

DSA Needs Assessment: Student Guidance

Key Points

- If you wish to disclose a disability or additional support need or think you might be eligible for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), you should discuss your requirements with student services staff at your enrolling college in the first instance.
- You are encouraged to disclose as early as possible so that appropriate support can be identified. Choosing not to disclose may have an impact on the support available to you.
- DSA is a non income-assessed allowance to cover any study-related costs arising from your disability. You can have a support plan in place without necessarily being in receipt of DSA funding.
- DSA funding, if awarded, is valid only for that particular academic year, so you would need to apply in each year of your course if you wish to do so. However, your needs do not necessarily need to be assessed every year if you are a continuing student.
- Engaging fully with the needs assessment process (including any equipment training that might be recommended for you) will help you make the most of the support available in light of your specific needs.
- Remember to check your university email account and in-tray in UHI Records.

1. Disclosing a disability or additional need

As a student of the University of the Highlands and Islands, you can choose to disclose a disability or additional support need at any time during your studies. All students and prospective students are encouraged to disclose any specific requirements at the earliest opportunity, in order that appropriate support can be negotiated and put in place as soon as possible.

Once you have disclosed, support services staff at your enrolling college will discuss support measures that might be relevant for you and, if it is agreed that you would benefit from specific support, begin the process of putting together a support plan.

In discussion with support services staff at your enrolling college, you will provide information about your needs, previous support arrangements you may have used and anticipated support needs while studying with us. This discussion will enable support services staff to recommend a support plan for you and, with your agreement, inform relevant staff of these arrangements.

Your support plan will be reviewed at least once during the academic session. Should you have any issues with any aspect of your approved PLSP, you should contact student services staff at your enrolling college in the first instance. You can also provide feedback via the Red Button (link to RB page) and the university's complaints process is available as an option of last resort.

Depending on your specific needs and eligibility you may be advised to apply for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). DSA is a non-income assessed allowance to cover any extra costs or expenses you might have while studying, which arise because of your disability. Note, however, that you do not need to be in receipt of DSA funding in order to have a support plan in place.

2. Applying for DSA

It is best to start the process of applying for DSA as early as possible, as it can take some time for your application to be processed by the relevant funding authority (for students living in Scotland this is the Student Awards Agency for Scotland – SAAS). Engaging fully with the process will help ensure you receive the support you are entitled to.

In order to apply to SAAS for DSA as a new student, you will need:

- A completed DSA application form, for the academic year in which you are applying.
- A needs assessment report.
- Evidence of your disability – this could be an Educational Psychologist's report as formal diagnosis of a specific learning difficulty, a letter from your GP, etc. You may be referred to an external agency (e.g. for an Educational Psychologist's assessment) to obtain the necessary evidence before the needs assessment process can be completed.

You can apply for DSA as soon as you know you have a place on your course or at any time until the end of March in the current year of your course. Any funding awarded is valid only for that academic year so it is necessary to apply in each year of your current course, should you wish to do so.

If you are a continuing student, your needs do not necessarily require to be assessed in each year of your course. A new needs assessment may be required in certain circumstances – e.g. if a significant period of time has passed since you were first assessed, if you have changed to a new course or if your needs have changed significantly since you were first assessed.

Student services staff at your enrolling college will be pleased to assist with your application and to advise regarding the needs assessment process.

3. The university's needs assessment process

The university is validated as an institution to conduct needs assessments with UHI students eligible to apply for DSA. This means that you can have your needs assessed at your campus or learning centre, where appropriate, without necessarily travelling to an Access Centre elsewhere in Scotland.

Video Conference technologies can be used to support remote learners and the needs assessment can be delivered at a pace to suit you. If your Academic Partner does not have a needs assessor on site, the university's DSA Service will be notified and make a referral to an available assessor. As a

guide, a referral will normally be made within two working weeks of the initial notification being received.

If you have been referred for assessment, your assessor will complete the assessment process as soon as is practicable. The referral and needs assessment process may, however, take longer during busier periods.

- The first stage of the needs assessment is an informal discussion with your assessor to consider your support requirements and their likely impact on your studies at the university.
- The needs assessor will meet with you to discuss and/or demonstrate relevant equipment and technologies as required.
- As a guide, the needs assessor will normally complete a draft needs assessment report within two working weeks of the needs assessment having been completed or as soon as is practicable thereafter, subject to the necessary evidence of need being in place¹.
- Once you agree your needs assessment report, the assessor will provide confirmation to the university's DSA Service that the necessary documentation is in place and send your application directly to SAAS for consideration. With your agreement, the assessor will also send a copy of the finalised report to your disability adviser.

Remember to check your student email account regularly so as not to miss any updates or requests for information. Your needs assessor may also use the university's Additional Support Online System to schedule appointments with you and/or update your support records. Thus, it is important that you login into the Student Hub in UHI Records, too.

4. Feedback

The university's DSA Service will offer a questionnaire survey to gather feedback about the needs assessment process from you. You can also share your experiences via the university's Red Button. The university welcomes all feedback.

Anonymised extracts of student feedback will be included in the DSA Service's Annual Report.

5. The outcome of your DSA application

Your funding authority will write to you with the result of your claim and will request further information from your disability adviser as appropriate.

Where DSA funding has been awarded SAAS will provide you with information and advice about accessing the recommended support and, where appropriate, ordering equipment or purchasing small items such as computer consumables. It's important that you forward a copy of your payment letter to your disability adviser when you receive it.

¹ Timescales vary according to the needs of the individual student, the availability and capacity of a needs assessor, etc.

Where DSA funding has been awarded, this will be paid directly into your designated bank account and you are advised contact the supplier recommended within your needs assessment report to arrange delivery of the equipment and/or training specified in your needs assessment report². You must send receipts for the equipment purchased to SAAS within six weeks of purchase.

It is your responsibility to arrange delivery of any equipment training that might be awarded under DSA. It is strongly recommended that you take this up, to enable you to make the most of your equipment during your studies.

6. Useful links

- [UHI Student Support Contacts](#)
- [UHI Disability Matters](#)
- [UHI Red Button](#)
- [UHI Records](#)
- [SAAS DSA Forms and Guides](#)

² You can choose to purchase the recommended items, using the funding awarded, from an alternative supplier if you wish.