



# DSA Students

Bridging the gap: A guide to the  
Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)  
in Higher Education



[www.studentfinanceneni.co.uk](http://www.studentfinanceneni.co.uk)

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# INTRODUCTION

## **Who is this guide for?**

This guide provides information about the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for current and prospective students in higher education who normally live in Northern Ireland.

If you normally live in Scotland, England or Wales the arrangements may be different. You can find out more information relevant to where you live at one of these websites:

England – **[www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance](http://www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance)**

Wales – **[www.studentfinancewales.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancewales.co.uk)**

Scotland – **[www.saas.gov.uk](http://www.saas.gov.uk)**

This booklet is for guidance only and does not cover all circumstances. It is not a statement of the law.



## What are DSAs for?

DSAs are grants to help pay for additional higher education study-related costs you may have to incur as a direct result of your disability, mental-health condition (such as depression or anxiety) or specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia or dyspraxia). The allowances can help with the cost of a non-medical helper, items of specialist equipment, travel and other course-related costs.

DSAs can be awarded to students who prove that they have a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty which affects their ability to study. They must also be studying:

- Full-time or part-time undergraduate courses (such as degree, HNC or HND level courses) including Open University and other distance-learning courses; or
- Certain full-time or part-time postgraduate courses (for which the entry requirement is at least a first degree or equivalent) including Open University and other distance-learning courses.

This guide explains:

- what costs DSAs can help with;
- how to apply;
- how you get paid; and
- who can help you with your application.

## **Do I have to tell my university or college about my disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty?**

Yes, it is important that you make your university or college aware of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty to ensure that you get the support that you need. This will enable them to put in place 'reasonable adjustments', to help you with your DSA Application Form, and (when the time comes) arrange an assessment of your course related needs. If you are studying part-time and want to apply for DSAs, you will also need to ask your university or college to certify that your average rate of study is at least 25% of an equivalent full-time course.

Your local Student Finance NI (SFNI) Office and the university or college's Disability Adviser will keep any information about your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty confidential.

Without the involvement of a Disability Adviser, the process of getting DSA support might be more difficult. We recommend that the Disability Adviser is sent a copy of your DSA needs assessment report. Your DSA Needs Assessor will only send the Disability Adviser a copy of the report if they have your permission, in writing.



# DO I QUALIFY?

## Summary - what this section is about

This section gives some brief information about the rules governing whether you are eligible to receive DSAs. For details about different types of student finance you should refer to our other publications – details of which can be found on page 26 of this guide.

To be eligible for DSAs you must meet the personal eligibility conditions for receiving student finance and also must be:

- studying an eligible **full-time undergraduate** course (including a distance-learning course); or
- studying an eligible **part-time undergraduate** course (including a distance-learning course); or
- undertaking a taught or research **postgraduate** course (including a distance-learning course at a UK higher education institution); or
- undertaking an **Initial Teacher Training course**; and
- able to provide evidence that the effects of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty will mean that you need to pay extra costs to undertake your course.



### **You cannot get DSAs if:**

- you are an EU student and are eligible only for support with your fees;
- you are a sandwich-course student on a full-year paid placement (but you may still be able to get DSAs if you are doing certain types of unpaid work experience in the public or voluntary sectors);
- you are eligible for a Department of Health (DoH), National Health Service (NHS) or other health care bursary;
- you are a postgraduate student receiving a bursary or award from a research council;
- you are a postgraduate student who will get the NHS Business Services Authority's bursary for students on postgraduate social work courses; or
- you are a postgraduate student receiving a bursary or award from your university or college which includes support that is equal to DSAs.

You should contact the provider of your bursary or award for advice on any extra support you may be entitled to because of your disability.

You cannot have DSAs for more than one course at the same time.

Previous study will not affect your eligibility for DSAs, even if you received financial support. However, if

you received any specialist equipment through the DSAs for a previous course, this will be taken into consideration.

There is no age limit on receiving DSAs, and if you are aged 60 or over you may be eligible for them even if you are not eligible for a Maintenance Loan.

### **Undergraduate and postgraduate NHS students**

This guide is not intended for students who will get a healthcare bursary for their course (this does not include students with a DoH bursary). DSAs are available as part of the healthcare bursary scheme, for which health care service bursary degree and diploma students may be eligible.

If you will receive an NHS bursary, or plan to apply for one, you should contact your university or college for details of the support that is available to disabled students under the NHS Bursary Scheme.

In Northern Ireland the Student Finance NI Offices will deal with the bursary arrangements on behalf of the DoH. Eligibility for any DSAs will also be assessed by your local SFNI Office.

If you started your first primary degree course in medicine or dentistry in 2016, you will become eligible for a DoH bursary in September 2020.

## **Open University students**

The Student Finance NI Office is also responsible for handling DSA applications from Northern Ireland domiciled Open University students.

You will need to send your completed form, and any necessary or relevant documents to:

Student Finance NI,  
DSA Office, Ballee Centre,  
Ballee Road West,  
Ballymena BT42 2HS  
Tel: 028 25 661385  
email: DSA-PT-PG@eani.org.uk

**[www.studentfinancenl.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk)**

## How do I show that I am eligible?

If you are physically disabled, blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing or have a long-term health condition or a mental-health condition, you will need to provide up to date medical proof of this. A Disability Evidence Form is available for download from the Student Finance NI website (**[www.studentfinancenl.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk)**) and should be completed by your doctor or specialist or you can provide a detailed report or letter from your GP or other qualified specialist which gives information about your long-term health condition or mental-health condition, and likely effect of that on your academic performance.

If you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, you must provide evidence in the form of a 'diagnostic assessment' from a psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher.

You will have to pay for any tests to establish your eligibility for DSAs. If you need a test but cannot afford to pay for it, you may be able to get financial help through your university or college's Financial Contingency Fund.

The table on page 10 shows what you need to send us.

<p><b>For disabilities and medical conditions</b></p>	<p>A completed Disability Evidence Form (available for download from <a href="http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk">www.studentfinancenl.co.uk</a>) or a detailed report or letter from your GP or other qualified specialist which gives information about your disability or long-term health condition, and the likely effect of that on your academic performance.</p>
<p><b>For specific learning difficulties</b></p>	<p>For students with dyslexia or dyscalculia, a written diagnostic report will be required from a Chartered or Practitioner Psychologist, or a specialist teacher holding a SpLD Assessment Practising Certificate.</p> <p>For students with dyspraxia, AD(H)D, Acquired Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, Speech and Language Disorder, Auditory Processing Disorder or Tourettes a completed Disability Evidence Form (available for download from <a href="http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk">www.studentfinancenl.co.uk</a>) or, a standard medical evidence letter from a GP will be acceptable.</p>
<p><b>For mental-health conditions</b></p>	<p>A completed Disability Evidence Form (available for download from <a href="http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk">www.studentfinancenl.co.uk</a>) or a detailed report or letter from your GP or other qualified specialist which gives information about your mental-health condition, and the effect of the condition on your academic performance.</p>



# WHAT HELP CAN I GET?

## **Summary – what this section is about**

DSAs can help pay for the extra study related costs that you may have because of a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty.

There is a range of help available, including:

- Specialist equipment allowance;
- Non-medical Helper allowance;
- General allowance; and
- Travel allowance,

and a description of each is set out on pages 12-19. The level of support available to you will depend on your Needs Assessment (see page 23, Step 2).

## Undergraduate students



### Specialist equipment allowance

What is it for?	To help with equipment you may need because of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. It can also be used to pay for technical support, insurance or extended warranty costs arising from owning that equipment.
How much can I get?	Full-time and part-time students can get up to £5,266 for the <b>whole course</b> . How much you can get <b>does not</b> depend on your income or that of your family, but it <b>does</b> depend on your needs assessment, reflecting your individual needs.
How is it paid?	In most cases the money will be paid directly to the equipment supplier on your behalf, but in exceptional cases it may be paid into your bank account.
Do I have to pay it back?	No, unless you leave your course early, in which case you may be asked to pay some back. If you receive equipment and then do not commence the course or if you receive equipment after you have left your course you will be required to make a full refund.





## Specialist equipment allowance (continued)

Anything else?

The rates shown are the maximum you can get. They are meant to support people with a high level of need, so most people will get less than the maximum.

Your local SFNI Office can also reimburse costs you have to pay to rent, rather than buy, items of equipment if this is more economical.

If you need more help or advice, you can call your local SFNI Office or you can speak to the Disability Adviser at your university or college.



**You may be able to get items of specialist equipment that have been recommended in your DSA Needs Assessment Report before the start of your course so that you may use them from the very beginning of your studies. However, you will need to provide evidence that you have been accepted on your course. Please note that if, for some reason, you are then not able to start your course, you will have to return the equipment.**





## Non-medical helper allowance

What is it for?

To help pay for support workers, such as readers, sign-language interpreters, note-takers and other non-medical assistants you need, to benefit fully from your course.

How much can I get?

How much you can get **does not** depend on your income or that of your family, but it **does** depend on your DSA needs assessment, reflecting your individual needs.

The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.

Full-time	Up to £20,938 <b>per year</b> .
Part-time	<b>A percentage</b> of the full-time rate to a maximum of £15,703 <b>per year</b> depending on how intensive the part-time course is.

How is it paid?

The money will be paid directly to the supplier of the services. (In most cases this will be your university or college).





## Non-medical helper allowance (continued)

Do I have to pay it back? No, unless you leave your course early, in which case we may ask you to pay some back.

Anything else? The rates shown are the maximum you can get. They are aimed at supporting people with a high level of need, so most people will get less than the maximum.



If you need more help or advice, you can call your local SFNI Office or you can speak to the Disability Adviser at your chosen university or college.



## General allowance

**What is it for?** To help pay for your needs assessment and other miscellaneous, disability-related costs. You can also use it to buy items such as print cartridges and Braille paper, or to top up the specialist equipment and non-medical helper allowances, if necessary.

**How much can I get?** How much you can get **does not** depend on your income or that of your family, but it **does** depend on your needs assessment, reflecting your individual needs.

The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.

Full-time	Up to £1,759 <b>per year</b> .
Part-time	<b>A percentage</b> of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,319 <b>per year</b> depending on how intensive the part-time course is.

**How is it paid?** The money will either be paid directly to the supplier of the services (for example, your university, college or equipment supplier) or into your bank account.





## General allowance (continued)

Do I have to pay it back?

No, unless you leave your course early, in which case we may ask you to pay some back.

Anything else?

The rates shown are the maximum you can get. They are aimed at supporting people with a high level of need, so most people will get less than the maximum.



If you need more help or advice, you can call your local SFNI Office or you can speak to the Disability Adviser at your chosen university or college.



## Travel allowance

What is it for?

To help with any **extra** travel costs you may have to pay to attend your university or college because of your disability (for example, if you need to take a taxi because your disability prevents you from taking public transport).



You will not be eligible for help with everyday travel costs which any student would expect to pay.

How much can I get?

Full-time **and** part-time students can get reasonable spending on extra travel costs.

How much you can get **does not** depend on your income or that of your family but it **does** depend on your needs assessment, reflecting your individual needs.



How is it paid?

Your local SFNI Office will send you a claim form to complete. On receipt of the completed claim form and receipts to verify costs incurred, the money will be paid directly to the supplier of the services (for example, a taxi firm) or into your bank account.



### Travel allowance (continued)

Do I have to pay it back?	No unless you leave your course early or your circumstances change and you have been overpaid.
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Anything else?	If you need more help or advice, you can call your local SFNI Office or you can speak to the Disability Adviser at your chosen university or college.
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### For full-time and part-time postgraduate students

There is a single DSA allowance to meet all costs of up to £10,469 a year for both full-time and part-time postgraduate students. You can use this for specialist equipment, non-medical helpers, extra travel costs or other course-related costs that you face as a direct result of a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. The amount of DSA you receive will depend on your DSA Needs Assessment.

## **Benefits**

Most full-time students are not eligible to receive income-related benefits such as Universal Credit, income based Employment and Support Allowance or Housing Benefit. However certain groups (including single parents, student couples with dependent children and some disabled students) may be eligible for income-related benefits while they are studying. Your local Jobs and Benefits Office, or Benefits Office will take account of most of any Maintenance Loan (and some student grants) that you are entitled to. If you receive the Special Support Grant this will not be taken into account.

Your local Jobs and Benefits Office or Benefits Office will be able to provide more advice on benefit entitlement.



# HOW DO I APPLY?

## Summary – what this section is about

This section tells you how and when to apply for DSAs, who you should return your application form to and how to have a Needs Assessment.

## Full time undergraduate students



### Step 1

Make sure you apply for your maintenance and tuition fee loans, bursaries and other grants before 30 April 2020. You can apply online or download a paper application form from **[www.studentfinancenl.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk)**

When you are applying for student finance, the application form asks if you want to apply for DSAs.

There is no deadline for applying for DSAs but the sooner you apply, the greater the chance of having everything you need in place at the start of your course.

If you have stated on the application form for student finance that you want to apply for DSAs, your local SFNI Office will send you a separate DSA application form for you to provide information about your disability, mental-health condition, or specific learning difficulty.

If you indicate on your online application for student finance that you want to apply for DSAs, you will be prompted to print off the DSA1 Slimline application form.

SFNI Offices each have a named DSA Officer who deals with applications for DSAs (See page 27 for contact details).

You may contact the DSA Officer at your local SFNI Office before you send in your application as they will be able to offer advice and give guidance on the DSA process.



**Important:** You must return your form to your local SFNI Office with evidence of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty (see ‘How do I show that I am eligible?’ on page 9).

If you are applying for DSAs **only**, you can download the full DSA1 application form at **[www.studentfinancenl.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk)**. You can also get copies from your local SFNI Office or by phoning our publication line on 0141 243 3686. You can get versions in large print, in Braille and on audio by phoning our publication line.



## Step 2

Your local SFNI Office will assess your application and send you a letter to let you know if you are eligible for DSAs. If you are eligible for DSAs your Student Finance NI Office will ask you to have a Needs Assessment carried out so that the help you need on your course can be identified.

A Needs Assessment is an informal meeting with an experienced Needs Assessor to discuss what equipment and support we can provide to help you during your time at university or college. The Needs Assessment can be arranged well before the start of term, and even before you have a confirmed place at university or college. However, you should not arrange for a DSA Needs Assessment until your local SFNI Office agree for you to do so.

If you are studying / planning to study at a **NI University / College**, to arrange to have a Needs Assessment carried out, please contact the Disability Adviser at the University or College where you are studying / planning to study.

If you are studying / planning to study at a **University in the Republic of Ireland** you should contact the Disability Adviser at the university that you are attending or planning to attend. Alternatively you can contact a nominated Further Education College in Northern Ireland in order to have a Needs Assessment carried out.

If you are studying / planning to study in **England or Wales** you may have your Needs Assessment carried out at a nominated Further Education College in Northern Ireland or at a DSA QAG Registered Needs Assessment Centre in Northern Ireland, England or Wales.

Likewise, if you are studying / planning to study in **Scotland** you may have your Needs Assessment carried out at a nominated Further Education College in Northern Ireland or at a Needs Assessment Centre accredited and validated by the Scottish Government.



### Step 3

After you attend a Needs Assessment you will receive a report which identifies the types of equipment and other support you will need, how much it will cost and where to get it from. The report will also identify any training you might need to make best use of the equipment recommended.



### Step 4

Your local SFNI Office will send you a letter to tell you whether any equipment and other support that has been recommended in your Needs Assessment Report can be paid for from DSAs. You can then order the equipment directly from the supplier.



### Step 5

If you apply for DSAs along with your main application for student finance, you won't have to re-apply for DSAs for each year of your course as long as you state on your main application that you want to continue receiving them. However, if you are applying for DSA only you need to re-apply each year.



### Step 6

If you leave or suspend your studies, or if your needs change, you must contact the DSA Officer at your local SFNI Office as soon as possible.

### Part-time and postgraduate students

If you are a part-time undergraduate student or a postgraduate student and want to apply for DSA only, you should fill in the Disabled Students' Allowances Application Form (full DSA1 form) and ask your institution to complete the relevant section. But if you are also applying for additional Student Finance (e.g. tuition fee loan) you only need to complete the DSA1 Slimline form.

You can download the form from our website at [www.studentfinancenl.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk) or get one by phoning our publication line on 0141 243 3686.

You can get versions in large print, in Braille and on audio by phoning our publication line. You should then follow steps 2 – 4 as detailed on pages 23 – 24.



# HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

You can get extra copies of this guide and the following student finance guides by visiting the Student Finance NI website at **[www.studentfinancenl.co.uk](http://www.studentfinancenl.co.uk)** and downloading a copy or calling our Publication Line on 0141 243 3686.

## **Information for full time**

**students:** Download '2020/21 Full time - A guide to Financial Support for Full Time Students in Higher Education.'

## **Information for part time**

**students:** Download '2020/21 Part Time - A guide to Financial Support for Part Time Students in Higher Education.' (Available summer 2020)

## **Information for students with children or adult dependants:**

Download '2020/21 Dependants Grants - A guide to Dependants Grants for full time student parents in higher education.'

## **Information about financial entitlement for students:**

Download '2020/21 How you are Paid - Full Time Higher Education Student Finance - A guide to Entitlement to Support and Payment.'

## **Information about student loans:**

Download '2020/21 Terms and Conditions - Student Loans - A guide to terms and conditions.'

## **Download Full DSA1 form**

**2020/21** – for students wishing to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances only.

## **Download DSA1 Slimline form**

**2020/21** – for students who have completed, or are in the middle of completing, an application for student finance and also want to apply for Disabled Students' Allowances.

You can also get copies in Braille, on audio and in large print.



## OTHER USEFUL CONTACTS

Address of Student Finance NI Offices	Covering local Government District(s)
<b>Kathleen Lunn (Mrs)</b> DSA Officer, Student Finance NI, 40 Academy Street, Belfast, BT1 2NQ Tel: 028 90 564238 E-mail: dsa.officer-belfast@eani.org.uk	Belfast
<b>Deborah Gamble (Mrs)</b> DSA Officer, Student Finance NI, DSA Office, Ballee Centre, Ballee Road West, Ballymena, BT42 2HS Tel: 028 25 661385 E-mail: dsa.officer-ballymena@eani.org.uk	Antrim, Ballymena Ballymoney Carrickfergus Coleraine Larne, Magherafelt Moyle, Newtownabbey
<b>Cathy Coyle (Miss)</b> DSA Officer, Student Finance NI, 1 Hospital Road, Omagh, Co Tyrone, BT79 0AW Tel: 028 82 411235 E-mail: dsa.officer-omagh@eani.org.uk	Fermanagh Limavady, Londonderry Omagh Strabane
<b>Judith Shivers (Mrs)</b> DSA Officer, Student Finance NI, Grahamsbridge Road, Dundonald, BT16 2HS Tel: 028 90 566307 E-mail: dsa.officer- Dundonald@eani.org.uk	Ards Castlereagh Down Lisburn North Down
<b>Janet McNally (Mrs)</b> DSA Officer, Student Finance NI, 3 Charlemont Place, The Mall, Armagh, BT61 9AX Tel: 028 37 512497 E-mail: dsa.officer-armagh@eani.org.uk	Armagh, Banbridge Cookstown, Craigavon Dungannon Newry and Mourne
<b>Jacinta Dixon (Miss)</b> DSA Officer (responsible for OU/PT/PG), Student Finance NI, DSA Office, Ballee Centre, Ballee Road West, Ballymena, BT42 2HS Tel: 028 25 661385 E-mail: DSA-PT-PG@eani.org.uk	Responsible for DSA students from all districts in Northern Ireland in relation to Open University, Part time and Postgraduate study.







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