

Bridging the gap

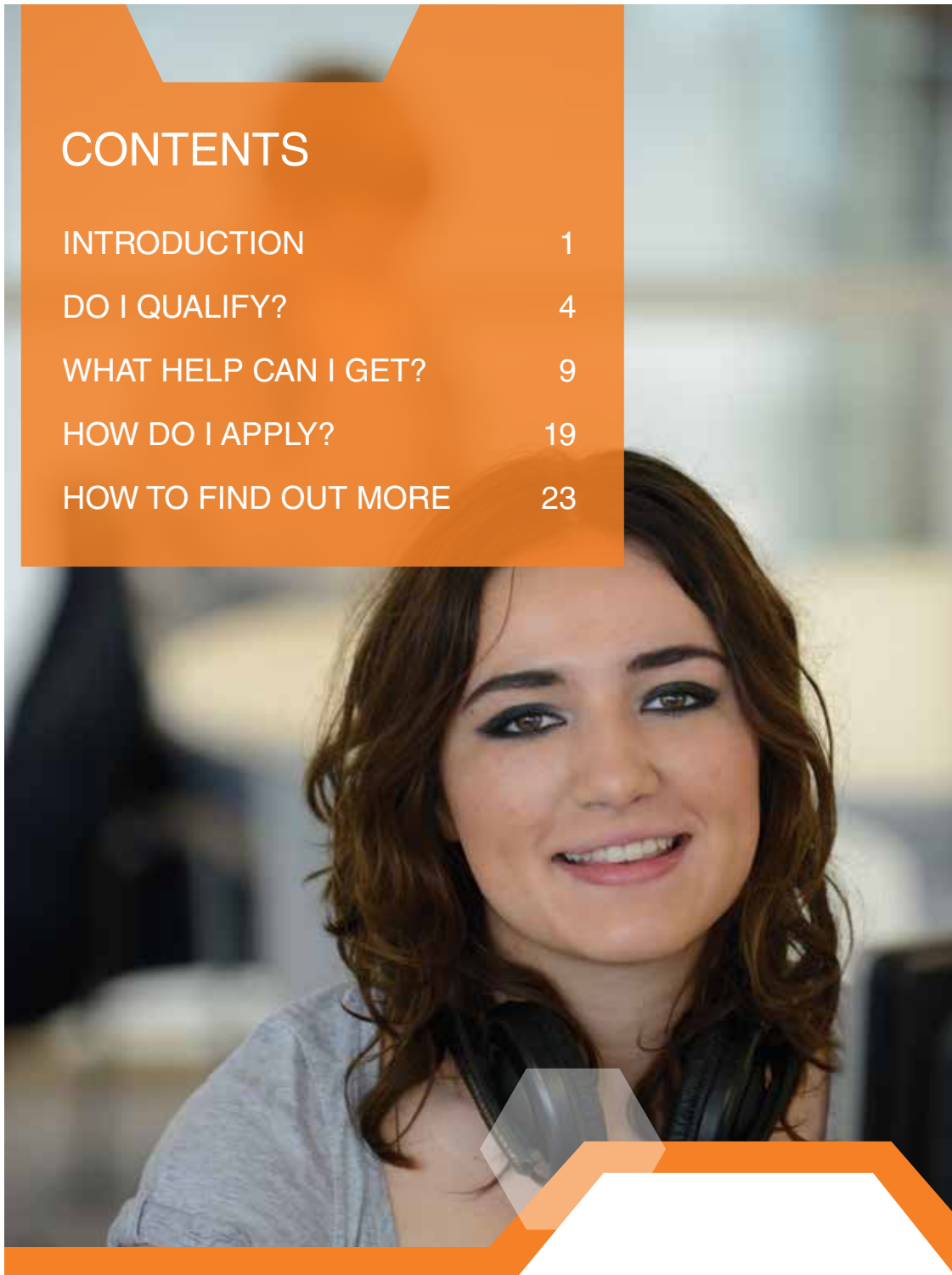
A guide to the Disabled Students'
Allowances (DSAs) in higher education
2014/15

www.studentfinancenl.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. Similar arrangements apply if you live in Scotland, England or Wales.

If you do not live in Northern Ireland, you can find out more information relevant to where you live at one of these websites.

England – **www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance**

Wales – **www.studentfinancewales.co.uk**

Scotland – **www.saas.gov.uk**

What are the DSAs for?

The DSAs help pay for extra costs you may have to pay when studying your course, 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 can prove that they have a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty which affects their ability. They must also be studying:

- Full-time and part-time undergraduate courses (such as degree or HND-level courses) including Open University and other distance-learning courses; or
- Certain full-time and part-time postgraduate courses (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. The information in this booklet is for guidance only and does not cover all circumstances. It is not a statement of the law.



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

No, but it will help you with your application if you contact the Disability Adviser at your university or college. He or she may be able to advise you and give you more information about the help the university or college can provide. 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 rate of study is at least 50% of an equivalent full-time course.

Your Student Finance NI office will keep any information about your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty confidential, but if you choose not to tell your university or college about your disability, the necessary reasonable adjustments may not be made. You can tell the university's or college's Disability Adviser about your disability in complete confidence, to make sure they get you the support you need.

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. **Your Disability Adviser should not normally carry out your DSA needs assessment.**

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 all other student finance you should refer to our other publications – details of which can be found on page 23 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 part-time **undergraduate** course (including a distance-learning course); other first higher education course (such as a HND or Dip HE); or
- undertaking a taught or research **postgraduate** course (including a distance-learning course); 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 will need to pay extra costs to attend 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 an undergraduate or postgraduate student and are eligible for a Department of Health, 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 health care bursary for their course. Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) are available as part of the health care bursary scheme, for which health care service bursary degree and diploma students may be eligible. If you are a medical or dental student who started your course in 2010, you will become eligible for an NHS bursary in September 2014. 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 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSS&PS). Eligibility for any DSAs will also be assessed by your Student Finance NI office.

Open University students

To be eligible for DSAs, you must be registered for an OU undergraduate or postgraduate level course that lasts for at least one year and does not take more than twice as long to complete as an equivalent full-time course. This will usually mean that the course amounts to 60 credit points each year. However, you may be able to study fewer than 60 credit points in some years as long as you make up the difference in other years and can still complete the course in no more than twice the time it would take to complete an equivalent full-time course.

You should apply directly to the Open University's Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) office. If you have told the Open University that you have a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty when you applied for your course, the OU's DSA Office will automatically send you all the information you need to apply.

You will need to send your completed form, and any necessary or relevant documents, back to the Open University's DSA Office:

The Open University,
110 Victoria Street,
Belfast BT1 3GN
Tel: 02890 245 025
Email: ireland@open.ac.uk

You can also apply on line at: **www.open.ac.uk/students/disability/disabled-students-allowance.php**

How do I show that I am eligible?

If you are physically disabled, or have a mental-health condition, you will need to provide up to date medical proof of this, such as a letter from your doctor or specialist.

If you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, you must provide evidence in the form of a 'diagnostic assessment' from a psychologist or suitably qualified specialist teacher. The diagnostic assessment must be recent i.e. produced after your 16th birthday.

You will have to pay for any tests to establish your eligibility for Disabled Students' Allowances. 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 below shows what you need to send us.

For disabilities and medical conditions	A detailed report or letter from your GP or consultant which gives information about your disability and the effect of the disability on your academic performance.
For specific learning difficulties	A report, produced after your 16th birthday, from: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a chartered or practitioner psychologist; or• a specialist teacher holding a current Assessment Practising Certificate.
For mental-health conditions	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.

WHAT HELP CAN I GET?

Summary – what this section is about

Disabled Students' Allowances can help pay the extra costs you may have on your course because of a disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. There is a range of help available and a description of this help is set out on pages 10-18. The DSAs you will receive will depend on a Needs Assessment (see How do I show that I am eligible? – opposite).

The following help may be available for Undergraduate students with disabilities:

- Specialist equipment allowance
- Non medical helper allowance
- General allowance
- Travel allowance



Undergraduate students

Specialist equipment allowance

What is it for?	To help you buy equipment you may need because of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty. You can also use it to pay for repairs, 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 whole course . How much you can get does not depend on your income or that of your family, but it does depend on your needs assessment.
How is it paid?	The money will be paid directly to the equipment supplier or 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.

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 Student Finance NI office (or the OU) 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 Student Finance NI office or you can speak to the disability adviser at your university or college.

You may be able to get items of specialist equipment recommended in a 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 show evidence that you have been accepted on your course.

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?	<p>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.</p> <p>The table below shows the maximum amount of help available for this year.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="350 722 1150 997"> <tr> <td data-bbox="350 722 589 780">Full-time</td> <td data-bbox="589 722 1150 780">Up to £20,938 per year.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="350 780 589 997">Part-time</td> <td data-bbox="589 780 1150 997">A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £15,703 per year depending on how intensive the part-time course is.</td> </tr> </table>	Full-time	Up to £20,938 per year .	Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £15,703 per year depending on how intensive the part-time course is.
Full-time	Up to £20,938 per year .				
Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £15,703 per year 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 or college) or into your bank account.				
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.				

Non-medical helper 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.

If you need more help or advice, you can call your Student Finance NI 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 other disability-related spending. You can 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.

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

Full-time	Up to £1,759 per year .
Part-time	A percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,319 per year 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?	<p>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.</p> <p>If you need more help or advice, you can call your Student Finance NI office or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your chosen university or college.</p>



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, and you may have to provide receipts.
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 does depend on your needs assessment.
How is it paid?	Your Student Finance NI 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 direct 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, in which case you may be asked to pay some back.
Anything else?	If you need more help or advice, you can call your Student Finance NI office or, you can speak to the disability adviser at your chosen university or college.



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. The amount of DSA you receive will depend on the DSA needs assessment.

NHS secondees

If you are employed by the NHS and are seconded (transferred temporarily) onto a health care course, you are not usually eligible for bursaries or DSAs from the NHS. However, you can receive DSAs from us if you meet the eligibility conditions.

Benefits

Most full-time students are not eligible to receive income-related benefits such as Income Support 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, Social Security office or Housing Executive 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, Social Security office or Housing Executive 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 get 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 4 April 2014. You can apply online or download a paper application form from

www.studentfinancenl.co.uk

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.

When you are applying for student finance, the application form asks if you want to apply for DSAs. If you have stated on the application form for student finance, or on your online application, that you want to apply for DSAs, your Student Finance NI office will send you a separate Disabled Students' Allowances application form for you to provide information about your disability, mental-health condition, or specific learning difficulty.

Student Finance NI offices each have a named officer who deals with applications for DSAs (See page 24 for contact details). You may contact the DSA Officer 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 Student Finance NI office with evidence of your disability, mental-health condition or specific learning difficulty (see ‘How do I show I am eligible?’ on page 8).

If you are applying for DSAs only, you can download the full DSA1 application form at www.studentfinancenl.co.uk. You can also get copies from your Student Finance NI 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 Student Finance NI 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. The needs assessment will be carried out at an independent assessment centre by a person with specialist experience, or at a centre within your university or college. It 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 Student Finance NI office (or the OU) agree for you to do so.

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 Student Finance NI office will send you a letter to tell you whether any specialist equipment and other support that has been recommended in your Needs Assessment Report can be paid for from DSAs. They will then either order any equipment and arrange other support for you or provide instructions so you can do it yourself.

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. Only postgraduate, part-time and DSA only students need to apply each year.

Part-time and postgraduate students (but not OU students)

If you are a part-time undergraduate student or a postgraduate student and want to apply for DSAs, you should fill in the Disabled Students' Allowances application form and ask your institution to complete the relevant section. You can download the form from our website at 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 20 and 21.



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 and downloading a copy; or
- calling our Publication Line on 0141 243 3686.

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

- 1 Information about help for full-time students** – Download the guide ‘A guide to financial support for full-time higher education students 2014/15’.
- 2 Information about help for part-time students** – Download the guide ‘A guide to financial support for part-time students in higher education 2014/15’.
- 3 Help for students with children or adult dependants** – Download the guide ‘Childcare Grant and other support for full-time student parents in higher education 2014/15’.
- 4 Information about financial entitlement for students** – Download the guide ‘Higher Education Student Finance – Entitlement to Support and Payment 2014/15’.
- 5 Information about student loans** – Download the guide ‘Student Loans – a guide to terms and conditions 2014/15’.
- 6 Full DSA1 form 2014/15** – for students wishing to apply for Disabled Students’ Allowances only.
- 7 Slimline DSA1 form 2014/15** – 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.

Other useful contacts

DSA Officers in the Student Finance NI offices

Kathleen Lunn (Mrs)

DSA Officer
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40 Academy Street,
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Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Equality House
7 – 9 Shaftesbury Square
BELFAST
BT2 7DP
Tel: 028 90 500 600
Textphone: 028 90 500 589
Fax: 028 90 248 687
Website: www.equalityni.org
E-mail: information@equalityni.org



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brailleandlargefonts@slc.co.uk or you can telephone us on 0141 243 3686. Please note: the above email address and telephone number can only deal with requests for alternative formats of forms and guides.

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