability, assessments may be conducted over the telephone. SFW will monitor the frequency of this mode of assessment.

Recommendations for remote NMH support will be considered through the normal processes, but only where it has been clearly identified that it is the student's choice, is in the best interests of the student and fully meets their needs. It is not expected that an NMH provider would opt for remote support simply to reduce costs, whilst drawing the same level of funding from SFW. Students who have not had remote support agreed previously but see value in having their support conducted this way, should be referred back to their Needs Assessment centre. Additional recommendations should be submitted for SFW's consideration in the usual manner. Assistive technology training can be delivered remotely on the condition it brings the same benefits to that provided in person.

DSA will cover the cost of one study needs assessment (including any associated reviews). However, SFW may be able to fund a review of the initial study needs assessment if the student presents with a new condition not identified at their initial assessment, they have had a break of 2 or more years from study or where 5 years has passed since the initial assessment was conducted. Funded reviews will not generally be considered for worsened conditions, reviews at the student's request which do not meet one of the fundable criteria, or a change from UG to research-based PG course.

Since 24th February 2024, where a student requires a funded review, these can no longer be provided by the student's original assessment centre. SFW will arrange for one of the new framework suppliers to provide this service. In certain circumstances SFW may deem that a new assessment is needed, this is available at the discretion of SFW. Students should be advised that they cannot have a second study needs assessment without prior permission from SFW.

For other non-fundable review of needs assessments, students are referred back to their original assessment centre. In the event their original assessment centre has closed or no longer has capacity to provide a review of need, SFW will refer the student to the most appropriate framework supplier. It is the responsibility of the needs assessment centre to advise SFW if they can no longer meet this requirement.

6.3 DSA quality assurance

Following the closure of DSA-QAG in December 2019 and post introduction of the reformed service that launched in February 2024, the Welsh Ministers expect all legacy assessment centres and equipment providers that are remaining open to support existing students, to adhere to the key principles and standards underlying the Quality Assurance Framework previously operated by DSA-QAG. All NMH providers must continue to have the required level of knowledge, skills, training and qualifications to deliver SFW DSA support competently and to meet professional standards.

From February 2024, new framework suppliers are responsible for the delivery of needs assessment, assistive technology and assistive technology training. SLC are responsible for setting the standards and managing the performance of the suppliers as per the contractual framework.

6.4 The role of the student

Students are advised to apply for DSA as soon as possible to ensure that all parties involved in identifying and providing support are aware of the student's needs. The student is encouraged to contact the disability services at their chosen university at the same time as completing their DSA application form.

It is also the responsibility of the student to advise their HEP or SFW that they have a continuation of travel and accommodation need prior to the start of each subsequent academic year of their course. The student's HEP can support with these arrangements and help secure annual approvals from SFW.

6.5 Disability Advisers

Most HEPs 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 Coordinators as well as Advisers) but they are expected to play an important role in the DSA process. Those working in disability services will have the best understanding of their disabled student body and have a key role in ensuring support is delivered effectively. If requested to assist a student with arranging their DSA needs assessment through the new framework model, it is essential that they liaise with SFW who will ensure the student is an eligible student under the Regulations and once approved, will allocate the student to the most appropriate framework supplier.

It is essential that the disability adviser does not advise the student to purchase equipment or services on the assumption that funding through DSA will be made available. Disability advisers understand the institutional environment and will have access to academic teaching staff and to detailed course information, it is essential that they work with the new framework suppliers to ensure the student's study needs assessment identifies appropriate recommendations required for their chosen course, and to enable the framework supplier to understand what reasonable adjustments can be made under the Equality Act, or more

generally as part of HEP duties, to support any DSA recommendations and prevent duplication. Disability Advisers have an important role in the DSA process by offering advice on the support available, supporting students with their DSA applications, ensuring that the support recommended in the NAR is in place and working with Accommodation Services, Social Services, SFW and academic departments as necessary.

DSA NARs will contain information about the student's disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty, which is classed as sensitive personal data under section 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998. Those releasing disability related data about the student to a third party must obtain written consent from the student. During the DSA needs assessment, assessors are requested to explain the role of the "disability adviser" and with the student's consent, a copy of the agreed report should be sent by the framework supplier's assessment centre to the disability adviser and SFW. Once approved, the student and the framework supplier will receive the DSA 2 letter confirming approved support; with the student's consent, a copy of the DSA 2 letter can also be issued to the Disability Advisor at their confirmed HEP. The DSA application for AY 25/26 asks students to give their consent to the release of information about their DSA to third parties such as disability advisers and DSA assessors.

Once a student is in receipt of support, a Disability Advisor may, without referring back to the assessment centre, make requests to SFW on behalf of the student for an increase in recommended NMH hours, more travel and accommodation updates. Where the Disability Advisor identifies an additional support need or feels the student may benefit from additional equipment or support not previously recommended, the Disability Advisor must refer the student back to their study needs assessment provider where a review of need can be considered. The student's supplier will be detailed on their DSA 2 letter.

6.6 DSA study needs assessor

The role of the DSA study needs assessor is to consider the nature of the student's disability and the impact of that disability on the student's ability to fully participate in their chosen course. Consideration must be given to the learning environment of the student and the content of the course they intend to study. Through discussions with the student and using the information in any specialist diagnostic assessment report and an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan or Individual Development Plan (IDP) where one exists, the assessor should identify what support is essential to enable the student to undertake their course effectively.

Assessors are required to have regard to the Student Support Regulations and this guidance when considering the support funded through DSA that they wish to recommend for the student. This guidance sets out what falls within the scope of DSA. If DSA is available, but the assessor determines that some of the support is already provided by the HEP, then DSA funding will not be necessary and should not be recommended for that support: the assessor must confirm with the HEP and note their response in the NAR. The primary responsibility for supporting a disabled student rests with the provider; DSA are made available to complement the existing support. DSA study needs assessors should set out

clearly in the report what recommendations they are making for DSA funded support and why. Any recommendations for DSA support will continue to require full justification. Decisions on the support to award will be taken by SFW, taking into account the recommendations of the DSA study needs assessor.

If the DSA study needs assessor identifies support that falls outside DSA funding, they may wish to advise the HEP of their findings for consideration. The DSA study needs assessor should not state how that support should be delivered or the level required – that is for the HEP to determine considering the individual needs of the student and their obligations under the Equality Act. Study needs assessors are required to follow the standards set out in the procurement framework when undertaking a DSA study needs assessment and compliance with those standards will be routinely monitored. A standard NAR template is used to ensure consistency of approach. The agreed NAR will be sent simultaneously to SFW and to the HEP's disability service if the student gives their permission to do so. A guide to how study needs assessors should fulfil their role is set out at Annex 4 below.

The DSA study needs assessor does not make decisions on eligibility or entitlement to DSA. This function has been transferred from the Welsh Ministers to SLC (including SFW). Eligibility criteria are set out in the Regulations. SFW will have regard to the opinion of the DSA study needs assessor when considering recommendations for DSA support.

Recommendations for assistive technology must continue to be made using the approved catalogue owned by SLC. In the unlikely event that an item is required for a student that is not listed on the catalogue, the needs assessor must contact the SFW DSA team to discuss

Study needs assessors must consider the language preference of the student and students must be given the choice to have their study needs assessment conducted in Welsh if that is their preference. Furthermore, where assistive technology recommendations are made and the language preference of the student is Welsh, assessors must ensure that the recommended Welsh assistive technology is directly comparable to the English version. In some cases, this may result in more than one item of software being recommended.

6.7 SFW service

SFW is a SLC service, providing financial support to students on behalf of the Welsh Ministers. Support is provided to students who are ordinarily resident in Wales entering HE in the UK. SFW is required to deliver DSA within the framework set by the Student Support Regulations and guidance. SFW may contact the Welsh Government with questions that arise from the applications they are processing, and the guidance may be updated to clarify the policy if needed.

SFW is required to make decisions on DSA eligibility and issue DSA 1 letters, and awards for support by issuing the DSA 2 letter, taking into account the recommendations of the DSA study needs assessor. SFW will challenge NARs where DSA support is recommended that falls outside this guidance and a reasonable adjustment is known to be offered. Similarly, the report will be challenged if the individual DSA recommendations are not sufficiently

justified according to the guidance and the impact identified during assessment. Challenges will be brought to the attention of the framework supplier for quality monitoring purposes. SLC's framework suppliers must build good relationships with HEPs and maintain up to date information on what help is available from the HEP by way of reasonable adjustments. This is to ensure the type and level of support recommended is appropriate and additional to that already available.

SFW will ensure students who no longer have access to their original needs assessment centre continue to receive the additional support they require. Minor updates to previously agreed support can be arranged by SFW but in circumstances where a broader review of needs is required, SFW will refer students to the new framework suppliers. Where consent is provided by the student, SFW will share the personal details and the type of support the student requires with the appropriate framework supplier. The framework supplier will then contact the student to make arrangements to provide that support. If the student has not provided consent, SFW will inform the student that they should contact the appropriate framework supplier directly to arrange the service that is required. SFW will provide the student the contact details of the framework supplier and approval of the service that is required.

7 The scope of DSA

SFW must satisfy itself that the student is obliged by reason of their disability to incur additional expenditure to be able to attend or undertake their course. SFW must also be satisfied that all such expenditure is reasonably incurred and appropriate to the individual needs of the student. DSA are not intended to assist with disability-related expenditure that the student would continue to incur if they were not following their course. For instance, 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.

7.1 The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 (Equality Act) came into force from 1 October 2010. The Equality Act generally carries forward the protection that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 provided for people with disabilities. It is for SFW and HEPs to take their own advice on how the Equality Act and related legislation applies to them.

The duty requires public authorities (which will include most colleges and universities), when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- promote equality of opportunity between people with disabilities and other people
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010
- eliminate harassment of disabled people that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards people with disabilities
- encourage participation by people with disabilities in public life
- take steps to take account of peoples' disabilities, even where that involves more favourable treatment.

These elements are defined as the general duty to promote disability equality. HEPs also have specific duties, which provide a clear framework to meet the general duty. Central to the specific duties is the requirement on HEPs to produce a Disability Equality Scheme. For further information on these duties see the Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Disability Equality.

In addition, it is unlawful under part 2 of the Equality Act 2010 for educational providers (including HEPs) to discriminate against disabled people. The Equality Act encompasses any services provided for students - education, training, leisure facilities and accommodation – it also covers admissions, enrolments and exclusions.

Part 2 of the Equality Act includes two key requirements on bodies responsible for educational providers:

- i. Responsible bodies must not treat a disabled person “less favourably” than a nondisabled person for reasons related to their disability
- ii. Responsible bodies must make “reasonable adjustments” to ensure that a disabled student is not placed at a “substantial disadvantage”

Reasonable adjustments cover everything from admissions procedures, to teaching arrangements, exam procedures or course content. HEPs must anticipate what sort of adjustments may be necessary for disabled students in the future. The anticipatory nature of reasonable adjustments requires education providers to be proactive in finding out about individual disabled students’ needs but this does not mean that education providers should wait for a disabled person to approach them before considering the duty to make reasonable adjustments. The Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice requires consideration and implementation of a range of mechanisms to overcome barriers that are likely to or would obviously disadvantage disabled people.

The duties in respect of students over 16 years were introduced in three stages: majority of legislation, September 2002, provision of auxiliary aids and services September 2003 and adjustments to physical features of premises, September 2005. This means that providers of goods and services must take reasonable steps to remove or alter a physical feature which makes it difficult for a disabled person to use a service or provide the service in an alternative way. The Equality and Human Rights Commission website (<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com>) provides a useful source of information about the Equality Act 2010 including guidance for the further and HE sectors.

SLC nor SFW are responsible for advising HEPs in relation to their duty under the Equality Act 2010.

7.2 Equality Act 2010 and work placements

Work placements are currently included in the Equality Act 2010 which means that college and university staff must consider a person’s disability when arranging work placements and liaise with the work placement providers to implement the support. The Equality Act 2010 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 HE course. The providers of work placements are now required to ensure that they do not have discriminatory practices and 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.

8 Support appropriate to DSA

The following headings provide a breakdown of the disability-related support considered appropriate to the DSA, although it should be noted that the contents are not an exhaustive definition of support appropriate to the DSA or appropriate in all cases.

8.1 Specialist equipment

For example:

- Computer hardware/laptops
- Disability specific ICT peripherals, audio capture equipment and accessories
- Disability assistive software – not course-specific software
- Ergonomic furniture required for study purposes within the student's residence

8.2 Non-medical helper support

For example:

- Training in use of disability software
- Note-takers
- Disability-related specialist support
- Library support
- Human assistance with carrying course-related materials and mobility around the HEP
- Payments to non-medical helpers that comply with statutory employment rights (for example, tax, holiday pay)
- Support for practical coursework
- Communication support workers (including BSL) to access lectures and other academic areas where learning takes place
- Administration costs incurred in recruiting and organising helpers
- Readers/scribes and proof-readers

8.3 General support

- other disability-related items not covered elsewhere; can also be used to cover additional costs associated with disability suitable accommodation.
- The costs of a study needs assessment or review of needs.

8.4 Travel allowance (separate to the capped allowance)

- The extra cost (due to their disability) of the student's travel to and from a HEP

- The extra cost (due to their disability) of the student's travel to and from a work placement
- The extra cost (due to their disability) of the student's travel to and from a field trip.
- The full cost of travel associated with attending a face to face study needs assessment, including parking.

8.5 Complexities of DSA and recommendations

Given the complexities surrounding disability-related support, it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list of support appropriate to DSA as it is awarded based on the individual's needs, considering their circumstances and the purpose of the disability-related support.

The following principles should be used to decide if the support is appropriate for DSA funding when it is unclear if the funding should be met from the DSA or the HEP's own funding allocation:

- the support in question is not provided by the HEP for all other students and
- the equipment is provided for use exclusively by the disabled student.
- the support is available from the HEP but resource is limited, and availability may impact the students ability to fully participate in their studies

The Welsh Ministers recommend:

- DSA should not be used for charges for support, counselling or tutorial services which the provider makes available to all students.
- DSA are not intended for the costs of extra academic tuition or support in the main subject area(s) being studied. Providers should normally meet these costs as part of providing the course.
- Similarly, where an HEP 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 HEPs may need to make to enable a disabled student to take examinations (for example, providing physical access to the examination hall or allowing the examinations to be taken and invigilated somewhere else) should not be set against DSA. 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 DSA.
- DSA 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 dyslexia 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 (for example, in essay construction and writing, examination techniques, revision skills) would be appropriate for DSA. However, SFW should satisfy itself that the cost is reasonable and appropriate. If such study skills or IT support or IT installation and training are provided through the summer, it would seem reasonable to use DSA to pay for it. However, any such activities undertaken outside term time would not count as attendance on the course and therefore would not trigger extra weeks' maintenance loan.

8.6 Eligibility

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 the Welsh Government to fund personal care support for disabled people and are responsible for deciding how their budget allocation is spent.

9 Arrangements for engaging Non-Medical Helpers

9.1 The employment rights of non-medical helpers including tax and national insurance contribution implications

NMHs who are self-employed are responsible for their own tax and NI contributions. Using a self-employed NMH would mean that students, or any other body, are not the employer of the NMHs. For the purpose of tax and NI 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 NMH 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.

DSA funding will not be available for individuals without an appropriate employment status - they must be registered with HMRC to pay tax and NI on their earnings.

NMH suppliers should not charge additional costs for travel and parking on top of their agreed rates. These costs should be quantified and factored into business costs.

9.2 The employer of the non-medical helper

Generally DSA funding will not be available for individuals without an appropriate employment status, for example, they must be registered with HMRC to pay tax and NI on their earnings. DSA funding will not be provided for family members or friends to provide NMH support without evidence that they have the appropriate qualifications and employment status. Students will be asked to provide appropriate evidence when requesting that a family member or colleague provides their support. Exceptions can be considered, for example for the short-term, where an appropriate support worker cannot be identified before the student's studies commence.

9.3 Administration charges for arranging non-medical helpers

In the context of DSA, many HEPs arrange and administer non-medical helper support however HEPs 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 Welsh Ministers accept that it is legitimate for HEPs to add the relevant element of these administration costs into their charges for non-medical helper support. Furthermore, the Welsh Ministers accept 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.

Although it is permissible for HEPs to recover administrative costs associated with the provision of DSA funded non-medical helpers, DSA cannot be used as a contribution towards the infrastructure, general administration and pastoral costs of the HEP. That is, DSA must not be used to cross-subsidise the infrastructure of HEPs' disability services.

HEP governing bodies are responsible for the proper stewardship and value for money of public funds. The amount they claim for DSA administration needs to be relevant and proportionate, and to have been incurred by the HEP 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.

Costs should be based on actual delivery and not assessed delivery. It is reasonable for SFW to ask for evidence that the support for which they are invoiced by HEPs 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. HEPs should clearly distinguish the types of services and their costs on invoices submitted to SFW and SFW will need to assure themselves about the amounts claimed by individual providers. They might, for example, ask providers to submit details of how their administrative costs have been calculated with the first claims each year.

A fundamental review of costs should be undertaken by HEPs 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.

SFW should satisfy themselves that claims for DSA are made in accordance with guidance and should challenge costs which do not appear to them to be reasonable.

NMH providers should be commissioned directly by the needs assessor. Once support is agreed, the NMH supplier is not permitted to outsource or sub-contract that service. If the NMH supplier is subsequently unable to provide the agreed support, they must advise SFW immediately.

9.4 Cancellation charges when students fail to attend a pre-arranged session with a nonmedical helper

There is no policy for paying NMH provision that has been recommended in a DSA NAR and put in place by a HEP or other provider, regardless of whether the student takes 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. If the student is required in such circumstances to pay a cancellation charge, then the charge could be met from the student’s DSA as part of the expenditure they were obliged to incur to secure NMH support. For example, where the terms of a contract the student has entered into with a HEP 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.

However, the number of missed sessions and the reasons for not attending will be closely monitored. Where students continually fail to attend NMH sessions without good reason a point must come where SFW can no longer agree to pay for NMH provision that is not being used. “Continually” could mean, for example, where 3 or more sessions are cancelled or missed by the student in one term. Sessions cancelled by the HEP or the provider will not be covered by DSA, unless there are exceptional circumstances that are beyond the control of either party, for example HEP strike action impacting on students’ ability to attend their session. Similarly, where students give notice part way through the year that they no longer need or want NMH support, we do not consider that SFW should continue to pay for NMH provision that is not being taken up. Additionally, if a student has not used the NMH in the previous year of study then SFW will not request updated costs for NMH support. It is reasonable for SFW to request evidence that any NMH support for which they are invoiced by HEPs or other providers has been delivered or seek evidence to support a claim for nonattendance/cancellations.

9.5 Payments of DSA

Regulation 24 (2017) and regulation 63 (2018) (FT DSA), regulation 71 (2017) FTDL DSA), regulation 88 (2017) and regulation 63 (2018) (PT DSA) and regulation 110 (2017) and Schedule 4 (2018) (PG DSA) provide a discretion as to the timing of DSA payments and also whether payments should be paid in instalments.

Payments for DSA (outside of the contracted framework supplier services) will be made by SFW upon receipt of an invoice or evidence of costs incurred.

9.6 Timing of payments for specialist equipment

Students are encouraged to apply for DSA at the earliest opportunity. Once their DSA eligibility has been established, the student is referred for a study needs assessment. Where recommendations for specialist equipment are approved, regulations permit for payment of DSA grant in respect of the academic year of the present course to be made prior to receiving attendance confirmation from the HEP and the framework supplier can provide the goods to the student before the course start date.

This will allow students to have the maximum time to familiarise themselves with the equipment and undertake any necessary AT training. We would not expect SFW to make payments of DSA well in advance of the start of the course, particularly where the student is still at school.

9.7 Payments to third parties

It is recommended that SFW pay DSA directly to suppliers of assessment, equipment and NMH services. The Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 (section 22) and the student support regulations authorise the payment of DSA directly to students. Therefore, payment directly to a third party would not satisfy the statutory requirements unless the student consents to this in the application declaration.

9.8 DSA applications received in the final stages of a course

Some students may apply for DSA support in the latter stages of the final year of their courses. 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.

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 human support, such as exam support, study support or revision skills, at short

notice. However, the usual DSA 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 that SFW treats any applications for equipment towards the end of a student's course with caution.

9.9 Students who leave a course after receiving equipment

If a student receives DSA equipment while on their course and then 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.

9.10 Eligibility

A DSA assessment is recommended to take place 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 early, for example, 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 62(5) (FT students) (2017) and regulation 90 (2018), regulation 80(3) (2017) (FTDL students), regulation 109(7) (PT students) (2017) and 90 (2) (2018) and regulation 119(6) (PG students) (2017) and Schedule 4, paragraph 22 (2018); essentially, the need for the equipment has not materialised.

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 SFW had not been notified that the student had left the course). This will constitute an overpayment for the purposes of regulation 62 (FT students) (2017) and 90 (2018), regulation 80 (2017) (FTDL students), regulation 109 (PT students) (2017) and 90 (2018) and regulation 119 (PG students) (2017) and Schedule 4, Paragraph 22 (2018).

SFW will be able to accept the return of the equipment to the supplier, a monetary repayment or a combination of both. 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.

9.11 VAT and DSA

Under VAT law, equipment and appliances are VAT zero-rated if:

- they are designed solely for use by a disabled person

- the supply is to a disabled person for their personal or domestic use
- the equipment is relevant to a person's disability
-

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, he 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.

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. 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.

9.12 Computer equipment that may be zero-rated when supplied to a disabled person for personal or domestic use

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.

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.

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.

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.

9.13 DSA equipment ordered and paid directly by SFW

DSA funds belong to the student and items purchased with these funds remain the property of the student. SFW is unable to order equipment on a student's behalf. VAT is properly chargeable at the time of purchase (for example, the VAT relief, if appropriate, is applied at that time by the supplier) and cannot be reclaimed from HMRC by SFW or the student.

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 reliefs for disabled people, on 0300 123 1073 or by visiting the HMRC website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vat-notice-7017-vat-reliefs-for-disabledpeople>

9.14 Internet Connection

Providing support for an internet connection can only be considered in exceptional circumstances. The wide availability of internet access within providers, student accommodation and other venues has removed the necessity of providing individual personal internet access. Exceptions should be considered by SFW on a case-by-case basis.

9.15 High-cost computers

Study needs assessors should identify the lowest specification computer that meets the student's needs. DSA will only be available for high-cost computers for example, non-PC laptops and desktops including Mac (and iPad), PC computers with larger memory, faster processors and/or graphics cards where there is a robust disability-related justification for computer support and written confirmation from the course director (or equivalent) indicating that the course cannot be completed via a PC platform. DSA study needs assessors should not recommend a high-cost computer unless it is essential and the student's specific need must be appropriately evidenced.

When electing to run courses requiring access to a non-PC platform, or other higher cost equipment, providers must consider how its students, including disabled students, will access the appropriate equipment. Providers should make appropriate provision for access to such IT equipment.

DSA funding is available for light-weight computers where there is an appropriate recommendation. While DSA funding is not generally available for tablet devices, these can be considered in exceptional where there is specific case justification.

100% of the recommended computer costs will be covered where the student has not reached their maximum DSA entitlement and there is no requirement to pay any upfront costs for any recommended computer equipment. Where a student has chosen to upgrade their equipment, they will be responsible for paying the balance between the recommended item and the upgrade.

9.16 Non-recommended suppliers and upgrades

Following the introduction of the DSA procurement frameworks to provide assistive technology and training, equipment and the associated training will be provided by the assigned supplier. However, as NMH support is outside of the framework, a student may request a change to their recommended supplier on the condition they can provide the support detailed and they meet the requirements for NMH support, including the Conflict of Interest standards. DSA will only be available to purchase support which has been agreed by SFW, in addition to this SFW will need to be satisfied that the NMH provider is appropriate and that the expenditure is reasonable.

If a student wishes to purchase equipment of a higher specification than that recommended, they must use their own money to meet the extra costs. Purchases made directly by students should always be supported by receipts which SFW may request under the provisions of Schedule 3 (2017) and regulation 35 (2018).

9.17 Electrically powered wheelchairs and scooters

Generally the cost of purchasing wheelchairs and scooters would be incurred regardless of whether the student is attending a course. The need for a wheelchair or mobility scooter is unlikely to be solely related to their study. They would therefore not be covered through DSA funding. Individuals may qualify for support from the health authority or through DWP benefits to meet their mobility needs.

9.18 Using DSA to support participation in extra-curricular activities

The Regulations allow for DSA to be used for additional expenditure on extracurricular activities which SFW is satisfied the student is obliged to incur in connection with their attendance on (or their undertaking) a designated course. This would not allow DSA to be used to support a student when participating in Freshers' week or other extracurricular activities where there is no link with the course of study.

If it could be demonstrated that the extra-curricular activity is a course requirement, there is no statutory bar to paying a DSA to allow the student to participate in that activity. It is recommended that DSA 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 this is course related.

It should be noted that course related costs which all students on the course are required to incur are not covered by DSA, for example items required by all students to attend a field trip such as waterproof clothing would fall outside the scope of DSA. It is expected that any reasonable adjustments which could have been anticipated when planning a field trip should be met by the provider.

9.19 Reimbursing HEPs for support provided before a DSA assessment was carried out

Students will not be reimbursed for items bought before the study needs assessment has been carried out. In the event the student commences their course before receiving their study needs assessment, HEPs may be able to claim reimbursement for NMH support that they have provided in advance of the study needs assessment on condition that the type and level of support is subsequently recommended by the study needs assessor. When assessing a student who has already started their course, the study needs assessor must enquire about any interim support being made available by the HEP. If a continuation of that support is recommended, and in line with the student's choice, the HEP providing the interim support should be one of the recommended suppliers.

It is important that the HEP tell SFW they are providing interim support to a student at the earliest opportunity to allow them to claim reimbursement of all costs incurred. HEP costs can only be reimbursed back to the date the HEP notified SFW they were providing that support.

9.20 Student fails to pay an assessment centre or supplier

Although it is recommended that SFW 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 monies and make payments direct. In some cases, the DSA assessment has been undertaken but the student has not paid for the assessment. Advice is that this does not constitute an overpayment and that this is a matter between the assessment supplier and the student. There are no provisions in the Regulations which would enable SFW 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 or NMH.

9.21 Bankruptcy for suppliers

The new framework model will provide protection against DSA money being lost where it has been paid to a supplier of specialist equipment (paid either by the SFW or the student) and the supplier has gone bankrupt before supplying the equipment. Should students who have been assessed prior to February 24, but who have not received their equipment, experience issues around obtaining their recommended goods, 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.

However, we would not want the student to incur unnecessary burden due to the actions of a supplier, therefore, in the event this happens, SFW may exercise discretion and the student will be referred to a framework supplier for them to issue the recommended goods. SFW will report all instances of this nature to the Welsh Government.

10 The role of disability organisations

National disability organisations such as RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) and Action on Hearing Loss (previously Royal National Institute for Deaf People) can often provide valuable specialist support and advice upon which SFW can draw. They can help SFW in one or more of the following ways:

- providing information on particular disabilities
- support the framework supplier on understanding and assessing students' needs
- helping with the training of Student Support Officers
- increasing awareness of DSA in their own constituent groups
- providing a network of wider help for SFW

It is important for SFW to establish good working relationships with the national bodies. SFW who have a nominated officer with responsibility for DSA will find it easier to establish and maintain a good working relationship. Assistance of the type described above from a national body need not replace any local arrangements that SFW may already have but can usefully supplement them.

10.1 Disability rights UK

Disability Rights UK is a national charity which gives information and advice to disabled students and the people who work with them. They can support students who are studying in Wales with general information on the Equality Act, welfare benefits and access to HE. All of the Disability Rights UK's factsheets are available on their website:

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/benefitsinformation/factsheets/education-factsheets>

The Disabled Students Helpline is open 11:00am-1:00pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Telephone number 0330 995 0414, and email: students@disabilityrightsuk.org

10.2 National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP)

The National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP) Ltd is the professional organisation for disability and support staff in FE and HE. 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 SFW may have on the role of disability staff and how they support disabled students.

National Association of Disability Practitioners Ltd
212A Lansdowne Building

2 Lansdowne Road
Croydon
Surrey
CR9 2ER
Tel/Fax: 0208 263 6220
Email: admin@nadp-uk.org
Website: <http://www.nadp-uk.org>

10.3 Complaints

DSA funded students should raise any complaints with the supplier of the service they are unhappy with in the first instance. Where the student and supplier are unable to resolve matters the student should be directed to SLC.

Details of SLC's complaints procedure can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/student-loans-company/about/complaintsprocedure>

Complaints in relation to the new framework suppliers' services can be directed to the relevant supplier through their websites: <https://www.capita.com/dsa>
<https://study.tech/complaints-policy>

11 The DSA application process

11.1 Application procedures for students applying for DSA

Full-time students studying at undergraduate level only apply for DSA once for the duration of their course, with support needs being rolled over and or reviewed as necessary each year.

Part-time undergraduate students and postgraduate students (both full-time and part-time) must apply for DSA each year of their course, although they may not need to provide SFW with further evidence if their disability has not changed.

Step 1: Students undertaking a HE course apply to SFW to receive DSA. Their application must be supported by evidence about their disability (see section 7.1)

Step 2: Once SFW has confirmed eligibility (DSA1), and if the student has provided consent to share, the customer details will be shared with the most appropriate framework supplier. The supplier will then contact the customer to arrange a needs assessment, where the student's support requirements are assessed. If the student has not provided consent to share, the student will receive advice about how to contact the supplier. A NAR detailing the specific support the student needs is provided to SFW and to the student.

Step 3: SFW considers the NAR, seeking clarification from the DSA study needs assessor where it considers it is necessary. It then processes the NAR and calculates the student's entitlement. The student is sent a copy of their entitlement letter (DSA2) and if consent has been provided this is shared with the framework supplier who will arrange for any assistive technology and training to be provided. For NMH and Travel support the student will be provided with contact details for the agreed supplier.

Step 4: The student receives the agreed support and the supplier invoices SFW for goods or services supplied.

11.2 Providing information to students

The process of applying for DSA can be confusing for students as they do not always understand what evidence is required. Therefore, 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 providers.

Students should also be made aware that they have responsibilities to supply information promptly to minimise the risk of delay in processing their applications and arranging their support. Therefore, SFW letters issued to students should include the following:

- Information on the evidence of disability/specific learning difficulty required from students together with a brief outline of the DSA process. This letter should be issued with "Extra help - Disabled Students' Allowance in 2025/26" when students enquire about DSA or have indicated on their application forms that they wish to apply for DSA. The AY 25/26 DSA application form (either DSA1F for students who have not yet submitted a student support application or DSASL for those who have) should also be sent at this stage to obtain the appropriate consent from students required for SLC to exercise the DSA process, this includes consent to share their details with their HEP and their DSA suppliers along with confirmation to pay suppliers on their behalf.
- A brief outline of the DSA assessment process and its importance. This letter would confirm that SFW accepts the evidence of disability/specific learning difficulty provided by the student and clearly sets out the arrangements for obtaining a DSA assessment.
- Full details of the DSA support awarded, any delivery arrangements and the method of paying for DSA support where applicable. This letter would be issued once SFW has agreed the DSA support to be awarded.
- SFW contact details for DSA enquiries.

- A reference to Disability Advisers at HE providers as a source of further assistance for the student. Whenever possible it would be helpful if SFW included the name and contact details of the Disability Adviser at the student's provider.

Where SFW rejects an application for DSA or allows only part of the application, it should provide clear reasons to the applicant for its decisions. In such cases, it would be expected that SFW at the same time provided the applicant with information on its appeals policies and procedures.

SFW FT students are able to apply for DSA through their online account. The AY 25/26 DSA application form (either DSA1F for students who have not yet submitted a student support application or DSASL for those who have) is also used for obtaining student consent to paying suppliers direct and for releasing information about the student's DSA application to third parties such as Disability Advisers and DSA suppliers. DSA1F can be issued by SFW to FT UG students with "Extra help - Disabled Students' Allowance in 25/26 at the beginning of the application process. The DSASL form for 25/26 can be requested via the correspondence screen in the student's account.

11.3 Application procedures for students applying for DSA in respect of full-time distance learning courses, part-time courses and postgraduate courses

The DSA application process for students undertaking FT DL, PT and PG courses involve completion of the DSA1F (PG students will be required to complete a DSA1F in full) or DSASL form by the student and endorsement of course details by providers. In order to expedite the application process, it is recommended that SFW requests that students provide evidence of their disability with their completed application form.

Under the Equality Act, disabled students have the right to confidentiality which means that they are not required to reveal their disability to their provider. We expect that most students will not object to asking their providers to endorse their application form. However, some disabled students (we expect the number to be minimal) may object to asking their provider to complete the form because this would disclose that they are disabled and deny their rights to confidentiality under the Equality Act.

In the event that a disabled student does object to their provider seeing their application form, we recommend the following action:

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

Letters should not mention that the student is disabled or is applying for DSA.

For all DSA applications, SFW must consider if the student requires reasonable adjustments to help them complete the application process. This can include, but is not limited to, taking application details over the phone or engaging with a nominated third party to act as an intermediate between SFW and the student. Records of any reasonable adjustment required must be recorded on the student's notes for future reference.

12 Annexes

12.1 Annex A - List of research councils (others may be available)

- The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) at www.ahrc.ukri.org
- Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) at <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/>
- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) at <https://esrc.ukri.org/>
- Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) at www.epsrc.ukri.org
- Medical Research Council (MRC) at www.mrc.ukri.org
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) at www.nerc.ukri.org
- Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) at <https://stfc.ukri.org/>

12.2 Annex B – Accredited courses

Courses accredited by the British Dyslexia Association (BDA) for dyslexia assessments carried out by teachers. You should contact the BDA for details of the specific providers and courses that meet the DSA requirements. BDA details can be found here: <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

Courses Leading to SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate. Details of the courses that will qualify successful candidates to apply for SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate from Patoss or Dyslexia Action can be found at: Approved SpLD Assessor Qualifications <https://sasc.org.uk/>

12.3 Annex C – Specific learning difficulties

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

12.3.1 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, causing the print to appear distorted or the reader to lose the 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 the ability to acquire arithmetical and mathematical skills
- lack of structure in oral presentations and word retrieval difficulties
- short attention spans and a high level of distractibility
- poor organisation making time management very difficult

12.3.2 Screening for SpLDs

Screening for SpLDs usually precedes a diagnostic assessment and the purpose is to determine whether a full diagnostic assessment would be warranted. Screening for SpLD does not constitute a diagnostic assessment and therefore SFW should not accept a

screening for SpLD as the sole evidence of a SpLD. There is no requirement for a student to undergo a screening for SpLD when providing their evidence for HE purposes.

12.3.3 Full diagnostic evidence of SpLDs

A Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) Working Group was set up in 2003 to review the arrangements for identifying and assessing SpLDs in HE 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 DSA section of the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee website at: <http://www.sasc.org.uk>

98. The SpLDs Working Group asked a committee to take a lead in implementing a number of the report's recommendations. This committee is the National Committee on Standards in SpLD Assessment, Training and Practice (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 can be found on the SASC website at <http://www.sasc.org.uk> or email sascweb@sasc.org.uk.

The Framework recommended in the report has been adopted by SFW. 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"> 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 recognised by the British Dyslexia Association's Accreditation Board (see Annex 2).
Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2006 and August 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept diagnostic assessments carried out by psychologists and suitably qualified specialist teachers as above. Diagnostic reports to be in the format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's report. Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC).

Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2007 and August 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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) or Dyslexia Action). Psychologists must hold a current practising certificate issued by their relevant professional association (for example, the
	<p>British Psychological Society).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diagnostic reports to be in the report format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC).
Diagnostic assessments carried out from September 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procedures as from September 2007 above plus the following: All training for assessing specific learning difficulties to incorporate the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines.
From September 2012 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychologists will be registered with the HCPC (the Health and Care Professions Council, formerly the Health Professions Council) as practitioner psychologists.

Further information on identifying SpLDs through assessment can be found in the regularly updated guidance issued by SASC and its SpLD Test Evaluation Committee see <http://www.sasc.org.uk>. New guidance relating to the assessment of ADHD and updated guidance on dyspraxia is also available.

Diagnostic assessments 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, 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. Once the diagnostic report has been accepted there is no requirement for the 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 PG courses.

If assessments 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 passed since the last assessment (for example, an assessment at aged 40 following diagnosis at aged 15, or an assessment at aged 18 following diagnosis at aged 7). A diagnostic assessment 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). This assessment is part of the diagnosis and the cost should be met by the student, although help may be available via the student's HEP. Students should speak to their HEP's disability officer for further advice. This assessment should be carried out by a qualified specialist assessor.

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 study needs assessment will then determine the nature of the support that is required. 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.

12.4 Annex D – Guiding principles for Non-Medical Helpers

The following should be considered by study needs assessors when recommending NMH support:

- All disabled students, wherever they might be studying, should have equal access to good quality and good value non-medical help support.
- Where possible, DSA should be used to promote independent study solutions. NMH should be used where independence requires additional facilitation or is not possible due to disability-related issues.
- Duplicate support strategies should be avoided, unless a blended approach is taken to assist with transition (for example, providing a note taker until a student develops the skills to use a digital recorder themselves).
- All non-medical helpers should have the required level of knowledge, skills, training and qualifications (where appropriate) to deliver the support competently and to meet professional standards.

When assessors recommend and charge non-medical help work to SFW, they should consider:

- whether the costs of non-medical help services are comparable and represent an appropriate cost for the service provided and
- the training, range of qualifications, type/level of experience and professional standards required by the individual providing the service.

Activity titles currently allowable for DSA funding are shown below. The hourly rate price range show in brackets is an illustration of current pricing. Costs may be recommended outside these ranges where they are considered reasonable and necessary, for example, lack of affordable support in the market or difficult to source support:

12.4.1 Practical Support Assistants (£15-24)

This role provides practical and mobility support to assist a student with a physical impairment in manoeuvring around the campus. This could include helping to manipulate a wheelchair, carrying books, ICT equipment etc. It could also include general orientation and finding out where things are located for students whose disability means that they have problems with orientation. It could also include 'social support' to ensure access to the wider aspects of student life, for example for a student on the autism spectrum who had difficulty with social interaction. While some of these tasks, such as carrying equipment for a student with mobility difficulties, will need to continue throughout a student's course, others, such as general orientation, should decrease as the student becomes more able to manage independently.

Skills required: Some experience/understanding of providing support for disabled adults, thorough knowledge of the campus and good interpersonal skills.

Qualifications/training: Generic NMH training and those whose support activity includes supporting wheelchair users will also need to have had specific health and safety training relevant to the physical demands of their activity.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the practical support needs of the student. In any event, DSA funding is not available for any aspects that are covered by a local authority care plan. Such support will continue to be provided under the duties placed upon the local authority.

12.4.2 Library Support Assistant (£15-24)

This support is provided to help students search library catalogues, locate materials, collect materials, photocopying etc. Access to libraries and information available through libraries to support students in their study can be supported in many ways. Libraries should particularly consider the provision of e-books and alternative format publications to assist disabled students. This would reduce the need for the provision of hard copy publications and scanners/photocopying.

It is expected that library staff should all have disability awareness training and be available to assist disabled students with accessing information including support to use systems that aren't accessible to assistive technology. It is not expected that provision is available to assist disabled students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. That might not be a reasonable

expectation. Contact time for lectures and tutorials varies greatly from course to course. This should provide sufficient time for all students, including disabled students, to access libraries during the normal opening hours.

Skills required: Good working knowledge of the library.

Qualifications/training: Generic NMH training required and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the library support needs of the student.

12.4.3 Reader (£15-35)

A reader provides support for students whose disability makes reading or other forms of accessing text impossible. There are now many forms of assistive software that provide this facility and appropriate alternatives should be considered. Assistive software may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where this barrier exists and where students will not require additional support to use systems that aren't accessible to assistive technology.

Skills required: Clear reading voice and sufficient skills to cope with the demands of the text including any technical jargon.

Qualifications/training: Generic NMH training required and some understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the 'reader' needs of the student.

12.4.4 Scribe (£15-27)

A scribe is used to write down or type what a student dictates. This is directed notes and should not be confused with general notetaking which may occur in a lecture, seminar etc. There are now forms of assistive software that can help in this area which may remove the need for human support in many cases. Assistive software may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where this barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the support needs of the student.

Skills Required: Clear handwriting and/or accurate keyboarding skills, good spelling and punctuation, sufficient skills to cope with the area of work being followed by the student including any technical jargon and an understanding of the boundaries of this activity including personal integrity and an awareness that the scribe's activity is to write down exactly what the student says and not to make any amendments or changes to content.

Qualifications/training: GCSE English Language grade C or above. No professional body membership has been identified for this support. Generic NMH training and some understanding of the HE context are considered.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the 'scribe' needs of the student

12.4.5 Workshop/Laboratory Assistant (£15-26)

Supporting a student in gaining access to the practical aspects of their course, for example, in the laboratory or in a workshop/studio situation.

Skills Required: Knowledge and experience of the educational setting where the student is studying, for example, laboratory or workshop.

Qualifications/training: Generic NMH training, sufficient knowledge in the requisite practical area and health and safety training relevant to the workshop context considered.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the workshop/laboratory support needs of the student.

12.4.6 Sighted Guide (£15-25)

A sighted guide may be required to assist a student with visual impairment to navigate the campus and may be required for all or part of each day the student needs to attend the university. This role is about the physical attendance at lectures, tutorials, workshops etc. and not about accessing the information that is delivered.

Skills required: Thorough knowledge of the campus and good interpersonal skills.

Qualifications/training: No qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support. Generic NMH training, sufficient knowledge in the requisite practical area and health and safety training relevant to the workshop context.

12.4.7 Proof-Reader/Text Checker (£15-28)

Text checking, often referred to as proof reading in this context, is provided for a range of students to help identify and point out the types of errors that has been made in grammar/spelling/structure etc. and to give advice on ways of rectifying such errors in the future. This type of support is valuable for the general student body and HEPs will wish to consider how best to meet the needs of all their students. For disabled students there are now alternative forms of assistive software that can provide some support in this area. Assistive software may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where a particular barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the support needs of the student.

Skills Required: Fast reader but also good attention to detail, an understanding of the area of work being followed by the student including any technical jargon and an understanding of the boundaries of this activity including personal integrity and an awareness that the proof-reader's role is to support the student to learn to recognise their own mistakes and is not to make any amendments or changes to content.

Qualifications/training: GCSE English language grade C or above. Generic NMH training, specialist training relevant to the demands of the activity and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the proof reading/text checking needs of the student.

12.4.8 Study Assistant (£20-29)

This role does not refer to the specialist 1-to-1 skills support which is provided under band 4 support. This support is provided where a mix of enabling strategies complemented by some practical assistance has been required. This is usually because of the student's combined complex circumstances. Previously this has been described as supporting the student in adapting to the academic demands of HE, providing information, helping with time keeping, helping with organisational skills etc. and can be supplemented by practical support for example library support, workshop support etc.

Skills required: An enhanced level of skill and experience of working with disabled students, an understanding of the barriers which disabled students may have in accessing learning, but not the specialist experience and knowledge of those working at Band 4, 1 to 1 Study Skills Support or Specialist Mentors, knowledge of the way the HEP/organisation works and

the demands of studying in HE, excellent interpersonal skills, and clear understanding of issues of confidentiality.

Qualifications/training: Generic NMH training, specialist training relevant to the demands of the activity and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding is available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the study assistant support needs of the student.

12.4.9 Examination Support Workers (£20-28)

Examination Support Workers may assist with reading out the examination paper, writing down student answers using exactly the words used by the student and for some students, for example those on the autism spectrum who might get very focussed on a particular question, giving a prompt as to when it is time to move on to another.

Skills required: Clear reading voice, excellent spelling and grammar, clear handwriting and/or good and accurate keyboard skills, ability to cope with any specialist vocabulary or technical jargon and a clear understanding of the activity and high level of personal integrity to not make any additions or amendments to student's answers.

Qualifications/training: Generic NMH training, competent knowledge of English, specific subject expertise where relevant for example to cope with technical jargon and an understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding is available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the examination support needs of the student. In any event, the cost of any arrangements that HEPs may need to make to enable a disabled student to take examinations (for example providing physical access to the examination hall or allowing the examinations to be taken and invigilated somewhere else) will not be considered within the scope of DSA. HEPs will also need to have regard to competency standards when considering how disabled students undertake an examination of their skill in a particular area.

12.4.10 Notetakers (£20-28)

This support is provided for students who require notes to be taken on their behalf, for example because they have a physical impairment. The activity of notetaking is to produce an accurate record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, off-campus events etc. in the student's preferred style and format.

Skills required: Clear and legible handwriting at speed if providing handwritten notes, accurate spelling and grammar skills, familiarity with subject specific vocabulary and technical language and disability awareness. A standard of education to at least second year degree level is expected, the undertaking and completion of specialist notetaker training (may be in-house training) which includes the formal assessment and evaluation of skills and suitability and the successful achievement of that assessment and evaluation.

Qualifications/training: Other training, including at a HEP, delivered by an appropriately qualified trainer who can demonstrate a relevant qualification in notetaking, and which leads to a final skills assessment and certificate. Other formal UK notetaking qualifications should be considered.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the need for capturing information from lectures, seminars etc. or for providing notetaking support for the student. There is a wide range of ways to deliver information to students which may reduce or remove the need for individual notetaking, which should be discussed with the student. There are many forms of assistive technology that can provide some support in this area, for example recording devices, and these should be considered as an alternative to notetaking where possible. Assistive software is likely to enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered where a particular barrier exists. In cases where DSA funding is provided for notetaking, the DSA study needs assessor will be asked to determine the required format of notes at the needs assessment taking into consideration the course, the student's needs, and compatibility with the student's assistive technology where appropriate and indicate the outcome of that discussion in the report for consideration by the HEP.

Where DSA funded notetaking is recommended, DSA study needs assessors will be required to provide the following information, where possible: the actual number of notetaking hours required based on timetable or where this is not possible (for example, prior to course commencement or when module options have not been finalised) make informed estimate of the likely number of hours based on contact with HEP, discussion with the student etc. Where typed notes are required by the student the DSA study needs assessor must take steps to identify workers that can take typed notes at the time required. Only if that is not possible should provision for a handwritten note be provided with the notes being typed up for the student afterwards. A note typed at the time is the default position if available – given value for money considerations. In the case where handwritten notes and subsequent typing up is the only available option, (see example above) a maximum additional charge of 30 minutes will be paid for the typing up time, per 1 hour of manual notetaking, but only where it has not been possible to provide a note-taker that can take typed notes or typed notes are not appropriate.

Notetaking costs should be clear on the invoice. Typed notes should be invoiced as manual notetaking (typed). This is a band 2 activity. Where the notes have been taken by hand and typed later, the invoice should set this out clearly as manual notetaking (written) + typing up fee. The subsequent typing up of notes is not a band 2 activity and therefore an appropriate reduction in the amount charged for typing up after the session is expected. Typing up charges should be no more than half the amount charged for the actual notetaking session and no more than half the time of the notetaking. Example: A session of notetaking is arranged for a tutorial lasting an hour. The notes are taken manually, and the charge is £20 per hour. The amount available for the subsequent typing up of the notes (if required to comply with the student's specific needs) is £10 per hour, with only half an hour being the appropriate charge (for example an additional £5). The typing up of written notes by the notetaker or a third party is not electronic notetaking or specialist transcription services and should not be recommended or charged as such.

12.4.11 Communication Support Workers and Lip Speakers (£35-44)

This support is provided to translate sign language into voice and vice versa although not at the level of competence required by a trained and qualified BSL/English Interpreter, or to convey a speaker's message to lip readers accurately using unvoiced speech. The support worker is required to work flexibly with an individual deaf student in workshop and seminar situations as well as providing general 1 to 1 support. This does not include academic support.

Skills required: Competent signing/lip speaking and experience of working with deaf learners in an HE context and an understanding of how deafness affects learning.

12.4.12 Specialist Notetakers for Deaf and Visually Impaired Students (£35-40)

There are a range of Specialist Note Taking options which can be provided for sensory impaired students. DSA study needs assessors should discuss with the student which option will be most appropriate for them to gain access to their course. This is different to Notetakers and Specialist Transcription Services. This support activity is predominantly for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, and for visually impaired students. The primary requirement of this support is to make a comprehensive set of notes to meet the needs of the student for access, review and revision purposes. The notetaker may be either a manual notetaker (handwritten notes or handwritten notes that are later typed) or a trained ENT.

The note-taker will make a comprehensive although non-verbatim, typed or hand-written record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, off-campus events etc. in the student's preferred style and format. ENT: requires the NMH provider to be the laptop owner. Using a student's laptop will negate their insurance and relies on the student bringing a laptop with them which may be inappropriate and/or unnecessary. Some students may wish to receive the information simultaneously on their own computer using, for example, NoteEd® or Stereotype® software, in these cases the second laptop could belong either to the student or the NMH service provider. For some students, ENT may be delivered remotely, using live captioning services. For visually impaired students the laptop

could also be linked to Braille reading equipment. The notes can be sent to the student within a specified time frame or will be saved by the student at the end of the session.

Note: This activity is not to be confused with that of Specialist Transcription. For visually impaired students there are now many forms of assistive technology that can provide some support in this area and may be considered as an alternative. Assistive technology may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered first where a particular barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the student's note taking needs.

Electronic Notetaking (ENT) ENT systems involve a trained operator usually using a standard laptop and specialist software (NoteEd®, Speedtext® or Stereotype®) which enables them to provide summary notes (so accuracy is not a % figure) at approximately 120 words per minute.

Speech to Text Reporting (STTR) STTR involves a trained operator using a specialist chorded keyboard system and software to enable them to listen to speech and transcribe the text verbatim. The text is displayed on a screen at 200-300 words per minute with an accuracy of 97-99%. This support is available for deaf students but should only be recommended where a verbatim record is needed to enable the student to interact or to follow a session (a tutorial where it is important to capture discussions in real-time), and the student has a high fluency in English.

Students who use BSL are unlikely to require STTR or ENT in lectures, as they will be concentrating on the BSL delivery of the lecture. However, they will still require notes to be delivered by specialist notetakers trained to take notes for deaf students. STTR is not a standard recommendation for deaf students and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

12.4.13 Specialist Transcription Service (£25-32)

This support is provided to transcribe lecture notes, seminar notes, oral dictation, or audio files into an alternative format accessible to the student.

Skills required: Familiarity with a range of specialist office packages and equipment and knowledge of how to transcribe into various alternative formats.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HEP, however, DSA funding remains available where required.

HEPs should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the specialist transcription needs of the student.

12.4.14 Mobility Trainer (£35-42)

The Mobility Trainer provides a professional assessment of the campus location and then carries out a time limited programme of training. This training is particularly applicable for blind or visually impaired students who will require an individually developed programme based on agreed assessment of needs and who will need to learn with their coach safe routes around the campus, either making use of a long cane or with a guide dog. This kind of training may also be applicable to other students whose disability means they have difficulty with orientation, for example, students who have significant difficulty with orientation because of acquired brain damage. For on-going support around campus, a sighted guide might be a more appropriate response.

Skills required: A worker who has the requisite qualification and proven experience in training blind or visually impaired people, or those who have significant orientation difficulties because of other impairments, to find their way independently and safely around a new environment.

12.4.15 Specialist Mentors (£50-66)

Specialist mentors provide highly specialist, specifically tailored, 1 to 1 support which helps students address the barriers to learning created by a particular impairment. This support is primarily provided for students with mental-health conditions, ADD/ADHD or ASDs. The support could address a range of issues, for example, coping with anxiety and stress situations, how to deal with concentration difficulties, time management, prioritising workload and creating a suitable work-life balance.

Specialist Mentors should not act as advocates or counsellors and are expected to provide support that focuses on enabling the student to access their academic studies, rather than on the management or treatment of a specific condition. Their role is to help students recognise the barriers to learning created by their impairment and support them in developing strategies to address these barriers, particularly at times of transition, for example, when starting at university or when planning to move on from it. For some students this support will need to be on-going while for others it might be gradually phased out or only be required at certain points of their course.

Mental Health mentors particularly should not act as mental health advisors or counsellors: these are roles which should be provided via a student's HEP or the NHS. DSA study needs assessors should carefully evaluate the stages of the course where the student will require this support and agree a reducing level of support to enable independence where appropriate.

Skills Required: In depth knowledge and experience of the disability, understanding of the demands of study in HE and close working relationship with other support services both inside and outside the HEP and recognition of when there is a need to refer to other services.

12.4.16 Specialist 1 to 1 Study Skills Support (£50-72)

This specialist 1 to 1 support addresses the issues which some students might have in acquiring, recalling, and retaining information in written and spoken language as well as the range of memory, organisational, attention and numeracy difficulties that students with SpLDs or an ASD often face when working in an HE context. This support is primarily provided for students with an SpLD, ADD/ADHD or an ASD. This support should aim to develop students' skills and to develop independent learning. It should be tailored to a student's individual needs and professionals delivering the support should set out clear goals and timescales for achieving these goals. A reducing level of support to enable independence should be agreed, where it is appropriate.

Skills Required: Substantial experience of working with students with the relevant disability for example SpLD or ASD on a 1 to 1 basis, also experience of working with these disabilities in an educational/learning environment and a good working knowledge of assistive technologies and related AT study skills strategies would be desirable. When working with students with SpLDs, an in depth understanding of the effects of SpLDs on language and learning in a HE context. When working with people on the autism spectrum, an in-depth knowledge and understanding of autistic thinking and learning is needed. An awareness of the strengths which students with SpLDs and those on the autism spectrum can bring to a learning situation and the skills to help students to make use of these strengths and overcome barriers to learning.

12.4.17 British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreters (£50-57)

BSL interpreters are interpreters for students who are deaf and whose first or preferred language is BSL. The interpreter will attend lectures, seminars and tutorials with the student and will interpret from English to BSL or vice versa. Interpreters will use their skills and knowledge of BSL and English and their understanding of the differences between the two, to receive information in 1 language and pass it on in another.

Skills Required: Interpreters should be trained and have experience of working in a HE setting. They should also have some knowledge of the academic area being followed by the student.

12.4.18 Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for students with sensory impairments (£50-£72)

This support is bespoke support for the individual needs of students with a sensory impairment which reflects their method of communication, educational history, and experience. The SSP should have specialist knowledge of the support that was provided to the student prior to their entry into HE and can build on those strategies to frame the support provided in the new learning environment. Support may include developing research strategies, composition strategies, working on presentations - structure and mode of presentation, organisation, time management, communication etc. – which should all facilitate strategies for independent learning. This support is not subject specialist support

but support to enable access to the course. The SSP is uniquely placed in a position which gives them an in depth understanding of the specific requirements of the student. Therefore, the SSP should provide bespoke advice to the HEPs disability officers and teaching staff on what adjustments could be made to create an inclusive learning environment for the student. This advice should be provided only if the student gives permission for this and when it is required.

12.4.19 Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for deaf or hard of hearing students (£50-72)

The support provided by the SSP is bespoke so that it reflects the individual needs of the student and their personal learning style. In addition, to all of the above, specialist support uses appropriate communication strategies to enable access and understanding of carrier language (this is not subject specific vocabulary), to work on planning workload and structuring assignments, to support access to research sources and to support preparation for assignments. Additionally, as students with sensory impairments face even more specific barriers to learning, the SSP should provide the HEP with specific advice on making adjustments to disability officers and teaching staff, with the permission from the student.

This will be focused on helping the student access the course, all assessments and support the student needs to develop strategies to overcome barriers to learning. Specialist audiological advice regarding different personal FM systems or specific course needs, for example, an amplified stethoscope, should be provided to the HEPs as needed. This support is not subject specific, rather it is support aimed at enabling access to study. This support will include appropriate modification to allow for language of assignments. For a student whose preferred communication is BSL, the SSP must have the level of BSL specified within the DSA assessment.

12.4.20 Specialist Support Professional (SSP) for Students with Multi-Sensory Impairment (MSI) (£50-72)

Depending on the primary need of the student, tutorial support may be provided by a SSP for Deaf Students or a SSP for students with a Vision Impairment through liaison with colleagues specialising in MSI. The support provided by the specialist is bespoke for the combined vision and hearing impairments of the student (including deafblind students). The specialist uses their knowledge of previously used strategies to ensure the utilisation of appropriate communication strategies to enable access and understanding of vocabulary. The specialist supports planning workload and structuring assignments, access to research sources and support preparation for assessments. In addition, the SSP should provide the HEP with bespoke advice on making adjustments to meet the needs of the student. The advice provided to members of the HEP should be given with permission of the student. In addition to, providing advice students and HEPs about modification of any learning materials into accessible formats (including Braille and tactile diagrams). Alongside, supporting students with the use of specialist equipment and ICT, and provides support and advice regarding access to all assessments. This support is not subject specific support but support to enable access and will include appropriate modifying of language of assignments.

For a student whose preferred communication is BSL, the SSP must have the level of BSL specified within the DSA assessment.

12.4.21 Assistive Technology (AT) Training (provided through framework arrangements)

This activity provides support over and above the practical installation and familiarisation support given to students on receiving a new piece of software. Its purpose is to provide a substantial programme of training for the student in how to use the range of assistive technology and specialist software or hardware, in relation to their studies. This support is time limited and is generally provided in the early stages of the course. HEPs should consider how students can access on-going assistive technology training support once initial training has been undertaken and completed. Where online training is available, and is fully accessible using assistive technology, HEPs should consider bulk-buying licences to enable their disabled student body to access on-going training free-of-charge.

Skills required: AT trainers require knowledge and skills in strategies to support learning and a broad understanding about the range of existing products and technological solutions to learning challenges. Knowledge and understanding of students' learning requirements is fundamental to this activity alongside an understanding of how to address learning challenges. These challenges might include organisational skills, planning and time management or concentration, or gaining access through, for example, vision or hearing. Solutions include AT, software programmes such as mind mapping, text to speech and speech to text, Microsoft Windows and Mac accessibility options and features to support learning such as the use of Outlook for organisational skills and digital recorders to aid memory. They require significant experience of working in a training capacity with people with a disability and an understanding of the kind of work required by a student at HE.

Related Documents: <https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/practitioners/policy-information/guidancechapters.aspx>

13 Updates log

Date	Updates
13/01/2025	Rollover of AY references and new max DSA amount
20/03/2025	Updates made after WG review.
07/04/2025	Signed off for publishing by WG