

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

**RT HON DAVID WILLETTS, MINISTER FOR UNIVERSITIES AND
SCIENCE; DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS**

HE STUDENT SUPPORT

7 APRIL 2014

Today I am announcing measures to modernise the Disabled Students' Allowances which are available to Higher Education students from England.

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) are non-repayable grants that assist with the additional costs that a disabled student incurs in relation to their study in higher education. DSAs currently provide a range of support. This includes the purchase of laptops and specialist equipment, provision of support workers and assistance with additional travel costs. The support is not means tested and is available for eligible full-time and part-time students, studying at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

In 2011/12 DSAs provided over £125 million of additional support for over 53,000 full-time undergraduate higher education students, compared with £91.7m awarded to 40,600 students in 2008/09.

I announced earlier this year that maximum grants for full-time, part-time and postgraduate students with disabilities will be maintained at 2014/15 levels in 2015/16.

I am announcing a number of changes aimed at modernising the current system, subject to the Equality Impact Assessment. This will ensure that the limited public funding available for DSAs is targeted in the best way and to achieve value for money, whilst ensuring those most in need get the help they require.

DSAs have been available since 1974, with the four separate allowances being introduced in 1990. The current arrangements do not recognise technological advances, increases in use of technology or the introduction of the Equality Act 2010. It has been almost 25 years since the DSA scheme was reviewed, unlike other areas of student support.

The proposals outlined below look to rebalance responsibilities between government funding and institutional support. We will look to HEIs to play their role in supporting students with mild difficulties, as part of their duties to provide reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act. These are partly anticipatory duties and we expect HEIs to introduce changes which can further reduce reliance on DSAs and help mainstream support. We will be consulting with specialists in the sector to ensure that Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD) students understand the type of support they can expect to receive and who will provide it.

We recognise that students will continue to need support. However, we believe that HEIs are better placed to consider how to respond in many cases, including giving greater consideration to the delivery of their courses and how to provide support. The need for some individual non-medical help (NMH) may be removed through different ways of delivering courses and information. It is for HEIs to consider how they make both anticipatory reasonable adjustments and also reasonable adjustments at an individual level.

The key changes are set out below:

- **We will pay for higher specification or higher cost computers where a student needs one solely by virtue of their disability.** We will no longer pay for standard specification computers or the warranties and insurance associated with them. We will no longer pay for higher specification and/or higher cost computers simply because of the way in which a course is delivered. We are changing our approach to the funding of a number of computer equipment, software and consumable items through DSAs that have become funded as 'standard' to most students.
- **Students with Specific Learning Difficulties will continue to receive support through DSAs where their support needs are considered to be more complex.**
- **We will fund the most specialist Non-Medical Help.** HEIs are expected to consider how they deliver information to students and whether strategies can be put in place to reduce the need for support workers and encourage greater independence and autonomy for their students.
- The additional costs of **specialist accommodation will no longer be met by DSAs**, other than in exceptional circumstances.
- We are also clarifying a number of policy changes. We will define disability in relation to the definition provided by the Equality Act 2010, for the purposes of receiving DSAs. We will also introduce a requirement for registration for those providers offering DSA study needs assessments and DSA assistive technology service providers.

The changes will ensure DSAs provide support where it is needed the most.

The changes in this Statement will apply to all full-time, full-time distance learning, part-time and postgraduate students applying for DSA for the first time in respect of an academic year beginning on or after 1 September 2015. This provides sufficient time for us to work with institutions and stakeholders to ensure the changes are introduced effectively.

Existing DSA students and DSA students for 2014/15 entry will remain on the current system of support for 2015/16.

