



Disabled Students in Further and Higher Education

Support for disabled students

Universities and Colleges have support services for students facing barriers in education.

All public services have a duty based on the protections afforded by the **Equality Act (2010)** <https://www.disabilityscot.org.uk/info-guide/the-equality-act/> The Act makes it illegal to discriminate against people who fall into any of seven 'protected characteristics'.

One of these is disability and a disabled person is described as:

“someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”.

The Equality Act definition of disabled people can include people with any of the following:

- Mental illness/mental health condition
- Physical impairment resulting from either illness or injury
- Specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, ADHD or Autistic Spectrum Conditions
- Chronic illness or health condition

Who should I tell about my disability?

Information about disability is personal and it may be something you do not want people to know about.

However, disclosing your disability to the right people in your institution can result in reasonable adjustments being made for you to minimise difficulties you face with your studies or with assessments.

So who are the right people?

In universities and colleges you may find that there is a department with the name disability in its title, or you may find support within a department called student services or student support.

You can arrange to speak to an advisor who can advise on what you might need for your studies and help you to get this.



Do I need to tell my tutors or lecturers?

You do not need to tell tutors or lecturers any detailed information about your disability or impairment. Lecturers or tutors will be notified of any 'reasonable adjustments' that are to be made but not of any diagnosis or condition you have. You should be asked to sign a data protection document which should explain where information is shared but if you have any doubts then ask for more details. Your college or university should be able to set up reasonable adjustments while keeping the sharing of personal details to a minimum.

What kind of help can I get?

It is not your condition or impairment that determines what adjustments are made but **how your impairment affects you in relation to your particular course of study**.

An important aspect of making adjustments is deciding whether they are **reasonable** or not.

What might be viewed as reasonable can depend on factors such as how large the institution is, how common your impairment is or how long your course is. Many institutions will draw up an 'Individual Learning Plan' or 'Inclusive Learning Plan' (ILP).

In order to write the ILP, an advisor will discuss the requirements of your course and how your impairment affects you. The advisor may be able to put some adjustments in place right away while others may require wider consultation and more detailed assessment.

Reasonable adjustments in more detail

In deciding what adjustments are required an advisor will take into account how your disability affects you in relation to the following:

- Access to written course materials.
- Participation in course-related activities including physical access.
- How the course is assessed.
- Organisational issues.
- Any placements you may be required to go on.
- Access to essential services such as the library or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).
- What is available to all students in your institution.

Reasonable adjustments take many forms and can range from the very simple rearrangement of usual practice to complex arrangements involving other people and/or equipment or software. Some may be arranged informally while others require



to be recorded and organised officially to ensure that they are in place for the times you need them.

Adjustments can involve changes to

- Time requirements.
- Location change or physical amendment.
- Assessment methods.
- Greater flexibility applied to course timetables/requirements in specific areas.
- Equipment or software.
- Alternative format materials.
- Support from other people sometimes described as 'non-medical personal helpers'.

Some of the more costly adjustments may require funding. This will be covered in more detail later.

Medical Evidence

You may be asked to provide 'medical evidence' relating to your disability, especially if you need to apply for extra funding. Your advisor can tell you what evidence you may need to provide and how to get it. There are a number of different kinds of evidence and, in spite of the term 'medical evidence' they are not all provided by a medical practitioner.

If you are **dyslexic** then you will require a report from an educational psychologist or other professional who is specifically qualified to assess for **Specific Learning Disabilities**. This report usually needs to have been written fairly recently and to be an assessment of you as an adult. Your disability advisor or needs assessor will be able to advise on whether any reports you have will fulfil the criteria.

For a **mental health or medical condition**, you may need evidence from a GP or specialist you are working with. It is important to tell your doctor or specialist what you plan to study and ask them to write how your condition is likely to impact on the course of study you have chosen. For example, if you have a visual impairment then you may need the doctor to say a little about the condition such as that it affects your ability reading on screen or from paper, affecting concentration and may lead to fatigue.

If you have a particular concern about how you will manage a part of the course because of some aspect of your impairment then do ask your doctor to refer to that in your medical evidence.

Costs of medical evidence

You will often be asked to pay for a letter from your doctor and will be expected to meet this cost but if you require an educational psychologist's report then this cost is



often met by your university or college from their discretionary fund. If you were to pay for an assessment yourself then this is costly – between £450 and £600. Some colleges and universities can offer dyslexia screening which give an idea if you are likely to have dyslexia. This is important as it could save you from a costly and time consuming test if you are not dyslexic.

Disabled Students Allowance (DSA)

Disabled Student's Allowance is the Government funding given to disabled students in the UK to pay for specialist equipment/support that may be required as a reasonable adjustment.

When you go to college or university, your institution will provide some adjustments directly but others may require more funding and that's where DSA comes in. The rules for DSA are different depending on which UK funding body pays your fees. The specifics of the different funding bodies can be found in the following links.

SAAS – Student's Awards Agency Scotland

https://www.saas.gov.uk/forms/dsa_notes.pdf

SFE – Student Finance England <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas>

SFW – Student Finance Wales

<https://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/undergraduate-students/new-students/what-financial-support-is-available/disabled-students-allowances.aspx>

SFNI – Student Finance Northern Ireland

<https://www.studentfinancenir.co.uk/types-of-finance/postgraduate/northern-ireland-student/extra-help/disabled-students-allowances/what-are-they/#main>

The criteria involved generally includes where you are a citizen, where you have been resident in the last two years, the hours spent on your course, the duration of your course and how many academic credits your course can earn.

DSA is not the only source of funding so if you are not eligible do check with advisors in your college or university. If you get no funding from any external source, your university or college will often still be able to put reasonable adjustments in place using their funds.

Applying for DSA

The needs assessment will be carried out by a Needs Assessor at an Access Centre or in your own institution if it has been validated as an Access Centre.

Here are some examples of information the assessor needs to know about:

- What difficulties does your disability cause you?
- Difficulties you may have had at school in relation to disability and any reasonable adjustments made.
- What worked for you there?



- What does your course entail?

What follows is not an exhaustive list but will give an idea of things to think about. Do you have any issues that are caused by disability and might cause difficulty with,

- Notetaking
- Concentration/Comprehension
- Memory
- Physical access to environment
- Energy levels
- Mental health issues
- Difficulties with structure/writing
- Other issues arising out of your course

The DSA Needs Assessment

The Needs Assessment usually takes around two hours and you can be accompanied if you wish. You will complete the DSA form and it will ask for personal details and these may include bank details and any reference numbers that relate to your funding body.

The needs assessor will then ask some questions and will make recommendations based on what he/she is told by you and your medical evidence. Once the report is completed you will review it and sign to confirm it is accurate. The report will be sent along with your application form to the funding body.

How long will a decision take?

September/October is a very busy time for assessors and for the funding bodies. Once the report has been sent it will take up to 3 weeks for a decision to be made, but it can be longer during the busy period.

The DSA award

If equipment has been recommended then you will find the details of this in your award letter.

Some funding bodies will send funding directly to the supplier who provides your equipment, but others – including SAAS – will pay the money directly into your bank account.

The funding can only be used to purchase the equipment recommended on your award. If the equipment costs less than originally thought you may be asked to repay some of the award.



Make sure you understand the rules for evidencing how you spent your award and keep the receipts of your purchases.

Remember to include insurance and extended warranty for your equipment if this is itemised in your award letter.

You should get VAT relief on purchases from the recommended supplier but if you shop elsewhere, make sure the supplier knows that you are eligible for VAT relief. If you do shop around, make sure the laptop/pc purchased is of the same specification as recommended or you may find you cannot run recommended software.

Your award may include time with people, sometimes referred to as **Non Medical Personal Helpers (NMPH)**. These may include tutors, trainers, note takers or mentors.

You will be awarded a set amount of hours and the hourly cost is detailed. You will not need to worry about these payments as the person will usually be paid directly without you requiring to do anything except confirm that you had the specified amount of time with them.

What if the funding body rejects all or some of the recommendations?

If you do not get all of the recommendations made in your Needs Assessment then your Needs Assessor can appeal this for you. They can contact the funding body and find out why they rejected a recommendation and either provide more evidence for this or better justify the recommendation or else they can make an alternative recommendation.

What if I am not eligible for DSA?

If you are not eligible for DSA for any reason but have support needs for equipment or Non Medical Personal Helpers then do still speak to an advisor.

The institution is still obliged to meet your needs if they can be considered reasonable. What is reasonable will vary with the size of institution, the length of the course and the stage of study. Many institutions have a pool of loan equipment and other funding to meet the needs of those students who may not be funded.

Do also check out our blog post on starting university here

<https://www.disabilityscot.org.uk/starting-university/>

See also the Info guide on **Education Funding** here

<https://www.disabilityscot.org.uk/info-guide/education-funding/#16-19-years-old-and-in-school-or-further-education-fe-college>



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