

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

Who are they for?

Please read this carefully: it answers some of the many questions students have about DSAs and will help you decide if you are eligible to apply.

Q1. What are Disabled Students' Allowances?

They are grants available to students in higher education to help with the extra costs they may have to pay in their studies because of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty.

Q2. Are DSAs means tested – do they depend on my income or the amount of savings I have?

No.

Q3. Will DSAs affect state benefits I'm entitled to?

No. DSAs are purely for the extra study costs you may have to pay because of your condition (for example, if you need to pay a helper at residential school) and have nothing to do with living costs. If you receive a DSA it will not affect any disability or other state benefits you are receiving.

Q4. Are there any age restrictions?

No.

Q5. Are DSAs only for physically disabled students?

No absolutely not – if you have a mental health difficulty or a specific learning difficulty you could still be eligible for a DSA.

Q6. How is 'part time' defined in this booklet?

A 'part-time OU student' is somebody who is:

- a) studying undergraduate-level courses that amount to at least 30 credit points in any one year and is
- b) aiming to complete an OU first degree or other designated qualification (towards which the courses in (a) can count) requiring more than one year of study and which takes no longer than twice the time to complete than the equivalent full-time course.

Q7. How much are DSAs worth?

In 2009 the awards are:

- **A specialist equipment allowance.** Up to £5,030 for the period you take to complete a programme of study leading to a first degree or undergraduate-level qualification.

- An annual **non-medical helper's allowance**. The maximum allowance you can claim is £15,000 if you are studying 120 credit points. However, most students study 60 credit points and so are entitled to up to £10,000 per year.
- An annual **general allowance** as a percentage of the full-time rate to a maximum of £1,260 a year. Those studying 60 credit points are entitled to up to £840 per year.
- **Extra travel costs** you have to pay because of your disability. The travel must be to attend a study activity (such as a tutorial or residential school) that is essential to your OU course. You can only claim the 'extra' cost – the difference between what a student who is not disabled would pay and what you pay for using transport (a taxi, for example) that's necessary because of your disability. There is no maximum amount.

It is extremely unlikely that any student would be awarded the maximum non medical helper or general allowance.

Q8. What do DSAs pay for?

DSAs are used to pay for *study-related costs* that arise directly from your disability or specific learning difficulty. Some examples are below. They cannot be used to pay OU course fees or to pay for everyday living costs that you have whether you're studying or not.

Specialist equipment allowance. Radio aids, braille note-takers, voice-activated computers, computers with synthetic speech output, low-vision aids, scanners, cassette recorders, special keyboards, wrist rests, printers, technical support, extended warranty, insurance.

Non-medical helper's allowance. Sign language interpreters, notetakers, lip-speakers, readers, study support assistants, dyslexia tutors.

General allowance. Miscellaneous expenses such as photocopying, printer cartridges, computer disks or CDs, blank audio cassettes, tactile diagrams.

Extra travel costs. For example, extra costs if your disability means you can't use public transport to attend tutorials. 75% of taxi fares to tutorial.

Q9. Are DSAs limited to a certain number of years of OU study?

You must be registered for an OU undergraduate course that lasts for more than 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, although students studying 30 credit points are still eligible if they complete their qualification within the time limit.

Q10. Do I have to fill in a DSA application form again for each year of OU study?

No, not unless you complete your current OU qualification and start another one that you can claim DSAs for. If you have been awarded a DSA we will send you an *Application for continued funding* for each new year. As long as your needs haven't changed you can ask for the same support again and we will consider your request.

Q11. What if I am already an OU student?

You don't have to be in your first year of study. You can apply for a DSA at any time during your course.

Q12. What are the rules for eligibility?

You must meet all these conditions.

1. You must have settled status in the UK. If you were born in the UK and are a British national, you have it automatically. If not, you must be or have been settled in the UK for immigration purposes on the first day of the first academic year of your current programme of OU study leading to a first degree or undergraduate-level qualification.
2. You must have been ordinarily resident in the UK for the three years immediately before the first day of the first academic year of your current programme of OU study leading to a first degree or undergraduate-level qualification. The DSA Office will be able to find this out from the information you give on your DSA application form.
3. You must normally live in England, Wales or Northern Ireland on the first day of each academic year of your current programme of OU study leading to a first degree or undergraduate-level qualification.
4. You must not have a bursary or award from the National Health Service, the Department of Health, or the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (Northern Ireland) for a course in 2008.
5. You must not be behind with repayments of any loan you have had from the Student Loans Company.
6. You must not be a national of another European Union country, unless you satisfy Condition 2.
7. You must have a disability, health condition, mental health disability or specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) that requires support of some kind and mean that you have to pay extra costs for your OU study because of your condition.
8. You must be registered for OU courses that amount to at least 30 credit points in your first year of applying for a DSA, and which you intend to count towards a first degree or undergraduate-level qualification.
9. You cannot, at any one time, have DSAs for more than one course of part-time study leading to a first degree or undergraduate-level qualification.

We insist on written evidence of your disability, health condition, mental health disability or specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia), and may also ask for written evidence that you satisfy the UK residence requirements.

You can also test your eligibility online at

<http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/pages/funding/dsa-eligibility-quiz-intro.php>

Q13. How do I prove that I'm eligible?

You must provide one or more of the following as written evidence of disability:

- letter from your doctor
- diagnostic assessment made by a recognised disability organisation such as the RNIB or Scope
- proof of registration as a blind or partially-sighted person from your Social Services Office

- diagnostic assessment of a specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) made by a suitably qualified specialist. Contact the DSA Office for advice before arranging your diagnostic assessment.

Unfortunately, we will not normally accept evidence of entitlement to disability state benefits such as the Disability Living Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance and Incapacity Benefit as evidence of disability. This is because we need evidence which confirms the nature and extent of your disability. Most benefits letters and forms do not provide this essential information.

If we require evidence of residence we will ask you for written evidence of settled status and that you live in the UK. We can also explain what those terms mean. Suitable evidence might be a certified copy of your passport, birth certificate, a letter from the Home Office, an original utility bill, a letter from your employer, or a bank or building society statement.

If you were born outside the UK written evidence is required by UK government regulations. In all cases, evidence of your identity must be certified by a person from an approved list. You'll find full details within the application form.

Q14. What happens if I move to Scotland, Isle of Man or Channel Islands after my course has begun?

We will continue to be responsible for dealing with DSA payments for your OU study needs, as long as you are still living in the UK or Islands on the first day of each subsequent OU course you take and are still eligible.

Q15. Can I use DSAs to pay for getting evidence of disability?

No, you must pay for that yourself, although the University may be able to help you. Your OU regional centre or the Financial Support Office (tel 01908 653411) can tell you more about that.

Q16. Why is evidence of disability necessary?

DSAs are grants from public funds. Although the OU does not itself ask for evidence of disability for most of its services, the Government requires us to do so for DSAs. We are accountable to the Government for the proper management of DSA funds in accordance with the appropriate regulations.

Q17. Must I tell the OU as well as the DSA Office that I have a disability in order to get DSAs?

Technically, no. The DSA Office is separate from the Disabled Student Services section and you only need to satisfy the DSA Office that you are disabled. However, we **strongly advise** that you do tell the University, as there are many practical difficulties in arranging your support if you do not.

Q18. What if I've already had DSAs for study elsewhere?

That doesn't affect your right to apply for DSAs as a part-time OU student, although when we consider requests for equipment for OU study we will take into account any specialist equipment bought for you with a DSA for your previous course.

Q19. Do course results affect eligibility for DSAs?

Your results in one year might not affect DSAs for the next year, even if you repeat a course you failed or withdrew from. But your eligibility will be affected if it is clear that

you are registering for courses but not actually studying them or if because of failure or withdrawal you can't complete the course within the required timescales.

Q20. What happens if I withdraw from a course?

You must tell us. We will cancel any DSA payments authorised but not yet made, and we cannot make any more payments for the year. If you withdraw early in your first year of study without good reason you may be required to repay any DSA payments made to you that you are not entitled to.

Q21. What happens if I take a break of a year or more from OU study?

Nothing. You can simply claim DSAs again when you return to OU study if you are eligible.

Q22. How do I find out what I need?

If you're eligible for DSAs, we will ask an Assessment Centre to see you to assess your study support needs. You will probably be asked to attend the centre for the assessment, although someone will come to your home if you cannot travel. They will send you a copy of your assessment report, recommending the items or services (or both) that the assessor thinks you need. We will then decide which of the recommendations should be paid for from DSAs. We will give you the decision in writing, and tell you how you can appeal against it if you want to.

Q23. What happens if my study needs change?

We will review your last needs assessment report in the light of your new circumstances, and we may ask you to have a new assessment. This could happen if there is a change in your medical condition or disability, or if a new medical condition is diagnosed. In these circumstances you will be required to submit further medical evidence – we will advise you if this is required.

Q24. Do DSAs pay for all my OU support needs?

No. The University provides and pays for general support services such as course materials in alternative media, physical access to teaching accommodation, examination centres and residential schools. DSAs give you access to a wider range of support.

Q25. How will DSA payments be made?

Usually to third parties who provide you with study equipment and services. We will need an invoice from a supplier or service provider, and some form of documentation from you and the University to show that you received the goods and services and attended the course activities for which study support was provided. If you pay for anything we have awarded (equipment, consumables, study-related travel and so on), you may claim reimbursement from the DSA Office. You must use a special claim form and provide full receipts.

You can download the appropriate claims forms at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/pages/funding/dsa-funding-answers.php#payments>

Q26. How will services paid for from DSAs be provided?

Most services will be organised and provided by the University either directly or through a third party. We can order any specialist equipment for you and in general ensure that services paid for out of your DSAs are delivered efficiently. If you have any difficulties, raise them first with the service provider. If they aren't resolved satisfactorily, tell us and we will pursue the matter for you.

Q27. What happens to equipment bought for me with DSAs?

It becomes your property, to keep.

Q28. How do I apply for DSAs?

You can complete your application online, or using a paper form. Fill out the application form, using the guidance notes on to help. Please return the form by post, as we can't accept forms by email as we require your original signature on the form.

You can apply up until the end of your course, but the earlier you apply, the better.

Q29. I have run out of DSA claim forms. How do I get some more?

You must have a current DSA award before you can make any claims. You can download the appropriate claim form at <http://www.open.ac.uk/disability/pages/funding/dsa-funding-answers.php#payments>

Q30. What if I have any other questions?

Ask the OU's DSA Office at Walton Hall.

Address:

DSA Office, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK& 6BR

Voice telephone 01908 654136 (general enquiries)

Textphone 01908 659955

Fax 01905659956

Email DSA-Queries@open.ac.uk

You can find more information about DSAs in the booklet *Bridging the Gap*. To get a copy you can either phone 0800 731 9133 quoting the reference S/BTGB/V7, or if you require textphone services the number is 0800 328 8988. You can also download or view the booklet on the following website www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance