



University Funding for Disabled Students: A Comprehensive Guide

RANi Need to Know Guides | Young person post 16 Advisory sheet 3

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Disabled students in higher education are entitled to additional support to help them overcome barriers related to their disability, health condition, mental health, or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or ADHD.

This guide explains the key types of financial support available and how to access them.

What Is a Disabled Student?

For the purposes of funding and support, a **disabled student** includes anyone who has:

- A physical or sensory impairment
- A long-term health condition (e.g., epilepsy, diabetes)
- A mental health condition (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- A specific learning difficulty (SpLD), such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, or ADHD

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- An autism spectrum condition
 - Any condition that has a **substantial and long-term adverse effect** on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (as defined by the **Equality Act 2010**)
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Key Source of Financial Help: Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

What is DSA?

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is a government grant (not a loan) that helps cover **extra study-related costs** arising from a student's disability.

Who can apply?

- Undergraduate or postgraduate students
- Home students (ordinarily resident in England)
- Students studying part-time or full-time
- Students who are eligible for Student Finance (tuition/maintenance loans)
- You **do not need to repay** DSA

International students are not usually eligible for DSA but may be supported by their university's own access or hardship funds.

What Does DSA Cover?

DSA does **not cover disability-related costs** that are not connected to study (e.g., daily care), but it **can cover**:

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| Type of Support | Examples |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Specialist Equipment Allowance | Computers with assistive software, digital recorders, ergonomic chairs |
| Non-Medical Help (NMH) | One-to-one study support, note-takers, specialist mentoring, BSL interpreters |
| General Allowance | Printing costs, internet contribution, travel costs if disability prevents use of public transport |
| Travel Allowance | Taxis or mileage reimbursement where necessary |

If you already have support funded via a **social care package** or **personal budget**, this should still continue.

How to Apply for DSA

Step-by-step:

1. **Apply for student finance** via Student Finance England (even if you're not applying for tuition/maintenance loans).
2. Tick the box indicating you want to apply for **DSA**.
3. Fill in the **DSA application form** (available online or by request).
4. Provide **medical evidence**:
 - GP/consultant letter or diagnosis for health conditions
 - Educational psychologist report (for dyslexia/SpLD)
5. Attend a **Study Needs Assessment** (paid for by SFE)
6. Receive your **DSA entitlement letter** listing the support agreed

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When to apply?

You can apply **at any point during your course**, but ideally **at least 6 months before** you start university to ensure support is in place from Day 1.

Support from Universities

In addition to DSA, universities must make **reasonable adjustments** under the Equality Act 2010.

They often offer:

- Disability and wellbeing services
- Adjustments to teaching and assessments (e.g., extra time in exams)
- Accessibility software and equipment
- Counselling or peer support programmes
- Alternative formats (e.g., Braille, large print)
- Accessible accommodation or early room allocation

You should contact the university's **Disability Support Service** as early as possible to discuss support needs and submit evidence.

Other Financial Support Options

1. Student Finance Maintenance Loan

- May be higher for disabled students if:
 - They cannot work alongside study due to their condition

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- They live away from home due to accessibility or care needs

2. University Hardship Funds

- Available to students facing financial difficulty
- May offer extra help with living costs, travel, or accommodation

3. Social Care Funding

- For care or daily living needs (not covered by DSA)
- You can request a **transition assessment** from your local authority if aged 18+

4. Charitable Grants

Some examples:

- **Snowdon Trust:** Grants for students with physical/sensory disabilities
- **Turn2Us:** Search tool for disability-related educational grants
- **Disability Rights UK:** Has a list of funding sources

Continuing DSA Year to Year

- You **do not need to reapply in full** each year
- You will receive DSA for the length of your course
- If your **needs change**, you can request a **reviewed Needs Assessment**

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Frequently Asked Questions

Can I get DSA if I don't have a formal diagnosis?

You need **some form of documented evidence**. For SpLDs like dyslexia, a full diagnostic assessment is needed (schools or universities may help arrange this).

Does DSA cover mental health support?

Yes. It can fund specialist mentoring, mental health mentoring, and access to resources. Mainstream counselling may still be provided by the university or NHS.

What if I start my course without support in place?

Contact the university's Disability Service immediately. They can arrange interim support and help fast-track your DSA application.

Checklist for Disabled Students Starting University

- ✓ Apply for Student Finance and tick the DSA option
 - ✓ Submit medical or diagnostic evidence
 - ✓ Book your Needs Assessment
 - ✓ Contact your university's Disability Support Team early
 - ✓ Discuss your support plan and exam adjustments
 - ✓ Apply for any social care support or housing needs
 - ✓ Keep all correspondence and DSA entitlement letters
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Useful Links

- [Student Finance England – DSA](#)
- [UCAS – Supporting disabled students](#)
- [Disability Rights UK – Education and training](#)
- [Snowdon Trust](#)

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- Turn2Us Grant Search

Support and Resources

- **RANi** – Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **Local Offer** - Help with advice, support and impartial information
- **SENDIASS** – Local impartial information and advice service for parents and young people www.iasmanchester.org
- **IPSEA** – Independent Provider of Special Education Advice: www.ipsea.org.uk
- **Contact** – A national charity supporting families with disabled children: www.contact.org.uk

If you'd like help preparing your request or understanding your appeal options, RANi can provide guidance and templates.

Remember:

Always keep a copy of all correspondence you send, along with proof of postage or delivery. If you send documents by post, we recommend using a **signed-for** service. If sending by email, request a **read receipt** if possible.

Get in Touch

If you need more information or have a question, we're here to help.

Email us: info@rani.org.uk

Please include:

- Your name
- Your child's name
- Your child's date of birth
- Your query

Or, if you prefer, you can fill out our online **contact form** and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

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