What is this Allowance?

The DSA is a financial package for which all disabled students can apply. 

- It is intended to cover extra study-related expenses incurred as a direct consequence of disability
- It is not intended to pay for other disability-related costs that might otherwise be incurred, for example, contributions towards the purchase of mobility aids, hearing aids or glasses/contact lenses
- There are no previous study restrictions related to eligibility i.e. if someone has already received a DSA whilst previously studying on a HEFCE funded course, this student is still eligible to apply for the NHS funded DSA
- There are no age limits related to eligibility
- Access to the DSA is not means tested
Eligibility

Disabled students who are already studying, or have been offered a place on an educational programme, can apply for a DSA. The application process for students studying on pre-registration allied health or other medical professions programmes differs from that for non-NHS educational programmes. The scheme is administered by the NHS Business Services Authority (NHS BSA) (Student Bursaries).

In order to be considered for a DSA, disabled students must demonstrate that they qualify for an NHS funded bursary. EU students and those who are seconded and receiving a salary do not qualify for a DSA under this scheme.

Identifying the need for support: first steps

Many disabled students require some additional support to enable them to undertake a degree programme. Applicants may be unaware of the DSA and you should have a basic knowledge of the process in order to be able to provide advice.

Telling people about a disability is not mandatory. If students wish to apply for a DSA, however, they must provide the NHS BSA with medical proof (for example a letter from a doctor or consultant) giving details about the nature and severity of the impairment. Applicants who have dyslexia or specific learning difficulties must provide evidence of a recent assessment which needs to be carried out by a suitably qualified person e.g. an Educational Psychologist.

It is helpful if students are offered the opportunity to discuss their possible requirements with appropriate academic staff and/or personnel from the university’s Disability Service during the general enquiry or formal application process. This will facilitate the following processes:

- Formulation of an initial plan
- Decisions about the disability-related support required
- Assessment of financial implications

Students must meet the costs associated with establishing a claim for disability i.e. fees for an assessment of dyslexia or charges for a doctor’s letter. Assessment of a person’s study-related needs is covered by the DSA funding.

Applying for the DSA

Students do not have to declare a disability although it is recommended that they do so as they will then be able to access help in applying for the DSA. If students do
choose to provide this information, they should inform the university at the earliest opportunity, and certainly upon receipt of a formal offer of a place (conditional or firm).

Applicants are required to complete form DSA 1

(http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Students/Documents/Students/DSA1.pdf)

which should be accompanied by the supporting evidence of the disability. The student’s personal reference number should be quoted in all correspondence with NHS BSA (Student Bursaries). All information is treated confidentially.

Early application is essential to avoid delays in processing claims and the subsequent implementation of disability-related support. Ideally, both specialist equipment and other support should be in place at the commencement of the undergraduate programme.

**Procedure for accessing the DSA**

If a student’s application is accepted, the applicant will be referred to a Regional Access Centre for an assessment of study-related needs. This assessment should only be arranged when the award has been confirmed and the assessment centre approved by NHS BSA (Student Bursaries). Students should arrange the assessment at the earliest opportunity: if possible, well before the beginning of term and even prior to receiving a confirmed offer of a place.

Some students may need a top-up assessment later in the programme, particularly if there is a change in their disability, to ensure that any specific requirements are met.

**Background research**

Assessors have differing levels of knowledge and experience regarding the range of impairments with which students may present. Students should, therefore, play as full a part as possible in the assessment process to ensure that the support recommended is appropriate.

Prior to the assessment, students should spend some time undertaking background research into the types of equipment and software that are available which may be helpful on their programme of study. This can be done in a number of ways, for example:

- Discussion with technical staff in specialist organisations
Students should be able to offer suggestions of the kinds of support that are likely to be of particular value on AHP programmes that include practical classes and practice based placements. It is not helpful, however, for them to arrive at their DSA assessment with a ‘wish list’ of expensive equipment and software. The assessors are constrained by the funders as to what they can recommend, but normally try to be as supportive as possible to the students.

**The assessment process**

The assessment usually takes place at the Access Centre nearest to the student’s home or place of study (not all universities house Access Centres). A qualified member of staff must complete a Study Aids and Strategies Assessment Report. This report should contain detailed recommendations relating to the additional disability-related support that the student is likely to require in order to participate fully in the programme. The costs of carrying out the assessment and producing the report will be met from the student’s DSA.

**Specialist input**

Not all Access Centre personnel are familiar with the nature and components of AHP programmes and their specific requirements; especially those related to practical and clinical situations. Whilst most disabled students will wish to apply for assistance with the purchase of general access equipment and services (e.g. computers with assistive software; employment of support workers) disabled AHP students may need some or all of the following:

- A laptop computer specifically for use in the practice based situation
- Tactile/fluorescent markings on a goniometer or tape measure
- Stethoscope with amplification or screen read-out
- Portable video magnifier with distance facility (especially for work based placements)
- DAISY/MP3 digital recorder for use with speech recognition software installed on a computer
- Support workers who are required to be more actively involved e.g. in practical sessions and on practice based placements.
There have been situations where, at a point in the programme, students have discovered that they have no DSA funding to purchase a particular item of equipment or type of support because this was not included in the assessment report.

**Example**

On attending a respiratory practical class, a student who is hard of hearing realised that he would need to use a stethoscope. When he attempted to perform auscultation, he was unable to hear anything. His assessment of study needs had been carried out before he arrived at the university and neither he nor his assessor had realised that he would be required to perform this technique. He did not, therefore, have access to funding to purchase an amplified stethoscope.

To avoid this situation, the assessor should commission the consultancy services of staff from an external organisation. The involvement of personnel with specialist expertise guarantees that the assessment will be more comprehensive and that an accurate estimate of costs can be submitted for approval at the outset.

**Example**

A student who is visually impaired received a formal offer of a place on a physiotherapy programme. She applied for a DSA and underwent a general Study Aids and Strategies assessment. During the assessment, the assessor recognised that she needed additional items of equipment and services relating specifically to an AHP programme about which he had no knowledge. At the student’s suggestion, he contacted the Allied Health Professions Support Service in order to obtain advice. Items such as a DAISY/MP3 digital recorder, goniometer with tactile markings, tactile tape measure, mobile phone with speech software and Tacti-mark pens were recommended. These were included in the final report, funding was subsequently agreed and the items were purchased prior to the commencement of the programme.

**Processing claims**

On receipt of the completed Study Aids and Strategies Assessment Report, the recommendations are reviewed by NHSBSA. The appropriate level of support to be implemented and the allowance available to meet the costs is then determined.

It may be some weeks before the student receives a response and follow up
telephone or written communication may be necessary to speed up the process.

Eventually, the student will receive written confirmation of the Authority’s recommendations which will contain full details of equipment and services agreed, together with the financial support for which the student is eligible. The University’s Disability Service should provide advice on any local procedures for payment and suppliers of equipment or personal support (e.g. the Agency with which the University has a contract to provide support workers).

Students may receive equipment prior to the commencement of the programme but must be able to provide evidence of a confirmed offer of a place. All equipment must be returned if students do not subsequently enrol on a programme.

Elements of the DSA

Specialist equipment allowance

- Items of equipment: computers with specialist software (e.g. screen magnification, mind mapping, speech to text); scanners; video magnifiers; digital recorder/MP3 players; braille embossers/note takers, tracker ball mice, ergonomic keyboards etc. Maintenance, repair, technical support, insurance or extended warranty costs arising from owning the equipment. Initial training on new equipment and software may also be reimbursed.

This allowance need not be spent all at once but can be accessed throughout the programme.

Non-medical helpers allowance

- This allowance can pay for personal assistance in a range of areas related to the programme of study.

This includes:

- note-takers
- personal readers
- sign language interpreters
- library assistants
- dyslexia tuition support
- mobility training
General allowance

This includes:

- Miscellaneous small items of equipment: e.g.
  - hand-held magnifiers
  - consumables
  - digital memory sticks
  - Braille paper
  - payment for photocopying/printing etc
  - top up for other allowances if necessary

Travel costs

If students believe that they are likely to experience difficulties travelling to and from practice based placements, claims for reimbursement of travel costs incurred as a direct consequence of a disability can be made. These claims will only be met, however, if they are included in the student's initial DSA assessment. If, during the programme, a student experiences difficulties relating to travel, claims for additional travel costs can be submitted following an assessment.

Examples include:

- travel to areas/local sites that are not served by public transport
- travel at a time when disability makes the use of public transport difficult/impossible

NB: As a general principle, it would be helpful if all prospective AHP students receive information about the clinical elements of the programme and the associated travel requirements. As indicated above, it is particularly important that disabled students are given this information prior to attending their DSA assessment so that they can ask the assessor to include this information on the assessment form.

See over for examples:
Example 1

Following an interview, a partially sighted student was offered a place on a Speech and Language Therapy programme. During discussion at the information exchange component of the interview, she was informed of that she would be expected to travel to practice based placements. She stated that she would be able to travel independently by train and bus in the morning when light levels were good. In the evening when light levels were low, however, she explained that travelling home independently would not possible as she became functionally blind, making it very difficult to negotiate complex routes or poorly lit areas. The interviewers agreed that it would be a reasonable adjustment for her to submit a claim for reimbursement of taxi fares in the evening from the DSA. They emphasised the importance of informing the assessor about this issue so that a claim could be included in the DSA report.

Example 2

An Occupational Therapy student using a prosthesis as a result of a below knee amputation was expected to travel to placement by bus. Standing for long periods had been identified as an issue for which reasonable adjustments had been organised. On carrying out a pre-placement visit in the rush hour, he found that he could not obtain a seat on the bus and had to stand for the forty five minute journey and then walk for twenty minutes to reach the hospital. This meant that when he arrived at the workplace he would be unable to start work until he had rested for at least half an hour.

In discussion with the support tutor from the University and his Disability adviser, it was decided that using the DSA for taxi fares to and from the practice based placement would be considered to be an appropriate use of the funding. An additional assessment was therefore arranged to enable a claim to be submitted.

Examples of allowances - 2012-13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allowance</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specialist equipment allowance</td>
<td>Up to £5031 for the whole of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-medical helper’s allowance</td>
<td>Up to £20,000 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General DSA</td>
<td>Up to £1680 per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel allowance</td>
<td>Payable for disability-related extra travel costs which have been reasonably and necessarily incurred</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All enquiries for students studying in England:

DSA Team NHS BSA Student Bursaries, Hesketh House, 200-220 Broadway, Fleetwood, Lancashire, FY7 8SS

All HEI related calls are now (from March 2012) handled by the Newcastle call centre: NHS Business Services Authority, Sandyford House, Archbold Terrace, Sandyford, Newcastle, NE2 1DB

Telephone the student helpline on: 0845 358 6655
Email: dsa@nhspa.gov.uk
Website: www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Students.aspx
Email: Heisecure@nhspa.gov.uk
Facebook: NHS Student Bursaries

The opening hours are:
8am - 6pm Monday to Friday
9am - 3pm Saturday
Closed on Sunday

Students studying in countries outside England should apply to their relevant awarding authority.

Web links

List of Access Centres available at: http://www.nnac.org/students/findcentre.php

Information for students available at:
http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Students/Documents/Students/DSA1_v3.0_Application_and_Guidance_for_Disabled_Students_Allowance.pdf
Contact Us

We welcome enquiries by phone or email

Jane Owen Hutchinson
Email: jane.owenhutchinson@rnib.org.uk

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Acknowledgment

The Allied Health Professions Support Service (AHPSS) was launched in 1991 in response to the closure of the Royal National Institute for Blind People's (RNIB) School of Physiotherapy which catered exclusively for visually impaired students. AHPSS’s remit was to provide support to disabled allied health profession students in mainstream higher education in the UK. It also offered information, advice and specialised disability awareness training to academic and practice-based staff.

In 2002, AHPSS staff were invited by the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) to join a team of specialists to produce a training manual specifically designed to provide guidance for practice based staff in supporting disabled students on practice based placements. The document: "Supporting Physiotherapy Students on Clinical Placement", was published in 2004 and received very positive feedback from all stakeholders.

By 2007, it was evident that the document needed updating in response to UK legislative and technological changes and the increasing use of online information. Following discussions with CSP staff, it was agreed that the AHPSS team (Jane Owen Hutchinson, AHPSS Manager and Karen Atkinson, Senior Lecturer and Manager of the RNIB Resource Centre at the University of East London), would take on this project.

Between 2007 and 2010, considerable time was spent in obtaining feedback from a wide range of stakeholders regarding the content and format of the future document. Whist it was unanimously agreed that it should be available in both hard copy and electronically, all staff identified the importance of being able to access some of the specific guidance on disability management from the AHPSS website.

"Into Physiotherapy" was published by the CSP and RNIB in 2010. Thirteen related information sheets were subsequently uploaded onto the AHPSS website (between 2010 and 2013), at which point the AHPSS was decommissioned by NHS London. As a result of the positive feedback these fact sheets received and requests from a number of organisations, Jane Owen Hutchinson and Karen Atkinson have given permission for these materials to continue to be available online.