



This bulletin gives you an update on the Student Finance England service for disabled students for academic years 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 - how we are doing and what's new.

AY 2011 / 2012 service

Returning full-time students

Our SFE service for returning customers is now open, with a deadline for submitting applications by 30 June 2011. We are encouraging returning customers to apply online as early as possible so that they can be sure to get all the money they are entitled to at the start of term in autumn 2011.

New full-time students

We will open the SFE service for new full-time students on 16 March, with a deadline for submitting applications of 31 May.

Disabled Students' Allowances applications

Customers applying for Disabled Students' Allowances will continue to apply using a paper application form.

New students

A pre-populated DSA1 application form will be posted out to new customers who tick the button on their main student finance application, indicating they wish to apply for DSAs. They need to sign the form and return it to us with evidence of their disability. If the student has already applied for student finance and now wishes to apply for DSA they can complete the short version of the DSA1 paper form.

Returning students

Returning customers don't need to re-apply for DSAs. Support will automatically be in place for them for the next academic year, as per recommendations of the Needs Assessment report. This excludes DSA only, part-time or post-graduate customers.

DSA only, part-time or post-grad

Students who are applying for DSA only, who are postgraduate students or part-time should download the long version of the DSA1 paper form.

How to apply

Customers can access the main student finance application and all of the DSA forms and guides online at: www.direct.gov.uk/studentfinance.

Accessible formats

To receive alternative formats and or guides in Braille, Audio and Large Font, students should email: brailleandlargefonts@slc.co.uk or phone 0141 243 3686.

AY 2010 / 2011 application processing

As at 27 February, we have received nearly 30,000 DSA applications which is 86% of what we expect to receive for AY 2010/2011.

Over 19,000 of the applications we have received are processed and we have written to these students to confirm their agreed support. About 1,000 applications are work in hand and we are waiting for eligibility information from a further 1,500 customers.

We have over 8,000 applications where we have established eligibility and confirmed with the student that they need to attend a Needs Assessment Centre so that their study needs can be evaluated. Within this 8,000 there will be cases where:

- the student has not yet booked their needs assessment appointment
- the student has booked but not yet had their appointment
- the needs assessment report has not yet been sent to us

Moving applications through

We want to encourage students to apply for DSAs as soon as possible and for those who have applied and been advised to make their needs assessment appointment, to do so now.

To help move applications through as quickly as possible we will now send a copy of the customer's eligibility confirmation letter, confirming their entitlement to DSAs, to their university or college Disability Adviser.

We'll ask the Disability Adviser to get in touch with the student and encourage them to take the next steps to progress their DSA application by choosing an assessment centre from DSA QAG and booking their appointment.

Initiatives and updates

Late applications

If a customer doesn't submit their DSA application until late in their final year of study, in order to get their support in place as quickly as possible, we will accept recommendations for non-medical helper support and general allowance claims from the customer's Disability Adviser at their university or college.

Please follow this link to read the full [late final year application guidance](#) for partners.

Specialist support for specific learning difficulties

We have updated the [2011/2012 DSA guidance chapter](#) (section 109) related to 'study skills tuition', changing the name of this support to 'specialist 1:1 support' and updating the definition to more accurately reflect what the support involves.

The new terminology and definition emphasise the specialist nature of the support students with specific learning difficulties or mental health difficulties require.

The changes were recommended by ASASA, Patoss and ADSHE and agreed with BIS and the Disabled Student Stakeholder Group.

DSA audit

We're undertaking our annual audit of DSA support paid out in 2010/2011 by performing follow up checks on a sample of students by contacting their Assessment Centre to confirm that the information we hold is accurate.

If you have been contacted, we would appreciate your support in returning the information requested by 7 March. For more information please email Internal_Audit@slc.co.uk.

Needs Assessment Reports

Various stakeholder organisations helped us to review the current needs assessment report template and it was agreed to keep the current format with minor changes.

Needs Assessment Centres are requested to use the approved template at all times. Reports submitted after 1 April which do not follow the guidelines will no longer be accepted.

If you are submitting an amended study needs assessment report, please mark 'Amendment' clearly on the front. This will help our teams to identify and process requirements more effectively.

Needs assessment charges for BSL interpreters

Charges for British Sign Language interpreters, required for the needs assessment, should not be charged in addition to the needs assessment fee.

These costs should be quantified and factored into business costs by assessment centres.

Irlens syndrome

We will no longer pay for the Irlens sensitivity test as this is classed as disability evidence and therefore should not be funded through DSAs.

We will still pay for the tinting, non prescription lenses and £30 towards frames if the test results indicate these are required.

Transfer of student finance responsibilities from Local Authorities to Student Finance England

Between January 2011 and March 2011 Local Authorities in England are transferring their student finance responsibilities to us. We will then be fully responsible for all student finance applications for customers in England.

Who is affected?

This affects students who started university or college in academic year 2008/2009 or before.

How is the transfer going?

As of 28 February, 68 Local Authorities have successfully transferred their customers to Student Finance England. The remaining 61 Local Authorities will transfer over the coming weeks and all transfers will be complete by 31 March 2011.

More information on the local authority transfer

The timetable with the dates for when each Local Authority is transferring to us is available on our SFE Practitioners' website

www.practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk

Further information about the transfer is available at: www.direct.gov.uk/latransfer

Employee training day

ADSHE, ASASA and Action on Access delivered a specialist training day for our employees on 19 January. The training day covered the one to one support available for students with specific learning difficulties and the issues faced by students with visual impairments.

DSA Partners Seminars

We are holding our DSA Seminars in May 2011 for partners and stakeholders involved in providing services to disabled student customers.

We're holding four seminars; in Birmingham, Leeds, London and Bristol.

Our 'save the date' invitation is now available. The full seminar invitation and programme will be sent out later this month. For more information please access our events website www.events-slc.co.uk.

Disabled Student Stakeholder Group

The Disabled Student Stakeholder group met on 4 February. They discussed DSA application processing and initiatives being undertaken to contact customers with pending applications, to help move these cases through.

The group are looking at development of procurement guidance, to address issues of quality and value for money in non-medical helper service provision.

Stakeholder survey

Our annual Stakeholder Survey is currently underway. We're sending out an online questionnaire to over 10,000 stakeholder contacts, including disabled student practitioners, assessment centres and other organisations involved in helping students with disabilities.

The survey covers three main areas: The service we provide to customers, the relationship we have with stakeholder organisations we work with and stakeholder views of SLC.

We'll update you on the results of the survey through this bulletin.

Feedback:

We would like your feedback on this bulletin - what has been most useful to you and your organisation? What would be of interest and value to you to include in future bulletins?

Please email any feedback to - michelle_wickenden@slc.co.uk

More information for practitioners is available on our Student Finance England practitioners' website www.practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk

Your questions answered

We have updated the 'Your questions answered' document on our Practitioners website, including adding a new section regarding recommendations for support from needs assessors.

Need to contact our disabled student team?

Here are our contact details for partners and practitioners:

For disability practitioners at HEIs email - disability_adviser@slc.co.uk

For Needs Assessment Centres email - access_centre@slc.co.uk

Submission of Needs Assessment Reports via encrypted PGP - needs_assessment_reports@slc.co.uk

For practitioners with queries relating to policy and regulations email - ssin_Queries@slc.co.uk
Tel: 0845 602 0583 (this number is not for students)

For practitioners with DSA enquiries -
Tel: 01325 215194 (this number is not for students)

For suppliers submitting invoices, invoice queries or specific student queries email - invoice_team@slc.co.uk

For Needs Assessment Centres referring Educational Psychologist's reports email - matthew_hall@slc.co.uk

For general matters related to working with DSA partners email - michelle_wickenden@slc.co.uk

For enquiries regarding the Disabled Student Service Stakeholder Group email - stakeholder_enquiries@slc.co.uk