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Section 1 – Supporting disabled students in higher education

1.1 Introduction

Supporting students to access and succeed in higher education remains a priority for government. For disabled students the government has put in place a comprehensive framework of support, backed by legislation. For the purpose of this document the term ‘institution’ covers any institution which provides higher education (HE) courses which are designated for HE student support purposes, including further education colleges providing HE and alternative providers, unless otherwise indicated. Institutions have the primary legal duty to support disabled students in their studies in higher education, set out in the Equality Act 2010. The government provides additional funding for individuals through the Disabled Students’ Allowances (DSAs). Provisions in the Care Act mean that a person aged 18 or over who has eligible needs for care and support will in future receive a statutory Care and Support Plan delivered by a Local Authority.

All students should be able to access the support they need to ensure that they are able to demonstrate their full academic potential at higher education level, through appropriate academic achievement. Our aim is to ensure that students receive the support they need, through their local authority, their institution and through government, to remove disability-related barriers to learning. This is our aim for all students, including disabled students.

Disabled students should arrive at university confident that any barriers to their learning have been identified, understood and appropriate steps taken to reduce their impact. The learning environment should be as inclusive as possible, so that the need for individual interventions is the exception, not the rule. Institutions should engage in a continual improvement cycle that develops inclusive practice, with the aim of reducing the number of individual interventions required. Funding through DSAs should be the top of an apex of support, underpinned by an inclusive environment, and individual reasonable adjustments where required.

This guidance relates to students applying for the English Disabled Students Allowances. The document provides guidance on full-time DSAs, DSAs for full-time distance learning students, part-time DSAs and DSAs for postgraduate students. References to “the Regulations” mean the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 (2011/1986) as amended by the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (2012/1653), the Education (Student Support and European University Institute) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 (2013/1728), the Universal Credit (Consequential, Supplementary, Incidental and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2013 (2013/630), The National Treatment Agency (Abolition) and the Health and Social Care Act 2012 (Consequential, Transitional and Savings Provisions) Order 2013 (2013/235) and the Further and Higher Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2014 (2014/2765) and the Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 (2015/1951).

Guidance on other grants for living and other costs payable under Part 5 of the Regulations is provided separately in the guidance chapters 'Assessing Financial Entitlement' and 'Grants for Dependants'. Both these guides are updated annually for each academic year.

1.2 The purpose and scope of DSAs

DSAs are available to contribute to the additional costs that a student is obliged to incur, in relation to their studies, because of their disability. 'Obligated to incur' means that the support is essential to enable the student to access their studies. DSAs should supplement the provision of reasonable adjustments made by the institution. DSAs are not available in place of a reasonable adjustment. Expenditure being considered for DSAs purposes must be reasonably incurred and appropriate to the individual needs of the student. DSAs are not intended to assist with disability-related expenditure that the student would continue to incur if they were not following their course of study. Local authority social services 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.

This document sets out the framework for higher education students domiciled in England and applying for DSAs for the first time for an academic year starting on or after 1 September 2016.

Disabled students should expect to be able to study effectively and leave higher education as more autonomous, independent learners, ready to follow their chosen career. The provision of support, both institution and DSAs, should focus on achieving those outcomes.

1.3 The purpose of this guidance

This guidance is for use by DSAs study needs assessors and Student Finance England DSAs assessors when considering the support that may be funded through DSAs. Higher education institutions' staff may also find the information helpful when considering how best to support their disabled students and signposting students to available DSAs support.

Higher education institutions are under a duty to support disabled students as set out in the Equality Act 2010. An institution should anticipate and respond to the needs of its disabled students where it is reasonable to do so. The decision on how to satisfy that duty is for the institution to determine and advice is available from other sources, for example the Equality Challenge Unit <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/managing-reasonable-adjustments-in-higher-education/>. The DSAs guidance does not set out what an institution should do to meet that legal duty, but it does indicate where DSAs are likely to have a primary role and where institutions are expected to have a primary role.

The DSAs guidance sets out the type of support that may be funded for students through DSAs. It sets out changes to the provision of certain non-medical help support (section 5), certain computer and peripheral equipment (section 6) and accommodation costs (section 8).

The DSAs study needs assessor will continue to consider what DSAs-funded support is essential for the individual student. This reflects the regulatory requirement that funding through DSAs will only be provided for costs a student is *obliged* to incur. The DSAs study needs assessor will have regard to this guidance and regulations when determining what DSAs-funded support to recommend for the student, including where it is indicated that the primary source of support is expected to be via the institution. The Secretary of State requires the Student Loans Company to deliver DSAs according to the regulations and the guidance set out here.

The DSAs assessor should also be aware of the requirement for local authorities to provide the DSAs assessor with current assessment information for young people with special educational needs who have been supported through an Education, Health and Care plan while at school and/or college, where requested by the student¹.

1.4 Who the changes apply to

Any changes set out in this document apply to all disabled students applying for DSAs for the first time for academic year 2016/17, even if they are already part way through their course. Continuing students in receipt of DSAs will continue on their current package of support for 2016/17. This includes undergraduate and postgraduate students studying part-time, full-time or by distance learning. See 1.12 for full details of transitional arrangements. Assessors should refer to the separate 2016/17 guidance for continuing students where appropriate.

1.5 Local Authority Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

Some disabled students will enter HE having had an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan while at school or college.

The 0-25 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice makes clear that local authorities should plan the transition into higher education before ceasing to maintain the young person's EHC plan, including how health and social care support will be maintained, where it continues to be required.

The Code of Practice makes clear that, where health and social care support is still required, local authorities should plan how it will be maintained and which authority will provide it, before ceasing the EHC plan. Even though an EHC plan will cease when a young person takes up a place in higher education, the health and social care support they remain entitled to will continue. Provisions in the Care Act mean that a person aged 18 or over who has eligible needs for care and support will receive a statutory Care and Support Plan. This would form the Care part of their EHC Plan where one is in place but would continue in its own right as a statutory Plan once a young person entered Higher Education and their EHC Plan was no longer maintained.

¹ 0-25 SEN Code of Practice, Chapter 8, page 134, paras 8.45-8.48:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>

In addition, the regulations which accompany the Act require Local Authorities to:

- make young people aware of support available to them in higher education through their local offer, including the Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) and how to make an early claim so that support is in place when they start their course;
- share a copy of an EHC plan with the Higher Education Institution that a young person will be attending and also with the person assessing them for the Disabled Students' Allowance with a young person's consent (for example the DSAs study needs assessor). The intention here is to ensure that the valuable up-to-date information contained within an EHC assessment is shared, both with the person assessing them for the DSAs, and with the institution that they are planning to attend, so that other provision may be made as appropriate, in line with the institution's own policies.
- set out in an easily accessible and public "local offer" the support available to young people in higher education, particularly DSAs and the process and timescales for making an application for DSAs.

1.6 The role of the student

Any student wishing to apply for DSAs should continue to do so. The time-limits governing applications for student support are set out in section 3 along with other eligibility criteria. The application process is set out in section 4. Students are advised to apply for DSAs 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 HE institutions at the same time as completing their DSAs application form, to ensure reasonable adjustments can be considered.

1.7 The role of institution disability services

Those working in disability services within institutions will have a well contextualised understanding of their disabled student body and have a key role in ensuring support is delivered effectively. Students may contact disability advisers before making an application for DSAs. However, many students will choose to apply for DSAs without speaking to a disability adviser, particularly those who are applying early and have not had their institution confirmed.

The starting point for the disability adviser, if contacted, is the effective provision of reasonable adjustments, both for students who may claim DSAs and for those who don't (for example overseas students). The student should be advised to claim DSAs if an identified need cannot be met through a reasonable adjustment and funding through DSAs is available. Disability advisers will also be an important point of liaison during the study needs assessment process, when the details of DSAs support packages are being established.

Disability advisers have an understanding of the institutional environment and will have access to academic teaching staff and to detailed course information. They should have an up-to-date knowledge of the level and type of support offered by their institution as reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act, or more generally as part of the institution's support for disabled students or students in general, to help inform the student about any barriers they might face, and provision they can access to reduce barriers. Institutions should also be working towards making this information readily accessible to relevant stakeholders, including students and Assessment Centres.

If contacted by a student it is essential that the disability adviser does not advise the student to purchase equipment or services on the assumption that funding through DSAs will be made available. Eligibility for DSAs can only be determined by Student Finance England (SFE) and entitlement to funding through DSAs will be based on the recommendations of a DSAs study needs assessor.

1.8 The role of the DSAs study needs assessor

The role of the assessor is to:

- Consider the nature of the student's disability.
- Consider the learning environment of the student.
- Consider the impact of the student's disability on their ability to undertake their course.
- Analyse the student's previous educational experience and the effectiveness of any strategies.
- Identify appropriate solutions to enable barriers to be overcome.
- Explain to the student that support may also be available from the institution and to encourage the student to discuss their additional needs with the disability adviser at the institution.

Assessors make recommendations; they do not make final decisions on eligibility or entitlement to DSAs. Decisions on eligibility and entitlement are a Secretary of State function which has been delegated to the Student Loans Company (including Student Finance England). Eligibility criteria are set out in the regulations. Student Finance England will have regard to the recommendation of the DSAs study needs assessor when considering entitlement to DSAs support.

Through discussions with the student, and using the information or medical evidence provided by their GP, consultant etc. (and information in any specialist diagnostic assessment report, statement etc. where appropriate), the assessor should identify what type of support is *essential* to enable the student to undertake their chosen course.

A Needs Assessment Report (NAR) should be readable as a standalone document which clearly demonstrates:

- The impact of the student's condition on their ability to undertake their course
- An understanding of the requirements and demands of the student's chosen course at their preferred institution
- An understanding of the teaching practices for the student's chosen course at their preferred institution
- An analysis of all the support strategies available to the student
- A clear decision making process for the support strategies ultimately recommended
- A commitment to the provision of cost-effective solutions for each student within the parameters of DSAs funding as set out by BIS

The Needs Assessor should consider the barriers that need to be addressed and set out the strategies that are necessary to overcome the barrier in the NAR.

Assessors should set out clearly in the report what recommendations they are making for DSAs-funded support. Any recommendations for DSAs support will require clear and robust evidence-based justification.

Assessors should only recommend support from suppliers that are accredited by DSA-QAG to deliver DSAs-funded services, qualified to provide the type of support recommended and have the requisite capacity to provide the support. Where a provider does not have the capacity to provide the support, the student should be referred back to the assessor to select alternative provision. The provider should not select alternative provision.

DSAs support should not be recommended where support is available from another source e.g. the institution, NHS, local authority etc.

Assessors are required to follow certain processes when undertaking assessments, and compliance with those processes will be audited annually by DSA-QAG. A standard NAR template must be used to ensure consistency of approach. The NAR will be sent to Student Finance England and simultaneously to the student.

If the assessor identifies a need for support that is indicated as being the primary responsibility of the institution or which falls outside the scope of DSAs funding, these should be noted throughout the report and a summary provided which the student can share with the institution for consideration under reasonable adjustments.

The assessor should not state how support that is required from the institution should be delivered or the level required – that is for the institution to determine taking into account the individual needs of the student.

1.9 The role of Student Finance England (SFE)

SFE is a Student Loans Company service, providing financial support to students on behalf of the UK Government to students from England entering higher education in the UK. SFE are required to deliver DSAs within the framework set by the Student Support Regulations and guidance. SFE may contact BIS with

questions that arise from the applications they are processing and the guidance may be updated to clarify the policy if needed.

SFE are required to make decisions on DSAs awards, taking into account the recommendations of the DSAs study needs assessor. SFE will challenge DSAs study needs assessment reports where DSAs support is recommended that falls outside this guidance or where support from other sources is known to be offered. Similarly the report will be challenged if the individual DSAs recommendations are not sufficiently justified according to the guidance and the impact identified during the DSAs study needs assessment. Challenges will be brought to the attention of the Assessment Centre manager for monitoring purposes.

To note - DSAs for students undertaking a course with the Open University, where the course commenced before 1st September 2012 are currently administered by the Open University and will continue to be until the course ends. From AY 2014/15 DSAs for students undertaking a course with the Open University, where the course commenced on or after 1st September 2012 will be administered by SFE.

1.10 The role of the Disabled Students' Allowances Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG)

DSA-QAG is a non-profit making company with charitable status. Its Board consists of Chairman, two NUS trustees and two independent trustees. Institutions, assessment centres and equipment suppliers are 'associate members' of DSA-QAG, with observers from BIS and the SLC. A central administrative unit supports this work. DSA-QAG has responsibility for a quality assurance framework against which levels of service for both DSAs assessment centres and equipment suppliers are audited. From 2016/17 a registration process, quality assurance framework and audit function for NMH suppliers is being introduced. DSA-QAG is also responsible for delivering this service.

Since 2015/16, only DSA-QAG accredited assessment centres can provide DSAs-funded study needs assessments (England and Wales). Assistive technology, including assistive software, is expected to be provided and installed by registered assistive technology service providers. Students may opt to source their computer from the open market. More information on DSA-QAG and a list of registered and accredited assessment centres and suppliers is available at the following website: <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/>. A new DSA-QAG registration scheme is being put in place for non-medical help providers from 2016/17. All NMH providers will be required to register in order to supply support for new DSAs students in 2016/17. Existing DSAs students (see transitional arrangements) may continue with their existing NMH provider.

DSA-QAG organisations that are accredited to deliver DSAs-funded services are required to comply with the standards set out in the DSA-QAG Quality Assurance Frameworks in order to retain accreditation to deliver DSAs related services <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/Framework-Documents/framework-documents.html> . This does not affect their membership of DSA-QAG.

From 2016/17 Assessment Centres, assistive technology service providers and non-medical help providers are required to be registered with DSA-QAG in order to deliver DSAs services for English-funded students, unless they are based in Scotland or Northern Ireland. Scottish assessment centres should be validated by the Scottish Government's Disabled Student Advisory Group in order to provide services for English-funded students. Assessment centres in Northern Ireland do not currently require accreditation.

A BIS-led oversight group has the role of considering the accreditation of the DSA-QAG membership organisations and considering actions for organisations who do not meet expected standards.

1.11 Conflicts of Interest

Public funds should be used fairly, transparently, and for the purpose intended. Anyone making decisions about the administration, distribution or use of DSAs must at all times be conscious of any relationships or links they have, or any actions they take or do not take, that could raise doubts about their impartiality or probity. This includes any relationships or links – including personal, financial, business, or familial – that could be seen to have an influence on their decision making. Managing conflicts of interest appropriately is essential for protecting the integrity of the DSAs process. Separate guidance on conflicts of interest is available: <http://www.slc.co.uk/stakeholders-partners/updates/disabled-students-service-for-student-finance-england.aspx>.

1.12 Transitional arrangements

The changes set out in this guidance apply to:

- (i) Students who are starting a higher education course for the first time in 2016/17 and are applying for DSAs for the first time;
- (ii) Students who are starting a higher education course in 2016/17 and are applying for DSAs, having studied on a previous course where they were not awarded DSAs;
- (iii) Students who are starting a higher education course in 2016/17 and are applying for DSAs, having ceased to undertake a previous HE course where they were awarded DSAs more than 5 months before the start of the current course (i.e. the gap between the two courses is more than an intervening vacation); or
- (iv) Students who are continuing a higher education course in 2016/17 and who are applying for DSAs for the first time.

Transitional arrangements are in place for the following students, who will continue to be assessed under the Student Support Regulations 2011 and the 'continuing students' DSAs guidance published separately.

- (i) Students who are continuing on a higher education course in 2016/17, having been awarded DSAs for a previous academic year/years of their course;

- (ii) Students who are transferring to a higher education course starting in 2016/17 from a previous course which started before 2016/17, where the student was awarded DSAs for the course they transferred from;
- (iii) Students who are starting a higher education course in 2016/17 immediately after (excluding an intervening vacation – maximum 5 months) completing a previous higher education course, where the student was awarded DSAs for the previous course; or
- (iv) Students who started a higher education course before 2016/17, who suspended their studies with the agreement of their HEI and notified Student Finance England and are returning to their course in 2016/17, where the student was awarded DSAs for a year/years of the course before 2016/17. The period of suspension is normally up to 1 academic year in length but could be up to two years in exceptional circumstances.

Section 2 – The Equality Act 2010 and the role of institutions that provide higher education courses

2.1 The Equality Act

As independent and autonomous bodies, institutions are entirely responsible for addressing any issues of discrimination that might come to their attention. The Government provides a legal framework for individuals, which protects their right not to be discriminated against – primarily through the Equality Act 2010. Institutions are prohibited by law, through the Equality Act 2010, from discrimination against students with protected characteristics which includes disability.

Under the Equality Act 2010 institutions have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to ensure they are not placed at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled students.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments comprises three requirements:

- Where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.
- Where a physical feature puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function.
- Where not providing an auxiliary aid or service puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to provide that auxiliary aid/service.

The duty to make adjustments arises where a provision, criterion or practice, a physical feature or the absence of an auxiliary aid or service puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled.

The Act leaves open what particular auxiliary aids or services might be provided in specific circumstances. The duty remains with the education provider to determine what steps it would be reasonable for them to take.

2.2 Monitoring

- Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011, institutions are required to publish information as to their compliance with the general public sector equality duty. This requires institutions to publish information to demonstrate they have had due regard to the equality objectives.
- In order to give proper consideration to the aims set out in the public sector equality duty, a relevant body will need to have sufficient evidence of the impact its policies and practices are having, or are likely to have, on people with different protected characteristics.

- The courts have made clear the need to collate relevant information in order to have evidence-based decision making and a body subject to the duty will need to be able to show that it had adequate evidence to enable it to have due regard.
- Adequate and accurate equality evidence, properly understood and analysed, is at the root of effective compliance with the public sector equality duty. Without it, a body subject to the duty would be unlikely to be able to have due regard to its aims.
- In addition, all providers of higher education courses which attract public funding, including alternative providers with courses designated for student support purposes, are expected to comply with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, published by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The Quality Code sets out Expectations which higher education providers are required to meet to ensure that appropriate and effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources are provided for all students, including disabled students; that the learning opportunities provided are monitored; and that the provider considers how to improve them. Providers which attract public funding are required to be reviewed periodically by the QAA to ensure they are meeting those Expectations.
- Under the quality code institutions are expected to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. They need to apply processes consistently for assessing the impact of current and proposed policies and procedures on all students, taking into account the diversity of protected characteristics, in line with principles of equity, and to identify organisational barriers to student development and achievement.

2.3 Anticipating reasonable adjustments

The duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students is anticipatory, which means institutions must plan ahead and take a strategic approach to addressing the barriers that potentially impede individuals with different kinds of disability. This will involve institutions putting in place systems that are inclusive or can be utilised as appropriate by disabled students, staff and/or visitors.

Some disabilities are more common in the student body than others. Our evidence shows that the prevalence of Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) in the UK domiciled student population has been fairly constant over the last decade and is estimated to be higher than in the general population. Students with SpLDs constitute just under half of the higher education population that declare a disability, the largest disability group that institution provision needs to accommodate. Within this group the most common learning difficulty is dyslexia. This suggests that all institutions will have a number of students with dyslexia who may require adjustments, which could include making changes to course materials and course delivery.

We would expect institutions to particularly consider what anticipatory adjustments should be made to accommodate this significant proportion of disabled students.

However, we recognise that for some students these adjustments will not be sufficient, and for these DSAs support will need to be accessed.

2.4 Responding to individual requirements

It will not always be possible for institutions to anticipate the needs of every prospective disabled student. Disability is an individual experience, with both the nature and the impact of the disability varying from individual to individual. Once an education provider becomes aware of the requirements of an individual disabled student it should consider what reasonable adjustments it can make to meet those requirements.

In the past, the provision of DSAs may have removed the need for reasonable adjustments in some cases. However, DSAs funding is not a replacement for reasonable adjustments. Institutions should not take the continued provision of DSAs as setting the limit to their reasonable adjustments. We expect institutions to strive to provide the best possible support for all their students, including their body of disabled students, to continue to remove or reduce the need for individual support through DSAs. From 2016/17 an expectation is placed on institutions to take primary responsibility for certain areas of support. DSAs will remain available by exception only. See following chapters for detail.

2.5 Examples of reasonable adjustments and good practice

Over time we hope the sector will develop a resource of case studies of good practice in institutions, which those involved in strategic planning within institutions may wish to have regard to. Each institution will have its own response to how to best support its body of disabled students and case studies may be offered as examples, not a statement of what each institution should be doing in a particular area. However, DSAs will be considered on the basis that institutions will take the primary role in providing certain types of support and DSAs will only be considered for such support by exception only. See following chapters for detail.

There are many sources of information on managing reasonable adjustments, for example: Managing Reasonable Adjustments in Higher Education (Equality Challenge Unit 2010), Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities and Learning Difficulties (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2010)) etc.

2.6 The Equality Act and work placements

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

adjustments for disabled people on a work placement. The length of the work placement may be a factor when determining whether an adjustment is reasonable.

Section 3 – Disabled Students’ Allowances - technical guidance on eligibility and entitlement

3.1 General eligibility for DSAs

The personal eligibility criteria for receiving full-time and part-time student support, including DSAs, are set out in regulations and are covered in the SLC’s ‘Assessing Eligibility Guidance’ chapter.

Since 2014/15, a student must meet the definition of disability in order to be eligible to receive DSAs (see 3.1.1 below)

DSAs are not subject to:

- an age limit;
- previous study rules; or
- income assessment.

A student can only receive support for a designated course. Where the eligible course does not appear on the institution database, it will not be possible to fully process the application. Information on what action should be taken in this situation is covered in the ‘General Eligibility and Financial Assessment Administration’ guidance.

Students are potentially eligible for DSAs whilst attending an overseas institution as part of their UK course, whether obligatory or optional.

Students who are personally eligible for student support under paragraph 9 of Schedule 1 of the student support regulations (i.e. nationals of member states of the European Union), but not under any other paragraph of that Schedule, are not eligible for DSAs.

DSAs are not available for:

- Disability related expenditure that the student would incur even if they were not attending a course of higher education;
- Costs that any student might have regardless of disability;
- Auxiliary aids and services which are provided by the student’s local authority under a Care Plan;
- Auxiliary aids and services which are provided through other public funding e.g. mobility allowances, NHS support;
- Treatment for a disability;
- Diagnostic assessments for any type of disability or health condition;
- Temporary illness or injury – support from the institution or the NHS is appropriate here; or
- General learning difficulties – institution academic support is appropriate here.

3.1.1 Time limits for applying for DSAs

The Student Support Regulations require that student support must be applied for on an annual basis. Generally a time limit for applications is set at nine months from the start of the academic year (Regulation 9). For disabled students this can be extended as long as the application has been made as soon as is reasonably practicable (Regulation 9(2)(d)). Students are advised to apply as soon as possible, to enable support to be put in place by the start of the academic year.

Students may apply outside the general time limit for a number of reasons for example, they are newly diagnosed with a disability or the need for support has only arisen later in the academic year or towards the end of their course. Students are permitted to apply for DSAs irrespective of the time left on the course. Students should continue to apply for support as and when the need arises. However, students applying outside the general time limit will need to provide details of why they have applied outside the general time limit to enable the Secretary of State to determine that they have applied as soon as reasonably practicable.

Applications for DSAs that are made after the end of the academic year will generally not be considered retrospectively for that year. The application will ordinarily be administered as being an application for the academic year within which the application has been received.

It is advised that students requiring support near the end of their course should contact their disability adviser in order for reasonable adjustments to be considered in the first instance. Disability Advisers may be able to arrange institutional support, such as exam support, study support or revision skills, and loan equipment.

3.1.2 Definition of disability

For DSAs, the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability is used to determine eligibility. Students falling within the Equality Act 2010 definition of disability are eligible to apply for support through DSAs.

The Act defines a disabled person as a person with a disability. A person has a disability for the purposes of the Act if he or she has a physical or mental impairment and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (Equality Act S6(1)).

Sometimes a student's disability does not substantially affect their normal day to day activities but does have a substantial effect on their ability to study. In the context of DSAs 'day-to-day activities' includes education. See guidance at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85010/disability-definition.pdf which is issued pursuant to section 6(5) of the Equality Act 2010.

3.1.3 Evidence of a disability

For most applicants, there should be little difficulty establishing their eligibility for DSAs. Their disability will have been identified and documented at an earlier stage, in many cases while they were at school. However, it is not essential for an applicant's disability to have been identified at school in order to be eligible for DSAs.

The DSAs are not intended to provide assistance to members of the general student population who experience temporary illness or injury. Assisting such students would properly be the responsibility of institutions and the NHS, as appropriate. Nor are DSAs intended to provide assistance to students with general learning difficulties.

Students can become eligible for DSAs at any point during their course, not just at the start of their first year. Some students become disabled or have a disability identified after their course has started. Others may decide to disclose their disability only after their course has started. Additionally, equipment needs for some disabled students may only arise later in the course. Applications for support may be made outside the statutory time limit of nine months if the application is submitted as soon as is reasonably practicable (regulation 9(d)) – see time limits above.

A student wishing to apply for DSAs is required to submit medical/diagnostic evidence in order for eligibility to DSAs to be determined. Medical evidence can be in the form of a diagnostic assessment (for students with a SpLD), or evidence from a GP or consultant, or other qualified medical practitioner or appropriate specialist. Medical evidence should state the nature of the student's disability and ideally should also briefly explain how the student's disability impacts upon them. SFE will seek further information from the student/medical practitioner if it is not clear that the student meets the definition of disabled. Evidence included in an EHC plan can support the diagnosis, particularly in signalling areas where the student needs support.

Students with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia will need to provide evidence of this by submitting a diagnostic assessment from a practitioner psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher (see Annex A for more information on diagnosing and assessing students with SpLD). The diagnostic assessment must have been carried out after the student's 16th birthday to be valid for DSAs purposes. Institutions may be able to offer assistance to students requiring a post-16 diagnostic assessment.

Cases may arise where the evidence that the student has a disability is deemed insufficient by SFE. In such cases, the student will be invited to provide further evidence, perhaps in the form of a diagnosis undertaken by a professional body or another acceptable person or their EHC Plan. In making such an invitation, it must be made clear to the student that they will normally be liable to meet the cost of providing the necessary evidence. This cost cannot be met through DSAs, however some institutions may consider providing help with the costs of diagnostic assessments e.g. for dyslexia.

Once satisfactory evidence is received, the student will be notified to book a DSAs study needs assessment to identify the appropriate course-related support. The cost of the DSAs study needs assessment is met from the general allowance of the DSAs. Once the initial evidence of a disability has been accepted, in most cases there should be no need for students to provide updated evidence of their disability at a later stage in the course. An exception would be if the student's condition changes or if there is reason to believe that the student's condition may change later in the course. Sometimes an expert may also include recommendations for DSAs support with their medical evidence. Given that the expert is unlikely to be aware of course requirements and appropriate strategies and technologies, there is still a requirement for the student to receive a separate full DSAs study needs assessment of their course needs, and different recommendations may be made.

Any cost a student incurs obtaining the necessary expert evidence or opinion cannot be met from the DSAs. This is because such costs are not incurred by the student to determine the type of support they will need to attend or undertake their course; they are incurred to substantiate their eligibility for DSAs.

3.1.4 Students diagnosed after the start of their HE course

Students who become disabled or are diagnosed with a disability, including a SpLD, after the start of their HE course of study may apply for DSAs once they have received their diagnosis, diagnostic assessment or have medical evidence confirming the presence of their disability. Applications should be made within the regulatory time limits or as soon as reasonably practicable – see time limits above.

3.1.5 English students studying in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Some English students who intend to study in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland may attend a DSAs study needs assessment in England before they start their course. This should be carried out by a DSA-QAG registered or accredited assessment centre.

However, there will be some occasions when students who are domiciled in England but study in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland require a DSAs study needs assessment during term time. In these circumstances, SFE will continue to accept DSAs study needs assessments carried out by centres used by the Students Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS) and the Department for Employment and Learning (Northern Ireland). Students studying in Wales are covered by the DSA-QAG administered list of assessment centres.

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

Centres in the devolved administrations must have regard to the English Student Support Regulations and this DSAs Guidance when recommending support for English students.

3.1.6 Prisoners

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

3.1.7 Means-tested NHS bursaries

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

3.1.8 Students who begin an Initial Teacher Training (ITT) course on or after 1st September 2010

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

3.2 DSAs for full-time undergraduate students (regulations 40, 40A, 41)

3.2.1 Maximum DSAs for full-time undergraduate students

There are four elements to the full-time undergraduate DSAs, which are available for students attending full-time courses or part-time ITT courses which began before 1st September 2010:

- NMH allowance
- Major items of specialist equipment allowance

- Travel allowance
- General allowance

The maximum allowances that such students may receive in 2016/17 are given in the table below. Two of the allowances (non-medical helper allowance and general allowance) are lower for students attending part-time ITT courses which began before 1st September 2010 where the period of full-time attendance, including teaching practice, during the academic year aggregates less than six weeks.

Allowance	Maximum payable	
	Full-time	Part-time ITT course which began before 1st September 2010 (less than 6 weeks attendance)
Non-medical helper allowance (each academic year)	£20,725	£15,543
Specialist equipment allowance (for the duration of the course)	£5,212	£5,212
General allowance (each academic year)	£1,741	£1,305
Travel allowance	Uncapped	Uncapped

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

3.2.2 Sandwich courses and work placements

Students on part-year paid or unpaid placements where the periods of full-time study in the academic year are 10 weeks or more in aggregate are potentially eligible for DSAs. For example, DSAs could pay for additional disability related travel costs to and from the institution using the travel allowance.

When a student is going on a work placement as part of their course, the DSAs study 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. The institution and the provider of the work placement should consider what reasonable adjustments are required to support the student during their work placement. Some courses already provide separate funding towards costs e.g. social work courses may attract a bursary towards travel costs.

Under regulation 38(6) students are not eligible for grants for living and other costs, including DSAs, in any academic year of a sandwich course where the periods of full-time study are in aggregate less than 10 weeks (unless the period of work experience is an unpaid placement of a type specified in regulation 38(7)). Students who do not qualify for grants for living and other costs under regulation 38(6) are eligible for a reduced rate maintenance loan which is not subject to income assessment (regulation 80(1)(b) & 80(2)(b)).

Under regulation 38(7) students undertaking certain types of unpaid work experience in the public or voluntary sectors are potentially eligible for grants for living and other costs, including DSAs (even where the periods of full-time study in the academic year are less than 10 weeks in aggregate) - see 'Assessing Eligibility Guidance'.

3.2.3 Students who become eligible during the course

Under regulation 38(8) & 38(9), a student **may qualify** for DSAs from and including the academic year during which:

- the student's course becomes designated;
- the student, their spouse, civil partner or their parent is recognised as a refugee or is granted Humanitarian Protection (in this context 'spouse' or 'civil partner' does not include a co-habiting partner of the student - also refer to the 'Assessing Eligibility' guidance);
- the state of which the student is a national accedes to the European Union and where the student has been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom and Islands throughout the three-year period immediately preceding the first day of the first academic year of the course;
- the student acquires the right of permanent residence;
- the student becomes the child of a Turkish Worker;
- the student becomes a person described in paragraph 6(1)(a) of Schedule 1 (of the Student Support Regulations); or
- the student becomes the child of a Swiss national.

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

3.2.4 Full-time distance learning courses

Where disabled students undertake a full-time course by distance learning solely because their disability prevents them from attending an institution, they are treated as being in attendance on the course. Such students are potentially eligible for DSAs under regulation 40, 40A & 41. They are also potentially eligible for the other elements of the full-time student support package (except travel grant).

Where disabled students undertake a full-time course by distance learning but are not compelled to study in this way because of their disability, they cannot be treated as being in attendance on the course. Students electing to study by

distance learning are instead considered for eligibility for DSAs under regulation 127 which are payable at the same full-time rates as those provided under regulation 41. Where the student commences their full time distance learning course prior to 1st September 2012, they are also potentially eligible for a fee grant and course grant similar to those offered to eligible part-time students. Where the student commences their full time distance learning course on or after 1st September 2012 they will potentially be eligible for a tuition fee loan to cover the tuition fee charged, but no maintenance support. Such students will continue to be potentially eligible for DSAs under regulation 127.

There is further guidance about full-time distance learning courses in the 'Assessing eligibility guidance 2014/15'.

3.2.5 Non-medical helper allowance (regulation 41(2)(a))

The non-medical helper allowance is to provide funding for additional support which the student requires, because of a disability, to undertake their course on an equal basis to other students. Institutional reasonable adjustments, including technical adjustments, should be considered in the first instance, before a recommendation for DSAs funding is made.

For details of the non-medical helper support that DSAs funding is available for, and how the allowance is administered, please see section 5.

3.2.6 Major items of specialist equipment allowance (regulation 41(2)(b))

The specialist equipment allowance is to provide funding for additional major items of specialist equipment which the student requires, because of a disability, to undertake their course effectively. Institutional reasonable adjustments should be considered in the first instance, before a recommendation for DSAs funding is made.

For details of the equipment that DSAs funding is available for under this allowance, please see section 6.

The specialist equipment allowance is for the duration of the course. Where the allowance is increased in subsequent years, a student who had received the maximum grant for specialist equipment can receive additional funding up to the new maximum amount, if required.

Course transfers and specialist equipment allowance

If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any amount awarded for specialist equipment in relation to the first course will be taken into account as the period of eligibility has not been broken. For example, a student receives £3,000 from the specialist equipment allowance but then transfers their eligibility to another course. Their specialist equipment entitlement for the second course should not exceed £2,212, as £3,000 has already been awarded for specialist equipment and given that £5,212 for 2015/16 is the maximum specialist equipment allowance.

All equipment purchased with the help of this allowance is and remains the property of the student.

3.2.7 Travel allowance (regulation 41(2)(c))

The travel allowance may be used to pay the additional costs of travel to and from the institution which are incurred because of a disability.

For details of the costs that DSAs funding is available for under this allowance, please see section 7.

3.2.8 General allowance (regulation 41(2)(d))

The general allowance may be used both for miscellaneous expenditure not covered by the other allowances and to supplement the specialist equipment allowance and non-medical helper allowance, if necessary. The cost of a DSAs study needs assessment is drawn from the general allowance.

For details of the costs that DSAs funding is available for under this allowance, please see section 8.

3.3 DSAs for part-time undergraduate students (regulation 147)

3.3.1 Maximum DSAs for part-time undergraduate students

There are four allowances for students undertaking part-time courses. These mirror those available to full-time students, but have different maximum amounts. The maximum allowances that part-time students may receive in 2016/17 are given in the table below. The maximum amount of the non-medical helper allowance and general allowance are calculated as a percentage of the full-time rates, based on the actual intensity of study. Some examples of the maximum amounts available are given below.

Allowance	Maximum payable	
Specialist equipment allowance (for the duration of the course)	£5,212	
Non-medical helper allowance (each academic year)	£15,543	75% of a FT course = £15,543 60% of a FT course = £12,435 25% of a FT course = £5,181
General allowance (each academic year)	£1,305	75% of a FT course = £1,305 60% of a FT course = £1,044 25% of a FT course = £435
Travel allowance	Uncapped	

For part-time students the cost of the DSAs study needs assessment should be drawn from the general allowance before the pro-rata percentage is applied to the allowance.

There are no provisions within the Regulations to pay more than the maximum allowance for the academic year. Please refer to the guidance in respect of full-time DSAs at section 3.2.1.

3.3.2 Eligibility

Students who begin part time courses on or after 1st September 2012 must be studying at a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the academic year to be eligible for PT DSAs (regulation 147(4)).

Under regulation 147 an eligible part-time student qualifies for DSAs to assist with the additional expenditure that the Secretary of State is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake (i.e. to attend or study by distance learning) a designated part-time course because of a disability.

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

3.3.3 Designated part-time courses

To be eligible for support, including DSAs, a student must be undertaking a designated part-time course. The criteria for course designation in respect of part-time support, including part-time DSAs, are set out in the 'Support for part-time students – policy guidance 2016/17 guidance chapter.

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

When a student transfers from a full-time to a part-time course, their status must be converted from an eligible full-time student to that of an eligible part-time student. Where a student transfers from a full-time to a part-time course part way through the academic year:

- a) no instalment of full-time DSAs is payable after the student becomes an eligible part-time student;
- b) the maximum amounts of part-time DSAs are reduced by one third where the student becomes an eligible part-time student during the second quarter of the academic year and by two thirds where they become an eligible part-time student in a later quarter of that year; and
- c) where full-time DSAs have been paid to the student in a single instalment, the maximum amount of the corresponding part-time DSAs payable to them are reduced by the amount of full-time DSAs already paid (or further reduced if paragraph (b) above applies). If the resulting amount is either nil or a negative amount, the part-time DSAs are not payable.

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

When a student transfers from a part-time to a full-time course, their status must be converted from an eligible part-time student to that of an eligible full-time student.

Where a student transfers from a part-time to a full-time course part way through the academic year:

- a) no instalment of **part-time** DSAs are payable after the student becomes an eligible full-time student;
- b) the maximum amounts of any full-time DSAs are reduced by one third where the student becomes an eligible full-time student during the second quarter of the academic year and by two thirds where they become an eligible full-time student in a later quarter of that year; and
- c) where part-time DSAs have been paid to the student in a single instalment, the maximum amount of the corresponding full-time DSAs payable to them is reduced by the amount of part-time DSAs already paid (or further reduced if paragraph (b) above applies). If the resulting amount is nil or a negative amount, the full-time DSAs are not payable.

3.3.6 Non-medical helper allowance (regulation 147(6)(a))

For details of the non-medical helper allowance see 3.2.5 and section 5.

3.3.7 Major items of specialist equipment allowance (regulation 147(6)(b))

For details of the specialist equipment allowance see 3.2.6 and section 6.

3.3.8 Travel allowance (regulation 147(6)(c))

For details of the travel allowance see 3.2.7 and section 7.

3.3.9 General allowance (regulation 147(6)(d))

For details of the general allowance see 3.2.8 and section 8.

3.4 DSAs for postgraduate students (regulations 158 – 168)

3.4.1 Maximum DSAs for Postgraduate students

The postgraduate DSAs scheme differs from that for undergraduate students in that one single allowance is available.

Regulation 166 provides for a DSA of up to **£10,362** for the academic year **2015/16** to be available for eligible postgraduate students undertaking designated full- and part-time postgraduate courses. There is no statutory provision to pay a postgraduate student in excess of **£10,362** during academic year 2016/17.

There are no specific limits within the maximum **£10,362** on particular items or type of help on which the grant can be spent. The allowance is awarded depending on the recommendations of the DSAs study needs assessment carried out by the assessment centre. The cost of the DSAs study needs assessment is payable from the postgraduate DSA, but, as with undergraduate DSAs, it cannot be used to pay for establishing a student's disability. The postgraduate DSA may be spent on specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, other general support or additional

travel costs, or a combination of the above, up to the maximum amount for the academic year.

3.4.2 Eligibility

To be eligible for the postgraduate DSAs students must meet the personal criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the Regulations and undertake a designated postgraduate course.

Under part 12 of the Regulations an eligible postgraduate student qualifies for DSAs to assist with the additional expenditure that the Secretary of State is satisfied the student is obliged to incur to undertake (i.e. to attend or study by distance learning) a designated full- or part-time postgraduate course because of a disability.

Postgraduate students studying by distance learning are eligible for DSAs, but only if the course is undertaken in the United Kingdom (regulation 159(11)). Students undertaking courses on a distance learning basis are deemed to be studying at their home address. Therefore, to receive DSAs postgraduate distance learners must remain living in the United Kingdom whilst undertaking their course.

Under regulation 159(4), a postgraduate student is not eligible for DSAs if they:

- a) are eligible to apply for a -
 - NHS bursary or award under section 63 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 or article 44 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order 1972;
 - allowance under the Nursing and Midwifery Student Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 1992;
 - allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by a Research Council.
 - allowance, bursary or award of similar description made by their institution which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability;
 - the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) bursary for students on postgraduate social-work courses which includes a payment for meeting additional expenditure incurred because of a disability;
- b) are in breach of an obligation to repay a student loan;
- c) have not ratified an agreement for a student loan made with them when they were under the age of 18; or
- d) have shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support.

Under regulation 159(18) an eligible postgraduate student is not eligible for support for more than one designated course at a time.

3.4.3 Postgraduate courses designated for DSAs

Regulation 161(1) provides the criteria for course designation in respect of postgraduate DSAs. The requirements are:

- a first degree or higher qualification should be an entry requirement to the course;
- a course duration of at least one academic year;
- where the course commences on or after 1st September 2012, if the course is part-time, it must be of a minimum intensity of 25% FTE during the academic year and ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than four times the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course;
- where the course commences before 1st September 2012, if the course is part-time, it must be ordinarily possible to complete the course in not more than twice the time ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course;
- the course is wholly provided by an authority-funded² institution in the UK ; provided by a publicly funded institution in the UK on behalf of an authority-funded educational institution or by an authority funded institution in conjunction with an overseas institution;
- the course is not an initial teacher training course or a course taken as part of an employment-based teacher training scheme.

Full and part-time Legal Practice courses and Bar Vocational courses provided by authority funded institutions are designated postgraduate courses under the Regulations as the entry requirement to such courses is a first degree or higher.

The Secretary of State may specifically designate courses for the award of postgraduate DSAs that are not automatically designated under the Regulations. Details of the specific designation process along with an application form can be found on the HEFCE's website <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/reg/design/>

² authority-funded" means—

(a)

in relation to educational institutions in England, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for England;

(b)

in relation to educational institutions in Wales, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales;

(c)

in relation to educational institutions in Scotland, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Scottish Funding Council; and

(d)

in relation to educational institutions in Northern Ireland, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland or the Department for Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland.”;

The HEFCE website also includes links to the latest BIS guidance on the new process. The current list of providers that have courses which have been specifically designated can also be found on the HEFCE website at: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/TheRegister/>

Eligible students on courses that are designated during the academic year will only be eligible for DSAs for the quarters following the award of designation, with the exception of the specialist equipment allowance, which is a single amount available for the duration of the course.

3.4.4 Postgraduate ITT courses

Students on postgraduate ITT courses are potentially eligible for DSAs under the full-time or part-time scheme. They are not therefore eligible for the postgraduate DSA.

3.4.5 Periods of eligibility

Regulation 162 provides for DSAs to be paid for the period ordinarily required to complete the course (subject to the course satisfying the requirement of regulation 161). If a student withdraws from the course, abandons or is expelled from the course the period of eligibility is terminated and no further support should be paid.

Where the part-time course begins before 1st September 2012 and where a student intends at the outset to complete a part-time postgraduate course in not more than twice the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the academic year during which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe. (See examples 1, 2 and 3 below).

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

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

Example 3: Student C states an intention to study part-time for a PhD for six years. The equivalent full-time PhD would take three years. The student is awarded the DSA in years one to five of the course as the part-time study is at least 50% of a full-time course. However during the fifth year the student's pattern of part-time study changes so that they now require a further three years part-time study to complete the course, making eight years in total. This period exceeds twice the

period normally required to complete an equivalent full-time course and so the student cannot receive DSA support for the final three years of the course. Their eligibility will cease at the end of the fifth year.

Where the part- time course begins on or after 1st September 2012 and where a student intends at the outset to complete a part-time postgraduate course in not more than four times the period ordinarily required to complete an equivalent full-time course but subsequently takes longer, the period of eligibility will terminate at the end of the academic year during which it becomes impossible for them to complete the course within the required timeframe (see example 4 below).

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

It is the institution to decide whether a postgraduate course is full-time or part-time and whether a part-time course takes more than twice (where the course begins before 1st September 2012) or where the course takes more than four times the period ordinarily required (where the course begins on or after 1st September 2012) to complete a full-time course leading to the same qualification.

The period of eligibility may be terminated where the eligible postgraduate student has shown themselves by their conduct to be unfitted to receive support.

SFE may also terminate the period of eligibility or decide that a student no longer qualifies for an amount of grant if a student has failed to comply with a request to provide information or provided information that they know is false. If the provisions in regulation 162(8) are used, support already paid to the student may be treated as an overpayment for recovery under regulation 168.

3.4.6 Transfer of eligibility

Regulation 163 provides for eligible postgraduate students to transfer their eligibility to another postgraduate course. A transfer is permitted provided that the period of eligibility for the first course has not expired or been terminated and a request to transfer eligibility is made by the student. It is also a requirement that the exporting institution recommends a transfer in writing and that the importing institution agrees to the transfer. If a student transfers their eligibility to another course, any DSAs amount awarded for the first course is taken into account for the second course as the period of eligibility has not been broken. For example, a student receives support of £3,000 but transfers to another course. For the remainder of the academic year, the student has £7,362 remaining (£10,362 maximum grant available less £3,000 already received for the first course). Students transferring courses may continue to receive support without the necessity of a further DSAs

study needs assessment unless their disability has changed or the course is substantially different.

3.4.7 Students moving directly from undergraduate to postgraduate study

Where a student has just graduated and is proceeding directly to postgraduate study in a similar subject area, the DSAs study needs assessment that was undertaken in respect of the undergraduate course may in many cases be sufficient to identify the student's support needs in respect of the postgraduate course. This means, for example, that the student could continue to receive support from non-medical helpers without the necessity of a further DSAs study needs assessment.

Where the support already in place is not sufficient, the institution should consider what reasonable adjustments may be needed.

Additional funded-reviews can be arranged for certain changes of circumstances. Further guidance on when a funded-review, single fee review or a rolling over of existing support is available – see Annex C. The DSAs study needs assessment fee will be paid, even if the study needs assessor identifies that no support is required by the student. No additional fee will be payable without the prior approval of SFE.

3.4.8 Postgraduate students completing dissertations after their course ends

A student retains their status as an eligible postgraduate for a period equal to that which is ordinarily required to complete the relevant designated postgraduate course. If the ordinary duration of the course includes a period to complete a dissertation or thesis, the Regulations provide for the student to be eligible to receive postgraduate DSA for the period spent completing their dissertation or thesis. For example, if a course ordinarily takes two years to complete and the second year of the course is writing up the thesis, the postgraduate student will qualify for support during the writing up period.

Generally the period of eligibility is limited to the ordinary duration of the course. However, regulation 162(9) provides some discretion to extend or renew a student's eligibility for such further periods as may be considered appropriate after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course. Such discretion will be considered on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the reasons for the request to extend the course after the expiry of the period ordinarily required to complete the course.

In the case of part-time designated postgraduate courses which began before 1st September 2012, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean that the overall duration of the part-time course will be more than double the time needed to complete a full-time equivalent course, the part-time course would then cease to be designated. Consequently, the student would not qualify for any further DSAs support. Where the part-time postgraduate course begins on or after 1st September 2012, if the additional period of writing up a thesis or dissertation would mean the overall duration of the part-time course will be more than four

times the time needed to complete the full-time equivalent course, the part time course will cease to be designated and the student will not qualify for further DSAs support.

In the case of part-time postgraduate designated courses regulation 159(9) provides that where the course begins on or after 1st September 2012, an eligible student will not qualify for postgraduate DSAs where the course intensity of study in the academic year for which the support is requested is less than 25%.

3.4.9 Erasmus Students

Additional grant support is available to disabled students on an Erasmus+ Programme to cover the costs of their support needs. Applications are made by the participating institution to the relevant Erasmus+ National Agency once a student is identified as a participant and their support needs are known. Funding covers 100% of the identified costs and are dependent on actual needs rather than a set grant amount or formula. DSAs funding is therefore not available for Erasmus students.

3.4.10 Costs incurred during vacation periods

Study skills support, assistive technology support or assistive technology installation and training provided during the long vacation may be considered through DSAs, if SFE are satisfied that the support is reasonable and appropriate with regard to the circumstances of the student. Any such support undertaken outside term-time does not count as attendance and therefore would not trigger Long Courses Loan or extra weeks' maintenance loan.

3.4.11 Social Services

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

For details of the type of support available under the Postgraduate allowance, see sections 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Section 4 – The DSAs application process

Eligible disabled students from England can apply for DSAs support as soon as Student Finance England launches the application process. Students should complete their DSAs application form and submit it to Student Finance England along with the appropriate medical evidence. SFE may request further information from the student if needed. There are two DSAs application forms. The full form - DSA1F - is aimed at students who have not applied for any other student support, and the slim form - DSASL - is aimed at those students who have already completed an application for student support and therefore do not need to provide certain information again. Both forms ask students to give their consent to the release of information about their DSAs application to third parties such as disability advisers and assessment centres.

Applications for DSAs for the current academic year should be made within the statutory time limit of nine months from the start of the academic year or as soon as reasonably practicable to do so. Applications received after the nine month time limit will be managed on a case by case basis and additional evidence may be requested to support a late application (see paragraph 3.1.1).

Students may wish to speak to their disability adviser before making an application and reasonable adjustments should be discussed and considered. The disability adviser may also assist the student with an application for DSAs if it appears that additional support is required. Students should be advised not to purchase equipment on the assumption that the costs will be covered by DSAs, as reimbursements are not available (see section 9.3).

Once the student undertaking a designated course has established their general eligibility and provided satisfactory evidence of their disability, they are eligible at that stage for DSAs and will ordinarily be advised to contact an assessment centre at the first possible opportunity in order to arrange a DSAs study needs assessment. Entitlement for an award of DSAs will be determined by SFE taking into account the recommendations following the DSAs study needs assessment. Some students may choose not to apply for DSAs as they will receive sufficient support through their institutions.

When notifying students that they will need to undergo a DSAs study needs assessment, SFE should inform the student what is involved in the assessment and that if they do not attend the DSAs study needs assessment they will not be able to receive any DSAs-funded support they may require. Since 2015/16 DSAs study needs assessments can only be carried out by DSA-QAG registered or accredited assessment centres (England and Wales). Students should be directed to the DSA-QAG website for an up-to-date list of accredited assessment centres. Scottish assessment centres should be validated by the Scottish Government's Disabled Student Advisory Group in order to provide services for English-funded students. Assessment centres in Northern Ireland do not currently require accreditation.

Funding through DSAs covers the cost of only one full DSAs study needs assessment, other than in such circumstances as SFE deem a further DSAs study

needs assessment is needed. Guidance is available on when a funded-review assessment, a review within the original fee or a rolling over of support is appropriate – see Annex C. Students should be advised that they will not receive DSAs funding for a second DSAs study needs assessment without prior approval from SFE. Assessments arranged without prior approval from SFE will not be funded through DSAs.

The DSAs study needs assessment will help determine what support the student might require and the amount of DSAs for which the student is entitled. Assessors should consider the information contained in a young person's EHC plan and supporting documentation where the Plan is current and has been made available by the student/local authority. Similarly, the assessor will cover the disabilities / SpLDs approved as eligible by SFE, taking account of the medical evidence submitted in relation to the approved condition(s). Entitlement to DSAs for new DSAs applicants for 2016/17 will be assessed according to the regulations and this guidance.

During the DSAs study needs assessment interview, needs assessors are requested to check that the student is aware of disability support services in their institution. Given that the DSAs study needs assessment may be carried out some months before the start of the course, some students may subsequently attend a different institution or course. In such cases, SFE may seek further information from the assessor or disability adviser, as appropriate. Students should not be advised to attend a second DSAs study needs assessment without prior approval from SFE.

A DSAs study needs assessment report will contain information about the student's disability which is classed as sensitive personal data under the Data Protection Act. This means that the written consent of the student should always be obtained before releasing the DSAs study needs assessment report or any other disability-related information to a third party. A copy of the needs assessment report should be sent to the student and SFE by the assessment centre, once agreed.

Section 5 – The DSAs Non-medical help allowance

From 2016/17 certain types of non-medical help are expected to be provided by the institution under their legal duty to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled students. Exceptions may be considered on a case by case basis.

5.1 The Non-medical help services framework

The SLC non-medical help reference manual

This section now incorporates the SLC Non-medical help reference manual, which is decommissioned from 2016/17. In this section the various support activities which may be funded through DSAs have been grouped into four bands, based on type of activity. Within the bands, individual support activities are set out and include: a brief description of the support activity, the skills and qualifications required to deliver that support, the applicable cost range and maximum cost, and where the primary responsibility for providing the support lies. A list of mandatory qualifications and professional body membership will be published by DSA-QAG.

Non-medical help costs

During 2015 an analysis of 30,000 invoices for 2014-15 was undertaken and the cost ranges reviewed. The new cost ranges for DSAs-funded support have been set using the median price of each role plus 10% to generate a maximum rate (normal rules on rounding were applied). The lower end of the cost range remains as set out in the previous SLC NMH manual, however it should be noted that for the majority of roles invoices were received for less than the lower end of the cost ranges and we expect that to continue as suppliers strive to remain competitive.

The new cost ranges in this document will be implemented for any student receiving a particular type of NMH support for the first time in academic year 2016/17, irrespective of whether they are a new or continuing DSAs student. Students currently in receipt of NMH support will continue on the terms that are already in place for that support for 2016/17.

DSAs funding will not generally be payable for more than the maximum amount of the cost range (+ VAT where applicable). The cost ranges set out in this document are exclusive of VAT. These cost ranges apply to DSAs-funded support only.

Using the Non-medical help support roles

The activity titles which have been used in this document are those generally agreed to be the most widely used and understood and should be the ones referred to by providers when communicating with SFE.

Some support workers will only deliver one type of support. However, where a range of support is delivered by a single non-medical helper that is qualified to deliver more than one type of support, the invoice should stipulate clearly the hours provided for each type of support and the charges should fall within the cost range for that particular type of support.

Assessors, institutions and NMH providers must use the support activity titles set out here when making recommendations or submitting invoices for payment.

Scope

From 2016/17 some roles within this document become the primary responsibility of HE providers. These roles have still been described within this document as DSAs funding is still available by exception. Each descriptor sets out what is considered to be in scope of the support, should DSAs funding become payable. However, this does not transfer the primary responsibility back to DSAs where the role has already been flagged as a HE provider responsibility.

Exceptions

Where this section refers to DSAs funding being available by exception only, this means the support will be considered on an individual basis through the Exceptional Case Process – see below and section 9.2. Any general exceptions that are identified in the future will be stated within the individual roles.

Exceptions to the role descriptors

It is expected that the majority of recommendations and subsequent invoices will be able to fit into the role descriptors presented in this document. However, there may be rare cases when an individual exception to the use of the role descriptors needs to be made. Any activity not covered within the following descriptors will be dealt with as an exception.

Exceptional Case Process

The Exceptional Case Process has been established to safeguard the interests of students where a student is in dispute with their HE provider about the provision of an adjustment. The Exceptional Case Process will consider circumstances where a reasonable adjustment might be expected but the institution fails to provide it. The Exceptional Case Process is triggered once the student enters into a formal dispute with their institution. The Exceptional Case team will consider whether the support falls within the scope of DSAs, and if so, whether interim support should be provided, or whether the needs of the student are so exceptional that DSAs funding should be awarded for the duration of the course. See section 9.2 and Annex B for more details.

DSAs should not be used for charges for support, counselling or tutorial services which the institution makes available to all students.

DSAs are not intended for the costs of extra academic tuition, subject specific coaching or support in the main subject area(s) being studied. Institutions should meet these costs as part of providing the course.

Where an institution makes special adaptations to course hand-outs 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.

Non-medical help quality assurance framework

It is important that students receive good quality support that is provided by individuals who are trained to provide the right level and type of support and recognise and respect the boundary between supporting a student to access their studies and providing academic support. DSAs NMH services should also be provided by support workers who have the appropriate employed or self-employed status.

For this reason a quality assurance framework has been introduced for non-medical help from 2016/17. Any supplier wishing to provide DSAs-funded non-medical help services from 2016/17 will be required to register with DSA-QAG, agree to comply with the quality assurance framework and will be subject to a periodic audit to measure compliance against the registration requirements and quality assurance framework. Any student receiving a type of NMH support for the first time after the launch of the NMH quality assurance framework (whether a new or continuing DSAs student) will only be permitted to receive support from a NMH worker registered with DSA-QAG.

In parallel, cost ranges and cost maximums are now in place setting out the amount that DSAs will generally cover in respect of NMH support. This guidance sets out the support roles and the corresponding cost range, DSAs will not be available to pay for support that exceeds the cost framework, other than by exception.

NMH and local authority care plans

The provision for the non-medical helper allowance does not remove the duty of local social services to provide assistance towards personal care costs that would have been incurred irrespective of a student's attendance on a course. DSAs funding is not available for personal care costs.

Using self-employed non-medical helpers

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

DSAs funding will not be available for individuals without an appropriate employment status i.e. they must be registered with HMRC to pay tax and national insurance on their earnings. DSAs funding will not be provided for family members

or friends to provide NMH support unless they are appropriately registered with DSA-QAG and comply with the quality assurance framework and audit arrangements. Evidence of appropriate qualifications and employment status will be required.

Administration charges for arranging non-medical helpers

In the context of DSAs, many institutions arrange and administer non-medical helper support; and institutions 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. Administration costs form part of the on-costs that are a legitimate part of the overall cost. However, on-costs must relate solely to the provision of support for that particular student. DSAs cannot be used as a contribution towards the infrastructure, general administration and pastoral costs of the institution. That is, DSAs must not be used to cross-subsidise the infrastructure of institutions' disability services.

Institutions' governing bodies are responsible for the proper stewardship and value for money of public funds, and the amount institutions claim for DSAs administration needs to be relevant and proportionate, and to have been incurred by the institution specifically in providing the DSAs service to the DSAs recipients in their care. 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. Institutions may be asked to submit information on how any on-costs in relation to the DSAs recipient have been calculated.

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. Institutions and providers should clearly distinguish the types of services and their costs on the invoices submitted. All costs must be clearly indicated on the invoice. Additional costs not included in the stated on-costs for providing the service will not be funded through DSAs. Any provider, institution or private, may be asked to submit details of how their administrative costs have been calculated with the first claims each year. Costs are expected to be maintained at the same level during the financial year for certainty for the student and SFE.

A fundamental review of costs should be undertaken by institutions / providers 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.

SFE should be satisfied that claims for DSAs are made in accordance with guidance and should query costs which do not appear to them to be reasonable.

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

As a general rule NMH provision will only be paid for through DSAs if the student has booked their support sessions with their NMH provider and attended the sessions. 'Booked' means that the student and NMH provider have agreed the date, time, location and support role in advance of the session. Please see below how sessions that are not attended by the student will be treated for funding purposes.

DSAs will not generally be provided to meet the cost of cancelled support sessions if the cancellation is made with more than 24 hours' notice.

There will be occasions where a student does not attend a booked support session and/or does not give more than 24 hours' notice of cancellation, for example, because they were ill or had a personal emergency or unforeseen circumstances. In these cases the student is engaging with their support provider and only cancelled at short notice, or did not attend, due to a reason outside of their control. When this occurs it is understood that the NMH provider has arranged for a Non-medical Helper to attend the support session and so has incurred a cost for arranging the support. The cost of these booked support sessions will be met from the student's DSAs as it is understood that the student booked the session expecting to attend (subject to the repeated missed sessions rule below).

There may be occasions where a student does not attend a session and could have cancelled the session with more than 24 hours' notice. The cost of such sessions may still be met through the student's DSAs where the NMH provider has incurred a cost for arranging the support and paying the support worker for those sessions (subject to the repeated missed session rule below).

However, in all scenarios, DSAs funding will not be provided for NMH provision that is repeatedly not being used once booked, or cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice, or where students indicate that they no longer need or want NMH support. For the purposes of DSAs funding, repeatedly is considered to be more than two sessions which have been missed per term. BIS consider that it is unlikely that most students would need to cancel their NMH session with less than 24 hours' notice more than twice per term.

DSAs funding will not be provided where the institution is responsible for cancelling the lecture/tutorial etc. that the session was booked for. The institution must take responsibility for notifying the student that the lecture/tutorial etc. is cancelled to enable the student to cancel the session with the NMH provider.

All missed sessions will be carefully considered by SFE before payment and where more than two sessions have been missed per term, to ensure that all parties understand their responsibilities and reasons for missed sessions are being investigated and documented. In cases like this, DSAs funding may be suspended.

NMH 'sessions'

A 'session' will be deemed to be the entire day.

Therefore a provider who has been booked to provide a support role at any point during that day will have an equal status. For each support role, that day will be deemed the first missed session. Similarly, where repeat sessions are booked during the day, all sessions for that support role will be deemed as a single session, but charges should not be made where the support provider is able to make alternative arrangements for the remainder of the day.

Any support that was not scheduled for that day will remain unaffected. No 'missed sessions' will be counted against unscheduled support for that day.

Example: A student has four booked sessions during the day:

Booked session 1 BSL + notetaker
Booked session 2 BSL + notetaker + library assistant
Booked session 3 BSL + mentoring
Booked session 4 notetaker + study skills support.

All the BSL support booked for that day will be counted as one missed session for the purposes of DSAs-funding.

All the notetaking support booked for that day will be classed as one missed session for the purposes of DSAs-funding.

The same will apply for the library assistant, mentoring and study skills support.

The student has been also recommended to have workshop assistant support, but none was booked on this particular day, therefore any allocation of workshop assistant support remains unaffected.

What action should the support worker or service provider take when a session is missed?

At the first missed session, the support worker or service provider should make all reasonable efforts to contact the student to find out the reason for the student missing the session and confirm arrangements for the next session booked. The support worker should not attend the next session until the arrangement is confirmed with the student. If the student states they no longer require the support, support should be terminated and SFE informed.

The same process should be followed for the second missed session.

The support worker should not suspend the student's support if the student wishes to book a future session. If the support worker no longer wishes to continue providing the support, they should notify SFE immediately so that another support worker can be identified. Alternatively they should contact the disability adviser to discuss ongoing support.

What is deemed to be a term when considering missed sessions?

Generally the academic year falls into 3 terms/semesters. However, some courses have non-standard delivery models that do not fall into 3 periods.

For ease we will refer to terms. This refers to the study periods that run either side of the standard holidays i.e. September – December, January to April, and May to July/August. The start of the academic year is not relevant for this purpose.

DSAs-funding is payable on a first come, first served basis. Therefore where a student is nearing the statutory cap and a number of support workers are requiring payment this will still be managed on a first-come, first served basis. Providers are encouraged to submit invoices in a timely and regular manner to ensure payment can be made.

Whilst BIS acknowledges that exceptions may need to be considered, it is expected that providers and students are working together to minimise the number of missed sessions and that exceptions will only be considered rarely.

NMH support following missed sessions

SFE will not suspend support after two missed sessions. It is assumed that the need for support continues and that sessions are being managed by the support worker and the student. However, payment will not be made for any missed sessions occurring beyond the first two, other than in exceptional circumstances.

The role of the HEI disability adviser in managing missed sessions

Where there is consent to share information with the institution, support workers may wish to liaise with the disability adviser if it appears that the student is not managing their sessions effectively and sessions are regularly being cancelled or missed without cancellation. This may indicate other problems or may indicate that the student does not require, or is not satisfied with the support they have been recommended. Early intervention in such cases may result in different support being offered.

BIS/SLC will separately consider what action might be taken if the nature of the student's disability is such that they might regularly need to miss booked sessions without warning. Study needs assessors should indicate on the needs assessment report if they identify that this is likely to occur.

Payment of invoices

In most instances non-medical help support is paid by SFE upon receipt of an invoice. Frequency of payment is determined by when the invoice is received. Invoices are paid on a first-come, first-served basis. Therefore suppliers should provide invoices as soon as practicable. SFE are not permitted to pay support that exceeds the maximums set out in the regulations.

5.2 BAND ONE – Support Assistants

Staff that carry out these activities must have the skills and competence to work effectively, at the direction of the student, in their own particular context.

From 2016/17 these activities are the primary responsibility of the HE provider, with the exception of sighted guide, which remains a primary responsibility of DSAs. However, where DSAs funding is available by exception, funding will be provided only within the cost ranges that apply to each activity and within the scope set out within each role.

The role of a support assistant is generally to provide support in the following areas:

- Providing practical support around the campus
- Providing practical support in the library, laboratory or workshop/studio etc.
- Reading aloud
- Scribing
- Text checking (pointing out errors but not providing corrections)

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Practical Support Assistant
- Library Support Assistant
- Reader
- Scribe
- Workshop/Laboratory Assistant
- Sighted Guide
- Proof Reader

5.2.1 Practical Support Assistant £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, IT 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' in order 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; good interpersonal skills.

Qualifications/training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training; 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 HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the practical support needs of the student.

In any event, DSAs 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.

5.2.2 Library Support Assistant: cost range £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. See information on e-books and accessible format publications at 8.4.

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: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training required; understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the library support needs of the student.

5.2.3 Reader: cost range £15-£25

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; sufficient skills to cope with the demands of the text including any technical jargon.

Qualifications and training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training; some understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the 'reader' needs of the student.

5.2.4 Scribe: cost range £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; 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 and Training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training; competency in English; understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the 'scribe' needs of the student.

5.2.5 Workshop/Laboratory Assistant: cost range £15-£26

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

Skills Required: Knowledge and experience of the particular educational setting, e.g. laboratory or workshop.

Training/qualifications: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training; sufficient knowledge in the requisite practical area; health and safety training relevant to the particular workshop context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the workshop/laboratory support needs of the student.

5.2.6 Sighted Guide: cost range £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; good interpersonal skills.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration>.

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.2.7 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 the student 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 institutions 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; 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: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training with particular emphasis on boundaries of activity; understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the proof reading/text checking needs of the student.

5.3 BAND TWO – Enhanced Support Assistants

These are activities which demand an enhanced level of skill, knowledge and training to Band One activities.

From 2016/17 these activities are the primary responsibility of the HE provider. However, where DSAs funding is available by exception, funding will be provided only within the cost ranges that apply to each activity and within the scope set out within each role.

The role of an enhanced support assistant is generally to provide support in the following areas:

- Supporting students to develop their independence and autonomy in HE, for example by providing support with issues such as time keeping; organisational skills etc. and can be supplemented by practical support e.g. library support, workshop support etc.
- Supporting a disabled student during examinations

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Study Assistant
- Examination Support Worker
- Notetaker

5.3.1 Study Assistant: cost range £20-£29

This role does not refer to the specialist one-to-one skills support which is provided under band 4 support – see 5.5.2

This support is provided where a mix of enabling strategies complemented by some practical assistance has been required. This is usually as a result 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 e.g. library support, workshop support etc.

Skills required: An enhanced level of skill and experience of working with disabled students and 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 Four, One to One Study Skills Support or Specialist Mentors; knowledge of the way the institution/organisation works and the demands of studying in HE; excellent interpersonal skills; clear understanding of issues of confidentiality.

Qualifications/training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training and also a level of specialist training relevant to the demands of the activity; understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the study assistant support needs of the student.

5.3.2 Examination Support Workers: cost range £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, e.g. 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; clear understanding of the activity and high level of personal integrity in order to not make any additions or amendments to student's answers.

Training/qualifications: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Generic non-medical help training; competent knowledge of English; specific subject expertise where relevant e.g. to cope with technical jargon; understanding of the HE context.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions 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 institutions may need to make to enable a disabled student to take examinations (e.g. providing physical access to the examination hall or allowing the examinations to be taken and invigilated somewhere else) will not be considered within the scope of DSAs.

Institutions will also need to have regard to competency standards when considering how disabled students undertake an examination of their skill in a particular area.

5.3.3 Notetakers: cost range £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 note-taking 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.

Qualifications/training: A Level 2 qualification in notetaking is required. 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, the successful achievement of that assessment and evaluation.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions 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 note-taking, 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 note-taking 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 DSAs funding is provided for notetaking, the DSAs Study Needs Assessor will be asked to determine the required format of notes at the needs assessment taking in to 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 institution.

Where DSAs-funded notetaking is agreed by exception, assessors will be required to provide the following information, where possible: the actual number of note-taking hours required based on timetable; or where this is not possible (i.e. 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 HEI, discussion with the student etc.

Where typed notes are required by the student the 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 note-taking. But only where it has not been possible to provide a note-taker that can take typed notes or typed notes are not appropriate.

Note-taking costs should be clear on the invoice. Typed notes should be invoiced as manual note-taking (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 note-taking (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 therefore expected. Typing up charges should be no more than half the amount charged for the actual note-taking session (and half the time of the note-taking).

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 students specific needs) is £10 per hour, with only half an hour being the appropriate charge (i.e. an additional £5).

The typing up of written notes by the note-taker or a third party is not electronic note-taking or specialist transcription services and should not be recommended or charged as such (see 5.4.2 and 5.4.3).

5.4 BAND THREE – Specialist Enabling Support

These are activities which demand specific expertise and specialist training in a particular access area.

From 2016/17 DSAs funding remains available for these support roles, with the exception of specialist transcription services, which become the primary responsibility of the HE provider. Where DSAs funding is available by exception for specialist transcription services, funding will be provided only within the cost ranges that apply to the activity and within the scope set out within the role.

The role of a specialist enabler is generally to provide support in the following areas:

- Making use of specialist expertise and training in a particular access area in order to facilitate a student's access to learning using specialist skills and/or equipment to represent the language of delivery into another more accessible format
- Using specialist skills to enable students to navigate themselves independently around the educational environment

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Communication Support Worker
- Electronic Notetaker
- Specialist Transcription Services
- Mobility Trainer

5.4.1 Communication Support Workers and lip speakers: cost range £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 British Sign Language (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 one to one support. This does not include academic support.

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

Qualifications/Training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration>.

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.4.2 Specialist Note-takers: cost range £35-£40

This support activity is predominantly for students who are deaf or hard of hearing and visually impaired students. The primary requirement of this support is to meet the need for live access to the content of the teaching session, seminar etc. and the need for notes for review and revision purposes. The note-taker will make a comprehensive although non-verbatim, live, typed record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, off-campus events etc. in the student's preferred style and format. This may include the information appearing simultaneously on the student's computer using either Speedtext or Stereotype specialist software. 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 if using the specialist software described above.

For disabled students there are now many forms of assistive technology (for example, recording devices) 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. There is a range of specialist notetaking that may be applicable here, two of which are set out more fully below.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration>.

Electronic Notetaking

Electronic notetaking (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**.

Equipment required: Electronic notetaking requires the 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. Where software is used to enable the student to receive the text live on a second laptop, the second laptop could belong either to the student or the service provider.

Note: This activity is not to be confused with that of Specialist Transcription.

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 (for example 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.

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.4.3 Specialist Transcription Service: cost range £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.

Qualifications/training: No mandatory qualifications or professional body membership has been identified for this support; Relevant specialist IT training.

The primary responsibility for providing this support lies with the HE provider. DSAs funding remains available by exception only. Institutions should consider what reasonable adjustments can be put in place to meet the specialist transcription needs of the student.

5.4.4 Mobility Trainer: cost range £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 particular 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 (see 5.2.6)

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.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration> .

If a student already has a guide dog then The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (GDBA) takes responsibility for mobility training in a new environment.

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.5 BAND FOUR – Specialist Access and Learning Support

These activities require advanced specialist skills, training and/or qualifications concerning how particular disabilities affect a student's access to learning and how to address these access issues. These support workers will make use of specialist skills and training in order to: understand the particular barriers to learning experienced by individual disabled students, work with the student in order to identify strategies to help address these barriers, monitor the effectiveness of these strategies, work to enhance student's autonomy within their learning context and interpret the language of delivery, giving real-time access, into another language accessible to the student

Functions undertaken by Specialist Access and Learning Support Workers require the use of specialist skills and training in order to:

- Understand the particular barriers to learning experienced by individual disabled students
- Work with the student in order to identify strategies to help address these barriers
- Work with the student to continually monitor the effectiveness of these strategies
- Work to enhance student's autonomy within their learning context
- Interpret the language of delivery, giving real time access, into another language accessible to the student

Roles which might provide this support include:

- Specialist Mentor
- Specialist One to One Study Skills Support
- BSL Interpreter
- Language Support Tutor for deaf students
- Assistive Technology Trainer

5.5.1 Specialist Mentors: cost range £50-£66

Specialist mentors provide highly specialist, specifically tailored, one to one 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 or autism spectrum disorders. 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. 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, e.g. 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.

DSAs 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 particular disability (e.g. mental-health condition, autism spectrum disorder); understanding of the particular demands of study in HE; close working relationship with other support service both inside and outside the HEI and recognition of when there is a need to refer to other services.

Training/Qualifications: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration> .

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.5.2 Specialist One to One Study Skills Support: cost range £50-£72

This specialist one to one 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 specific learning difficulties or an Autism Spectrum Disorder often face when working in an HE context. This support is primarily provided for students with a Specific Learning Difficulty or an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

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 e.g. SpLD or ASD on a one-to-one basis, also experience of working with these disabilities in an educational/learning environment. A good working knowledge of assistive technologies and related AT study skills strategies would be desirable.

When working with students with specific learning difficulties an in depth understanding of the effects of specific learning difficulties 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 specific learning difficulties 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.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration> .

The National Autistic Society website identifies some appropriate courses: <http://www.autism.org.uk/working-with/training-and-experience/courses-for-professionals-in-autism-and-other-related-topics.aspx>

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.5.3 British Sign Language Interpreters: cost range £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, in order to receive information in one 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.

Qualifications/Training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration>

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.5.4 Language Support Tutor for deaf students £50-£72

THIS ROLE IS DUE TO BE UPDATED SHORTLY.

This support is to provide one to one specialist English language enhancement to deaf students – either those whose first language is BSL or those who communicate orally. This does not include academic support.

Skills required: Significant experience of working in the area of language support with deaf students; very good knowledge of both English and BSL; understanding of the language difficulties faced by deaf students.

Qualifications/training: Any mandatory qualifications or professional body membership required to provide this support are set out on the DSA-QAG website <http://www.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-online-registration>.

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

5.5.5 Assistive Technology Training: cost range £50-£65

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.

Institutions 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, institutions should consider bulk-buying licences to enable their disabled student body to access on-going training free-of-charge.

Skills required: Assistive Technology (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 assistive technology, 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 higher education.

Qualifications and training: There are no specific qualifications for DSAs IT training, although IT trainers should have a thorough knowledge of assistive technologies.

DSAs funding remains available for this support.

Section 6 – The major items of specialist equipment allowance

DSAs funding can provide specialist equipment to enable students to overcome the barriers to learning that arise due to their disability. Specialist equipment and assistive technology should encourage independent, autonomous learning. Consideration should be given to the feasibility of utilising the student's existing equipment, before recommending that new equipment is purchased through DSAs.

Student leaves a course after receiving equipment

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

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

A DSAs study needs assessment may be provided before a student has started their course to ensure that any equipment or other support they need can be arranged and delivered for the beginning of term. In some cases it may be appropriate to supply DSAs-funded equipment before the start of term where training on the equipment is necessary before the student starts their course. However, if the student subsequently does not start the course, this will constitute an overpayment for the purposes of regulation 119 (full-time students), regulation 135 (full-time distance learning students) regulation 156 (part-time students) and regulation 168 (postgraduate students).

Similarly, a student may start their course, then abandon it and then receive DSAs funding or equipment after they have abandoned the course (possibly because SFE had not been notified that the student had left the course). This will constitute an overpayment for the purposes of regulation 119(7) (full-time students), regulation 135(8) (full-time distance learning students), regulation 156(7) (part-time students) and regulation 168(6) (postgraduate students).

SFE can accept the return of the equipment to the supplier, a monetary repayment or a combination of both against the overpayment. For example, where the student has received two items of equipment through DSAs 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.

Assessors should clearly explain to students who are supplied with equipment before the start of their course that they may be liable for the cost of the equipment if they do not subsequently begin the course.

Exceptions

Where this section refers to DSAs funding being available by exception only, this means the support will be considered on an individual basis through the Exceptional Case Process – see section 9.2. Any general exceptions that are identified in the future will be stated within the individual support type.

6.1 Computers

DSAs funding is not available for the first £200 cost towards a computer.

DSAs are only paid to eligible students for the purpose of assisting with the additional costs which a student is obliged to incur in connection with undertaking a course because of their disability. Therefore, funding for computers will only be provided, and subject to the £200 contribution, where the computer is required solely because of their disability.

It is the responsibility of institutions to consider how a student will access their course and part of that will be a consideration of the communal equipment available to their student body. Consideration should be given to providing the most commonly used types of assistive software as standard on networked computers and the provision of quiet rooms where necessary for the effective use of some software (e.g. speech to text). Consideration should also be given to ensuring the functionality of assistive software is active and that networked computers have roaming profiles with the facility to set student's personal preferences. Flexible arrangements for use should be considered, including priority use and longer time slots. Institutions may also consider what support they might provide on an individual basis, for example through bursaries to low-income groups.

DSAs study needs assessors must always consider the suitability of a student's existing equipment before recommending that a student receives DSAs-funded computer equipment.

Entry-level computers

DSAs funding is not available for entry level computers.

Some disabled students may only require an entry-level computer to support their studies, as a higher specification computer is not required to run their software. In this context an entry-level computer is one which is used for internet browsing, word processing, spread-sheets and the least technically demanding assistive software packages e.g. mind mapping software. Such computers may not have the capacity to run assistive software effectively at the same time. BIS considers entry level computers a mainstream participation cost for all students and cost £200 or less.

Standard computers

DSAs funding is available for a 'standard' computer, subject to a £200 student contribution.

Other students require a computer with a higher specification than an entry-level computer in order to effectively use speech-to-text software and/or text-to-speech software. This is termed as a standard computer in the DSAs context. The specification for a standard computer for DSAs purposes is set out as a 'Classic/WKH' in the DSA-QAG Computer Specification Matrix.

DSAs study needs assessors should not recommend a standard computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSAs study needs assessors must not recommend a standard computer where an entry-level computer will meet the needs of the student. Where a standard computer is identified as a necessity, additional costs, over and above the cost of an entry-level computer (i.e. £200) will be provided through DSAs. DSAs study needs assessors should identify the appropriate computer type that meets the student's needs i.e. entry level / standard / high cost.

DSAs study needs assessors should refer to separate guidance on establishing whether a student's existing computer is suitable for running their assistive software effectively.

High cost computers

DSAs funding is not generally available for high-cost computers (but see 9.2 for exceptional case process).

DSAs funding is only available for high cost computers e.g. non-PC laptops and desktops, PC computers with larger memory, faster processors and/or graphics cards where such a computer is required solely because of the student's disability – and they will no longer be funded through DSAs where the need is solely due to the way in which the course is delivered.

Institutions must consider how their students, including disabled students, will access the appropriate equipment, when electing to run courses requiring access to a non-PC platform, or other higher cost equipment. Institutions should make appropriate provision for access for all students to such IT equipment. Provision might be made in the form of communal facilities or individual access through institution discretionary funding e.g. bursaries or loan arrangements.

Where a high cost computer is required solely due to the student's disability, funding for the additional costs, over and above the cost of an entry-level computer i.e. £200, will be provided through DSAs. DSAs funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers in this instance.

The student's specific need must be appropriately evidenced. DSAs study needs assessors should not recommend a high-cost computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSAs study needs assessors should identify the appropriate computer type that meets the student's needs i.e. entry level / standard / high cost.

Low weight computers

DSAs funding is available for low-weight computers, subject to a £200 student contribution (considered through the exceptional case process – see 9.2)

Some students may have a specific disability related need for a low-weight laptop computer i.e. one that weighs up to 1.5kg. Where a low-weight laptop is required, additional costs, over and above the cost of an entry-level computer (i.e. £200) will be provided through DSAs. DSAs funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for these computers.

The student's specific need must be appropriately evidenced. DSAs study needs assessors should not recommend a low-weight computer unless it is essential and full justification will be required in each case. DSAs study needs assessors should identify the appropriate computer type that meets the student's needs i.e. entry level / standard / high cost.

Tablet devices

DSAs funding is not generally available for tablet devices (but see exceptional case process at 9.2)

Where devices such as tablets are essential to meet the specific needs of the student, DSAs funding will be provided. However, it is expected that a standard computer will provide the increased processing power with which to operate the full range of assistive software, compared to devices such as tablets. Therefore we expect a standard computer to be the most appropriate provision for the student should they require this software, unless their specific needs mean that exceptionally additional devices are required to support their study.

If the student does not need the assistive software which requires extra processing power then it is expected an entry level computer, or a device with equivalent functionality like a tablet, would meet the student's needs. It is expected that an entry-level computer will provide the same functionality as a tablet in the majority of cases and will not be funded through DSAs.

Insurance and warranties

DSAs funding is available for insurance and warranty cover for DSAs-funded computers.

Students should also be advised that DSAs funding is available for insurance and warranty for their existing computer, if the computer is required to meet their disability related needs and is of the appropriate specification.

6.2 Devices for printing and/or scanning

DSAs funding is available for devices for printing and/or scanning.

Where funding is made available, generally only multifunction printer/scanners will be considered.

Recommendations for separate individual printers or scanners will only be considered in exceptional circumstances, where there is a clear disability related need for separate items in place of a multifunction unit (see exceptional case process at 9.2).

All recommendations for devices for printing and/or scanning must include full justification and evidence setting out why the provision of the item is required for the student to undertake their course solely due to their disability.

Assessors should clearly evidence the need for hard copy materials and how that need is additional to that experienced by a non-disabled student. Assessors should also evidence why that additional need cannot be met through the institution's services e.g. library services or reasonable adjustments.

Assessors are advised to use the following three-step approach in evidencing need, and provide this in the report:

- i) Is there an additional 'need' due to their disability over and above that needed by their non-disabled peers, both for printed materials and scanning?
- ii) If the student does have additional needs for printed or scanned materials, can the need be met using library services?
- iii) If the need cannot be met by library services, can the need be met by the HE Provider through other reasonable adjustments?

Where devices for printing and/or scanning are provided, DSAs funding is available for ink and paper consumables which are additional to the needs of a non-disabled student.

6.3 Audio capture equipment

DSAs funding is available for audio capture equipment (e.g. Digital Voice Recorders (DVRs), microphones).

Assessors should consider whether adequate personal recording of lectures and seminars could be achieved via a laptop or a smart phone, including with use of an app, before recommending DVRs. Assessors should also consider if recordings are provided by the institution.

DSAs funding is available for smart phone apps if they are essential for audio capture, where the student will be using their existing smart phone instead of a DVR for this purpose and a free version of the app is not available. DSAs are not available to cover the cost of the student's own device, or any insurance or warranty associated with that device.

All recommendations require full justification and evidence setting out why the provision of the individual item is required for the student to undertake their course solely due to their disability. Recommendations should demonstrate and evidence that full consideration of other strategies has been made before a DVR is considered. Assessors should not expect to recommend DVRs and note taking for the same purpose.

6.4 Other equipment

DSAs funding is available for other equipment where the provision of the individual item is required for the student solely due to their disability.

The list below indicates a range of support that is available through DSAs. The list is not exhaustive. Nor should it be taken that the list represents items that all disabled students should receive.

All recommendations require full justification and evidence setting out why the provision of the individual item is required for the student to undertake their course solely due to their disability.

Assessors are advised to use the following three-step approach in evidencing need for each item:

- i) Is there an additional 'need' for the item due to their disability over and above that needed by their non-disabled peers?
- ii) If the student does have additional needs for an item, can the need be met using common facilities provided by the HE Provider?
- iii) If the need cannot be met by common facilities provided by the HE Provider, can the need be met by the HE Provider through other reasonable adjustments?

In all cases, the lowest specification item that meets the needs of the student should be recommended by assessors.

- Screens and monitors
- Keyboards and mice.
- Specialist equipment for visually impaired people (e.g. viewing equipment, Braille equipment)
- Magnifying equipment.
- Ergonomic equipment and furniture.
- Handheld dictionary and spelling equipment.
- Scanning pens.

DSAs funding is available for laptop carry cases as a matter of course, up to a maximum price of £20 for those students being provided with a laptop computer. The laptop carry case should form part of the quote for equipment.

DSAs funding is available for standard keyboards, standard size monitors and standard mice as a matter of course *if* they form part of a recommendation for a desktop computer.

DSAs funding is available for headsets or other items as a matter of course where they are essential for the effective use of specific assistive software that has been recommended.

A 'bundle' of standard computer peripherals will no longer be funded as standard. The need for each item must be individually evidenced.

6.5 Assistive and Standard Software

DSAs funding is available for assistive and standard software where the provision of the individual item is required for the student solely due to their disability and the software is not available for free through site licences or other means.

DSAs will fund:

- Assistive software
- Standard software (but only where it is essential for the effective use of assistive software alongside it. Otherwise standard software is considered a mainstream participation cost and outside the scope of DSAs)

6.6 Course Specific Software

DSAs funding is not available for course specific software

All students will need to access course specific software and therefore it falls outside the scope of DSAs funding. Institutions will need to consider how all of their students will be able to access course specific software.

6.7 Wheelchairs / mobility scooters

DSAs funding is not generally available for wheelchairs/mobility scooters (but see exceptional case process at 9.2).

The responsibility for providing wheelchairs and mobility scooters rests with the National Health Service (NHS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (e.g. through Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payments (PIP)). The need for a wheelchair or mobility scooter is unlikely to be a solely study related need.

6.8 Radio aids for deaf students

DSAs funding is available for a radio aid

Funding is available if the student's needs cannot be met through other means and a radio aid has not been supplied through other sources e.g. the NHS.

DSAs funding is only appropriate if the need for a radio aid is solely a study-related need.

Section 7 – The DSAs Travel Allowance

The travel allowance (regulation 41(2)(c)) may be used to pay the reasonable additional costs of travel to and from the institution which are incurred because of a disability.

7.1 Attending the institution

The travel allowance is calculated as the excess between public transport costs and the mode of travel the student is required to use because of their disability e.g. a taxi. For example, if a student needs to travel by taxi rather than by public transport because of mobility or visual difficulties, then the DSAs will cover the additional expenditure that represents.

Some students may be required as a result of a disability to use a private car to travel to and from the institution. In this instance, the amount of travel allowance should be any excess between public transport costs and the cost of the same journey by car. The cost of a journey by car is calculated by using the mid-point range of AA motoring costs which includes an element for wear and tear on the car. For financial year 2015-16 this is set at 24p per mile. Suitable parking facilities should be arranged by the institution as a reasonable adjustment.

Generally, where the student has opted to use a mobility element of their Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) to lease a Motability car, they will be expected to use that car to attend their institution and travel costs will be calculated using the AA motoring costs of 24p per mile (as above). Suitable parking facilities should be arranged by the institution as a reasonable adjustment. Exceptions may arise where the car cannot be driven by the student themselves. In such instances the study needs assessor must consider the cheapest travel options, taking into account the availability of the Motability car where possible (e.g. for travel to the local bus or train station).

The study needs assessor will need to be satisfied that the travel expenditure is related to the student's study and arises in each case solely by reason of a disability to which the student is subject. A disabled student may still qualify for Travel Grant (regulations 48 - 55) in the same way as any other student (see the 'Assessing Financial Entitlement' guidance).

Travel allowance is not available to enable the student to attend appointments, or other travel needs, that are personal needs e.g. hospital appointments, travel to home address. This is the case irrespective of whether the travel is required because the institution is not in the locality of the appointment or student's home address.

7.2 Attending a work-placement

The site of a student's work placement will be treated as being 'the institution' for the purposes of journeying to and from the site at the start and end of the day.

Institutions and the employer providing the work placement should consider additional travel needs, for example off-site meetings during the day, as part of their reasonable adjustments.

Assistance provided through other government funding for the purposes of attending a work placement e.g. the social work travel bursary, should be taken into account when calculating the excess costs that can be funded through DSAs

7.3 Attending a field trip

The site of a student's field trip will be treated the same as being 'the institution' for the purposes of journeying to and from the site at the start and end of the day.

7.4 Taxi firm accounts

DSAs funding for taxi fares only relates to appropriately licensed taxi providers. Students are required to set up an account with an appropriate taxi firm and payments will be made direct to the company, on receipt of an invoice. Students may need to make ad-hoc taxi journeys from time to time with a company that they do not hold an account with. These will be treated exceptionally and be reimbursed on receipt of a valid itemised company receipt.

Section 8 – The DSAs general allowance

This section sets out information on the type of support that is funded through the general allowance and details where support will be provided in more limited circumstances. Throughout this section exceptions are identified. These should not be taken as an exhaustive list. Where no exceptions are currently identified, exceptions will still be considered on a case-by-case basis.

8.1 DSAs study needs assessments

DSAs funding is available for the initial DSAs study needs assessment and the cost of travel to the DSAs study needs assessment.

The cost of a DSAs study needs assessment is drawn from this allowance. Assessment centres have agreed a fee framework which sets out the level of service a student can expect to receive as part of the initial assessment fee. The one-off fee paid in respect of the DSAs study needs assessment will cover much of the contact the student has with the assessment centre for the duration of the course.

From 1 January 2016 the maximum amount available for a full study needs assessment is £660 (+ VAT where applicable). Assessment centres charging above that rate will not be reimbursed any amount above this through DSAs.

For students being assessed by assessment centres that were charging less than that rate on the date of notification (see communication sent by DSA-QAG to assessment centres on 10 September 2015) the maximum amount available for their assessment will continue to be frozen at the amount charged by the assessment centre on the date of notification.

Additional funded-reviews can be arranged for certain changes of circumstances. Further guidance on when a funded-review, single fee review or a rolling over of existing support is available at Annex C. The DSAs study needs assessment fee will be paid, even if the study needs assessor identifies that no support is required by the student. No additional fee will be payable without the prior approval of SFE.

The DSAs study needs assessor will consider the nature of the student's disability and the impact of that disability on the student's ability to access their chosen course. The assessor will set out any recommendations for DSAs funded support and indicate where support may be required that falls outside the scope of DSAs within a Needs Assessment Report. The Report will be sent to Student Finance England and the student. The student will be advised to pass a copy of the relevant section of the needs assessment report to their institution's disability adviser, in order to discuss what adjustments might be appropriate.

Once a student has started their course, it may become apparent that additional or different support may be needed. Students should contact their assessment centre to discuss varying the support recommended. Assessment centres will also be asked by SFE to consider requests made by the institution to vary the support

recommended. Additional DSAs-funded support will only be agreed by SFE once the view of the assessor has been received and taken into account.

Subsequent DSAs study needs assessments will only be funded from DSAs where SFE has given express authorisation for a further DSAs study needs assessment to proceed. Students are advised to contact their study needs assessor if they require further help or advice during their course of study.

8.2 Living Accommodation

DSAs are not available towards the additional costs of accommodation where the accommodation is provided, managed or controlled by the institution or its agent, by which we mean an organisation or individual acting on behalf of the institution for the provision of accommodation.

DSAs remain available for the additional costs of accommodation not provided by the institution or its agent, but only where the additional costs are incurred solely because of the student's disability.

Institutions should not pass any additional costs of specialist accommodation on to the student.

Assessors should consider the student's accommodation needs for the duration of the course, so that students do not need to have a further assessment if they move from HE provider accommodation to private accommodation in subsequent years of their course.

Student Finance England will consider the status of the accommodation provider and will also make a judgement on a suitable comparator for costs. Generally where only one type of accommodation is available, e.g. where all accommodation provided by the institution or a large private provider is en-suite, then the student will not incur additional costs in relation to the provision of en-suite accommodation when compared to their fellow students.

Sometimes an institution will have a range of accommodation available and a certain type is specifically selected to meet the student's needs. In such cases a comparator might be from outside the locality of the allocated accommodation. The assessor should seek information on how the particular accommodation was selected by the student or allocated by the institution to enable SFE to determine the appropriate comparator. It would also be helpful if a map of the institution's campus is supplied, in order to identify suitable comparators for accommodation costs in the area.

8.3 Consumables

There is no standard 'consumables allowance'.

Consumables, for example paper and ink supplies, will continue to be funded where the assessor has a) evidenced that the student has a need for hard copy materials that is additional to that of a non-disabled peer and b) a printer has been

provided to meet that additional need, or the student already owns a suitable printer.

Assessors should clearly evidence the need for hard copy materials and how that need is additional to that experienced by a non-disabled student. Assessors should also evidence why that additional need cannot be met through the institution's services e.g. library services.

If the need for additional consumables is identified, assessors should consider carefully what consumables are required and to what level. An estimate of usage should be provided to SFE, along with the factors that have been taken into account when considering that usage, including the usage that a non-disabled student might have. A standard estimate should not be used by assessors, given the wide variation in the needs of individual students.

8.4 Books

DSAs funding is not generally available for books

Funding for general living costs, including books, equipment etc. is already provided through the maintenance support available to full-time undergraduate students. Part-time and the majority of Postgraduate students do not receive maintenance support, as they are expected to self-fund their courses.

Core books are a standard expense faced by all students and DSAs funding is not available for core books. If a disabled student requires access to a core book in an alternative format they should contact the library services at their institution to arrange for assistance.

Non-core books are optional for students and will not generally be considered essential for DSAs purposes. However, books will continue to be funded where they are essential and the needs of the student cannot be met through other solutions – examples of alternative solutions are set out below.

Wherever possible, students should be assisted by their institution to access materials in alternative formats if needed or through long library loans or other similar arrangements.

For a free source of accessible textbooks and images already provided by publishers go to: <https://load2learn.org.uk/>

For help finding key contacts for publishers in order to source electronic formats of textbooks for disabled students go to:
<http://www.publisherlookup.org.uk/index.php>

The e-book platforms to which institutions subscribe should be as accessible as possible (e.g. enable adjustments to font size and display colour; enable text to be read by text-to-speech tools) see useful guidance at:
<http://www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/techdis/keyinitiatives/libraries> .

When producing reading lists, it would be good practice for institutions to consider how accessible the textbooks on those lists are.

This would mean identifying books on the reading list that:

- Are readily available in electronic format on the e-book platform(s) to which the institution subscribes.
- If not available or accessible using assistive technology through the institution's e-book platforms the books could: a) be obtained in an accessible format directly from publishers, or b) be scanned in-house by the library service.

Where reading lists contain books that are neither available nor accessible using the institution's e-book platforms, it would be good practice for institution's library services to obtain files direct from the publisher in a timely manner.

It would be good practice for institutions to make assistive technology tools, such as text-to-speech, available on all institution computer workstations so that wherever the student accesses electronic texts they have the option of having speech support.

Where books are not available in an alternative format institutions should provide long library loans or fully accessible scanned versions where appropriate (where copyright regulations allow).

Leeds Beckett University – a case study

Over a number of years, Leeds Beckett University has developed a process for acquiring and testing accessible format texts on behalf of print impaired students registered with the University's Disability Services.

With an increasing number of students requiring accessible format texts, in 2007/08 the University began to approach publishers to request alternative formats of print books, and developed a robust procedure for keeping track of the requests made and files received.

The service has grown from 27 requests to publishers in 2007/2008 to 306 in 2013/14.

The process begins with the Learning Support Officer meeting the student to assess their needs and obtain a reading list. The Copyright Officer then contacts the relevant publisher for each item and uploads all correspondence to a database, including licence agreements. Any alternative format files provided by the publisher are stored on a secure server for testing. An accessible copy is then sent to the student whilst a back-up copy is retained (if permitted by the publisher).

If no file is supplied, in-house scanning would be considered, but only if the title was essential reading for the student.

Information about the ease (or otherwise) of obtaining alternative format files from specific publishers is provided to academic staff, to encourage them to consider this when putting together their reading lists.

Leeds Beckett is also working on a set of preferred licensing terms to be included in any subscription agreement for e-book platforms being considered for purchase, with accessibility being a key factor.

Assessors should make it clear during the assessment that DSAs will only be provided to purchase non-core books where they are deemed to be essential and are not available through any other source. A 'book allowance' should not be recommended. Students should be signposted to their institution's library services to access materials for their study.

If the situation arises whereby a student is unable to access the text they require and the purchase of hard copy items is the only solution, due to the specialist nature of the text, then the assessor should set that out in the NAR if known at the time, or the assessor should use the current 'additional recommendation' process to submit the request to SFE if identified later during the course.

8.5 Internet connection/costs

DSAs funding is not generally available for internet costs

The wide availability of internet access through institutions, student accommodation and other venues has removed the necessity of providing individual personal internet access. In addition, BIS considers internet access a mainstream cost. Distance learning students, disabled and non-disabled, are expected to have internet access to enable them to enrol for distance learning courses e.g. Open University courses.

8.6 Special diets (for those living with allergies)

DSAs funding is not available for special diets

A student who requires a special diet will generally face the additional cost of such a diet irrespective of the fact they are studying. Therefore funding generally falls outside the scope of DSAs.

8.7 Fridges (for students needing to store medication)

DSAs funding is available for the purchase of a small personal fridge where it is essential that medication is stored in a fridge and communal facilities are not suitable.

Section 9 – Other

9.1 Appeals and Complaints

The Student Loans Company has formal processes for handling complaints about their service and also appeals against a decision by Student Finance England in regards to funding.

Students can contact SLC if they wish to make a complaint by:

Telephone: 0300 100 0601

Email: customer_complaints@slc.co.uk

Online customer complaint form: -

http://www.slc.co.uk/media/5032/slc_customer_complaints_form_d.pdf

Or if they wish to appeal an SFE decision regarding funding:

Email - formal_appeals@slc.co.uk

The existing appeals process should be used for DSAs cases where a Study Needs Assessor recommends support that is not available under DSAs or not sufficiently justified, and the recommendation is rejected by SFE.

In addition to the existing appeals and complaints process, a new Exceptional Case Process has been introduced to consider applications for DSAs in the circumstances set out below.

9.2 Exceptional Case Process

An award of DSAs may be considered by exception in the following two circumstances:

Scenario 1 – Equipment

Step 1:

NA recommends support for an item of equipment listed below which the SFE assessor is unable to reach a conclusion on and is generally only available by exception:

- High cost computers,
- Lightweight computers,
- Tablets
- Standalone printers or scanners (e.g. book scanners, A3 scanners – i.e. not standard multifunction units)
- An unusual piece of equipment not ordinarily requested.

Step 2:

a) Equipment considered by ECP team and is agreed – end of process, OR

b) Equipment is considered by ECP team and not agreed – student notified that the item is not agreed. The student may pursue an appeal through the standard SFE appeals process (see section 9.1)

Scenario 2 – Non-provision of an adjustment (including NMH and accommodation)

Step 1:

The Needs Assessor should consider the barriers that need to be addressed and set out the strategies that are necessary to overcome the barrier in the NAR.

They should detail:

- What items of equipment and/or assistive software is essential to address the barrier and, if necessary, what other additional support strategies might be needed e.g. hand-outs, notes, etc.
- The Needs Assessor should detail what strategies would work for the student to provide the support essential for them to access their course.
- Some of these strategies are likely to include support and activities with outcomes associated with NMH Bands 1 and 2 NMH activities and specialist transcription services. It will be for the HE provider to agree with the student how to meet their needs in these areas.
- Some of these strategies may be the primary responsibility of DSAs funded support (primarily NMH Bands 3 and 4).

The recommendations for DSAs-fundable items/support considered by SFE assessors and are agreed/rejected under normal processes – end of process for those items.

Step 2:

Student notified of DSAs entitlement and advised to pass the relevant parts of their NAR to HEP disability officer to consider the support that has been identified as primarily the responsibility of the HEP (e.g. assistance with capturing points from lectures, assistance in the library etc.). The DSA2 letter will also advise the student to contact their HEP, by stating “There are areas of support identified in your Needs Assessment Report which are primarily the responsibility of your university/college. Please arrange to speak with your disability adviser as soon as possible so this support can be put in place.”

Step 3:

HEP agrees to put support in place – end of process, OR

Step 4:

The HEP and student do not agree on the type of support to be supplied and enter a formal dispute. The ECP team is notified by the student, with confirmation from the HEP, that an agreement has not been reached and that the student wishes to apply for support through DSAs. This can be done completing the 'Support Request Form' and email this to the DSA Team (disability_adviser@slc.co.uk).

Step 5:

The ECP team consider the circumstances of the student and consider that the support would fall outside the scope of DSAs in any event. DSAs funding rejected and student notified – end of process, OR

The ECP team consider the circumstances of the student and conclude they are exceptional and DSAs-funding is agreed for the duration of the course and the student is notified – end of process, OR

The ECP team consider that the needs of the student are not exceptional and support through the HEP is expected. Student notified that they would need to pursue the formal complaint with their institution and advise that interim support will be put in place for a limited period of time while their appeal is in progress.

Interim support is payable for a limited period of time initially whilst the HEP concludes their consideration of the student's circumstances. If the student submits evidence that the case is going to the OIA, interim support for a further limited period of time is available while the case is under consideration by the OIA.

Step 7:

Outcome of OIA review indicates that the students complaint that the HEP has failed to provide a suitable strategy, and could reasonably be expected to do so 'justified' or 'partially justified', and may make recommendations to the HEP which they are expected to comply with – HEP to provide support, end of process for that support, OR

Outcome of OIA review indicates that the students complaint that the HEP has failed to provide a suitable strategy, and could reasonably be expected to do so 'not justified' – refer back to SFE ECP team to consider whether DSAs will continue funding support for the duration of the course. Generally funding will be provided if the type of support is within the scope of the regulations covering DSAs.

All exceptions are on a student basis, and will not be granted at an institutional or support-type level.

To note:

BIS plans to engage with HEPs about sharing funding of support during the period of dispute. DSAs funding is public money, so BIS will explore how HEPs can appropriately share the responsibility of providing support to the student whilst a dispute is ongoing.

BIS also plans to engage with HEPs about recovering any costs incurred by BIS as a result of providing interim support whilst the dispute is ongoing, if the OIA finds that it is reasonable for the HEP to have provided the support. DSAs funding is public money, so it is right that costs are recovered in these circumstances.

The period of time that interim support will be offered is under review and will be published shortly. In any case, HE providers should consider appeals as quickly as possible and notify SFE of the outcome.

Appeals and complaints against HE providers

Institutions have a legal duty under the Equality Act to provide reasonable adjustments for disabled students. If a student requests an adjustment from their institution, and the institution determines that the adjustment is not reasonable, the student can appeal or complain through the institution's normal channels at no cost. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome to their appeal or complaint, they may make a complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for HE (OIA), once the internal complaints procedures are exhausted <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>. If the OIA determines that there has been a failure on the part of the institution and upholds the student's complaint, then the institution would need to respond to the OIA. The OIA covers institutions in England and Wales. Institutions in Scotland are covered by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). If a student has a complaint against SAAS or their HE provider and have completed that organisations internal complaints process they can ask the SPSO to investigate - www.spsso.org.uk. Unresolved disputes with a HE provider in Northern Ireland should be referred to the Department for Education and Learning (NI).

Institutions are being asked to improve the appeals process for students who have requested an adjustment which has been rejected. Institutions should seek to minimise any delay for disabled students seeking adjustments.

The OIA is listed by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) as an Entity which is compliant with the requirements of the European Directive on Alternative Dispute Resolution which was implemented in July 2015. One of the requirements of this Directive is that, unless a case is considered "highly complex", decisions on a complaint should be made within 90 days of receiving a completed complaint file.

BIS expects institutions to work to resolve disputes regarding adjustments as quickly as possible. In any event we do not expect this process to be used frequently, given the clear message to institutions on where we expect the primary responsibility for certain types of support to lie. The Exceptional Case Process for AY 16/17 is a 'pathfinder', and this process will be monitored and reviewed during the first year to determine if changes to the process are required.

9.3 Reimbursements

Reimbursements will not generally be provided for support or equipment provided or purchased before a DSAs application has been received /DSAs study needs assessment was carried out / SFE approval has been provided.

Students should not be advised by disability advisers or assessors to commit to expenditure before SFE approval is received on the assumption that a reimbursement will be made. The cost of previously owned/purchased equipment will not be reimbursed.

Exceptions

Exceptions will be considered for costs of travel to the course from the date the application for DSAs is received by SFE, but only if the travel costs are subsequently recommended by the assessor and receipts are provided.

The additional costs of specialist accommodation will be considered from the start of the academic year in which the application for DSAs is received, subject to the general rule set out at 8.2 and only if the costs are subsequently recommended by the assessor.

Reimbursement for certain types of NMH provided by an institution may be considered, but it is expected that a reasonable adjustment in such cases may be more appropriate. In any event, only support that is subsequently recommended by the study needs assessor will be considered for funding through DSAs.

9.4 Procurement of NMH

A two-quote policy is in operation for NMH support provided to students under the English DSAs support package. This requires the DSAs study needs assessor to select two viable support providers which can meet the student's needs. SFE will select the chosen supplier and notify the student which supplier to contact.

Alternative methods for selecting NMH support workers are currently being considered. However, the two-quote policy will apply until further notice.

9.5 Devolved administrations

Students from England studying at institutions in the devolved administrations and who are eligible for student support from SFE will have the same DSAs entitlement as students studying in England.

All other arrangements, including appealing against decisions will be subject to the arrangements in place within the relevant administration / institution. Organisations in the devolved administrations that are responsible for students and student complaints include:

Student Award Agency for Scotland – Scotland
Student Finance Wales
Office of the Independent Adjudicator – England and Wales
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
Department for Education and Learning (Northern Ireland)

9.6 VAT

Neither BIS nor the Student Loans Company can give advice on VAT matters. Any queries regarding the charging of VAT should be directed to HMRC.

ANNEX A – Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

“Specific learning difficulty” is often used as an umbrella term to cover the following:

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

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

There are two forms of SpLD

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

The following characteristics have been noted in connection with SpLDs;

- a marked inefficiency in the working or short-term memory system which may result in, for example, problems with reading comprehension and written composition;
- inadequate phonological processing abilities (innate difficulty linking sound and symbol) which affects the acquisition of fluent reading and spelling skills;
- difficulties with motor skills or coordination which might affect tasks which involve simultaneous use of several skills;
- problems with visual processing which can affect reading (for example, causing the print to appear distorted or the reader to lose their place excessively) and handwriting (for example losing track of place when copying. This can be termed visual stress);
- reading problems which may include slow reading speed, difficulty extracting sense from written material without substantial re-reading, inaccurate reading, omission of words;
- writing problems which may include poor handwriting and slow writing speed, omission of words, spelling problems, difficulties categorising information and sequencing ideas;
- difficulties with mathematical skills and concepts: can also be seen in difficulties with abstract concepts of time and direction, following sequential instructions, sequencing events affects, ability to acquire arithmetical/mathematical skills;
- lack of structure in oral presentations, seminars and discussion and difficulties with word retrieval;
- short attention spans and a high level of distractibility; and
- poor organisation making time management very difficult.

Screening for SpLDs

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

Full diagnostic evidence of SpLDs

A Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) Working Group was set up in 2003 to review the arrangements for identifying and assessing SpLDs in higher education students. The Working Group was asked to produce a report recommending a framework to guarantee the quality of assessments which diagnose specific learning difficulties. The final report has been published and is available on the Student Finance England practitioners' website at:

http://practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk/portal/page?_pageid=133,4210339&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL#section7

The SpLDs Working Group asked a committee to take a lead in implementing a number of the report's recommendations. This committee is the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC). A sub-committee of SASC, the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC), will review periodically the list of suitable tests contained in the SpLDs Working Group report and consider new tests for inclusion.

The framework recommended in the report has been adopted by the SFE. The table below sets out the criteria a diagnostic assessment must meet depending on when it was carried out.

Diagnostic assessments carried out before September 2006	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.
Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2006 and August 2007	<p>Accept diagnostic assessments carried out by psychologists and suitably qualified specialist teachers as above.</p> <p>Diagnostic reports to be in the format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's report.</p> <p>Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See p45</p>

Diagnostic assessments carried out between September 2007 and August 2008	<p>Accept diagnostic reports from psychologists and specialist teachers. Specialist teachers must hold a current practising certificate in assessing specific learning difficulties issued by their relevant professional association (for example, the Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (PATOSS), Dyslexia Action or the British Dyslexia Association). Psychologists must hold a current practising certificate issued by their relevant professional association (for example, the British Psychological Society).</p> <p>Diagnostic reports to be in the report format recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines</p> <p>Diagnostic reports to use tests recommended in the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines or added by the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See p45</p>
Diagnostic assessments carried out from September 2008	<p>Procedures as from September 2007 above plus the following.</p> <p>All training for assessing specific learning difficulties to incorporate the SpLDs Working Group's guidelines.</p>
From 2012	<p>Psychologists will be registered with the HCPC (the Health and Care Professions Council, formerly the Health Professions Council) as practitioner psychologists.</p>

Further information on identifying specific learning difficulties through assessment can be found in the regularly updated guidance issued by SASC and its SpLD Test Evaluation Committee see www.sasc.org.uk. New guidance relating to the assessment of ADHD and updated guidance on Dyspraxia is now available.

Diagnostic assessments conducted from the age of 16 are appropriate for the purposes of DSAs eligibility. If the diagnosis was carried out before the age of 16, the student will require a review diagnostic assessment. The diagnostic assessment should focus on those areas where there are likely to be difficulties that impact on study, in particular working memory, information processing and phonological awareness. It should include exploring effects on literacy skills, (speed and accuracy in reading and writing individual words and prose, also incorporating reading comprehension). The report should identify strengths, current strategies and anticipated difficulties that impact on study at HE level.

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

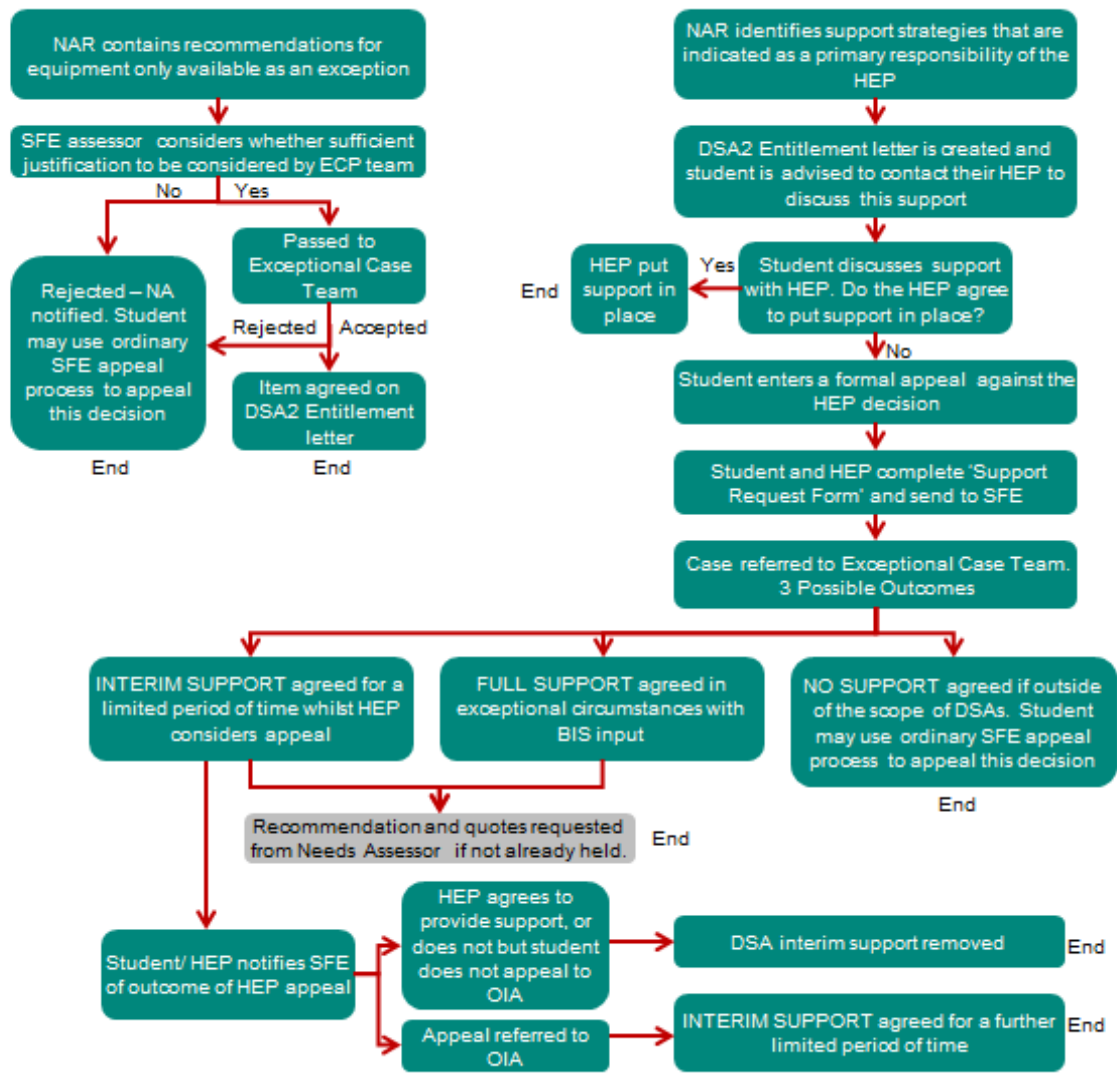
first course should also be acceptable for subsequent courses, including postgraduate courses.

Further testing may be indicated if many years have passed since the last assessment (e.g. assessment at 40 following diagnosis at 16).

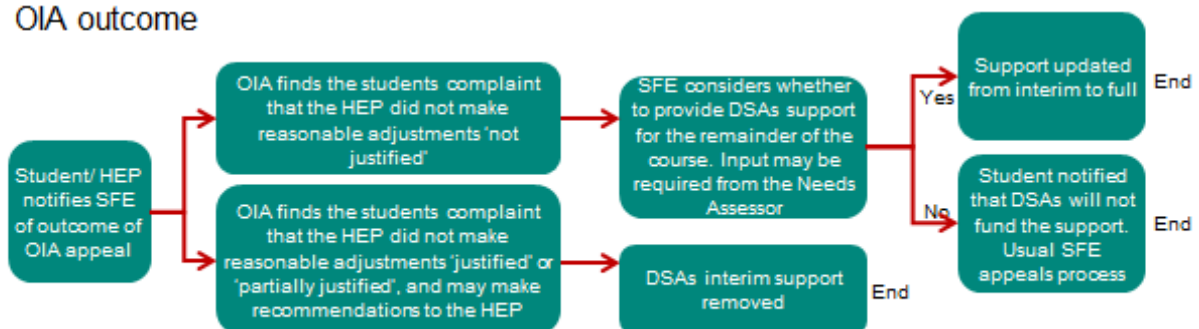
A post-16 diagnostic assessment should be based on tests recommended in the Specific Learning Difficulties Working Group's guidelines and updated by SASC and its SpLD Test Evaluation Committee (STEC). See 'SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) and the SpLD Test Evaluation Committee' p 45. This post-16 assessment is part of the diagnosis and the cost should be met by the student, although an application may be made to the institution's discretionary funds to meet the cost. This assessment should be carried out by a qualified specialist assessor as noted in the table above.

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.

ANNEX B – Exceptional Case Process



OIA outcome



Note: BIS will engage with HEIs regarding recovery of funding and risk sharing as appropriate. Refer to the DSAs guidance for further information.

ANNEX C – Arrangements for assessment reviews from 1 September 2015

This guidance sets out when a review of a student's support arrangements would be funded, when it would come under the single fee arrangement, and when it would be 'rolled over' by SFE. It also sets out arrangements for fees applicable when a student fails to attend an appointment.

The new arrangements apply to all students (both new and existing) from 1 September 2015.

The available outcomes are:

- 1) The student's existing support arrangements are continued (or 'rolled over') by SFE without a review.
- 2) A review is undertaken within the single fee arrangement (i.e. at no extra charge).
- 3) A funded review is undertaken.
- 4) An entirely new full fee assessment is undertaken.

Funded reviews

Students will qualify for a funded review:

- When moving from an UG course to PGCE or non-taught PG study; or
- When they present with a new disability that requires an agreed significant amount of additional work. (Centres are required to fully document the additional work undertaken for a review and submit this to SFE. As a guideline, but not exclusively, it is anticipated that reviews requiring at least two hours of additional work will be considered for funding); or
- If there is a gap of more than 2 years since the student last studied; or
- If they have not had a full assessment or funded review for 5 years.

The fee for funded reviews will be capped at £300+VAT.

Students may be referred at their own request, or if SFE is concerned that the rolling over of support is inappropriate.

Significant change to the student's course will no longer be a criterion that prompts a review.

Also, a worsened existing disability or condition will no longer be a criterion that prompts a review.

Reviews undertaken within the single fee arrangement

Reviews of a student's support arrangements will be undertaken within the single fee arrangement (i.e. at no extra charge) if none of the circumstances set out in the above 'Funded reviews' or below 'Full fee assessments' sections apply.

Full fee assessments

In a small number of cases, a subsequent full fee assessment will be paid where a student is unable to attend a review at their original assessment centre due to location and the issue could not be resolved by other methods (see scenario C below). If the issue could be resolved by other methods, then original assessment centre would only retain responsibility for the student up to a maximum of 5 years from their initial assessment.

Missed appointments

If a student fails to attend an appointment or gives less than 24 hours' notice of cancellation (excluding weekends and bank/public holidays), assessment centres will be able to charge a fee of no more than:

- £60+VAT for a full assessment appointment.
- £30+VAT for a funded review appointment.

If the centre is able to fill the appointment space with another student, they will not be able to charge a fee.

It is suggested good practice for the centre to contact the student (e.g. by text) the day before to remind them of their appointment.

Scenario examples:

Undergraduate to Undergraduate course

Student A is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student changes to a different UG course at the same HEI in 2015/16.
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Student will have their support <u>rolled over by SFE</u> . Where the student asks for a review, the <u>single assessment fee</u> arrangement will apply.

Student B is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student changes to a different UG course at a different HEI in 2015/16, but can attend the same assessment centre.
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Student will have their support <u>rolled over by SFE</u> . Where the student asks for a review, the <u>single assessment fee</u> arrangement will apply.

Student C is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student changes to a different UG course at a different HEI in 2015/16, but <u>cannot</u> attend the same assessment centre because of geographical distance.

The original assessment centre should make every effort to deal with the student e.g. telephone, email, Skype etc. under the <u>single assessment fee</u> arrangement.
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(1) If it is less than five years since the previous assessment, and the change can easily be managed, rolling over of support/single assessment fee applies.

(2) If it is less than five years since the previous assessment and change cannot be easily managed because of the geographical location of the new HEI, then the student should be directed to a new assessment centre, which may then charge a full fee.

(3) If five years or more has passed since the previous assessment, the student wants a new review and cannot attend the original assessment centre, they should be directed to a new assessment centre, which may then charge a full fee.

Student D is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student is on the same course but presents a new disability in 2016/17.

The student would qualify for either a single fee review or a funded review depending on the impact of the change and the amount of work involved.

Student E is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student is still on an UG course in 2019/20 and has not met the criteria for a funded review during that time.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as at least 5 years has passed since their previous assessment or funded review.

Student F is assessed on an UG course in 2012/13. Student suspends study for 2014/15. Student returns to same course in 2017/18.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as there has been an at least two-year gap in study.

Undergraduate to Postgraduate course

Student G is assessed on an UG course in 2012/13. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (PGCE) in 2015/16.

The student will qualify for a funded review.

Student H is assessed on an UG course in 2012/13. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (taught) in 2015/16.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement will apply.

Student I is assessed on an UG course in 2011/12 and finished UG course in 2012. Student starts PG course (taught) in 2015/16.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as there has been an at least two-year gap in study.

Student J had initial assessment in 2009/10 and finished UG course in 2014. Student starts PG course (taught) in 2015/16.

The student would qualify for a funded review, as at least 5 years has passed since their previous assessment or funded review.

Student K had an initial assessment on an UG course in 2012/13. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (taught) in 2015/16.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement will apply.

In 2017/18 Student K presents a new disability.

The student would qualify for a funded review as the change is at least 5 years after the initial assessment.

Student L is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student moves straight from UG to PG course (taught masters) in 2015/16.

Student will have their support rolled over by SFE. Where the student asks for a review, the single assessment fee arrangement should apply

In 2016/17 Student L (above) presents a new disability.

The student would qualify for either a single fee review or a funded review depending on the impact of the change and the amount of work involved.

Student M is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student moves straight from UG to a research-based PG course in 2015/16.

The student would qualify for a funded review.

In 2016/17 Student M (above) presents a new disability.

The student would qualify for either a single fee review or a funded review depending on the impact of the change and the amount of work involved.

Student N is assessed on an UG course in 2012/13. Student moves straight from UG to PG (taught) course in 2015/16.
Student will have their support <u>rolled over by SFE</u> . Where the student asks for a review, the <u>single assessment fee</u> arrangement should apply
In 2016/17 Student N indicates a need to review support
The student would qualify for a <u>funded review</u> as the change is at least 5 years after the initial assessment.

Student O is assessed on an UG course in 2014/15. Student requests a review as they do not agree with the initial recommendations.
In line with current practice, this student can have a review under the <u>single assessment fee</u> arrangement but only at the original assessment centre. The student will not be funded to attend another assessment centre.

Postgraduate to Postgraduate cases

It is anticipated that, for students moving from a PG course to another PG course, arrangements will follow the same logic as set out in the above scenarios.