



Department
for Education

Improving non- medical help for disabled students in higher education

Government call for evidence response

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Background

Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) is a grant which helps students with the additional costs that they may face in higher education because of their disability. DSA is not means-tested and does not have to be repaid. It is available to full-time and part-time students at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

To be eligible for DSA, students must: (a) meet the personal eligibility criteria for student finance within the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 and be studying a course designated for student support; and (b) have a disability as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

DSA is administered by the Student Loans Company (SLC), which determines students' eligibility and approves the support that can be funded through DSA. DSA can fund, for example, specialist equipment, travel, and non-medical help (NMH). NMH is the human support that some students need to enable them to access their studies. It includes roles such as British Sign Language (BSL) interpreting, specialist mentoring, and specialist study skills support.

In the 2024/25 academic year, the maximum DSA allowance for students who meet the criteria is £26,948 annually. There is also an uncapped allowance for travel costs.

In the 2021/22 academic year, £58.5m was spent on NMH support for undergraduate DSA recipients.

The Department for Education (DfE) ran a call for evidence from 10 April to 3 July 2024. This call for evidence was an initial evidence-gathering exercise intended to seek views on the current NMH system and roles and how they could be improved.

Executive Summary

The Department for Education ran a call for evidence on DSA-funded NMH between April and July 2024. We asked for views and experiences from various stakeholders, including (but not limited to) students, higher education providers (HEPs) and DSA NMH suppliers.

It is clear that NMH support from the DSA is highly valued. All respondent types were in agreement that this support is a benefit to disabled students while studying on their course and that it enables them to achieve in their studies. Respondents felt that it is vital that this support continues in order to ensure that disabled students are able to access and progress on their HE course on a level playing field with their peers.

Respondents also discussed the benefits of having a DSA model which complements the support that students receive from the HEPs, and some commented that the provision of a holistic package is especially successful when there is strong communication between HEPs and suppliers. Aspects such as DfE's qualification requirements, auditing process and registration process, and having knowledgeable needs assessors, were all raised as factors which contribute to a high quality level of support. HEPs who also deliver DSA NMH support were especially positive about their experiences and saw benefits of a streamlined process and better join-up of support as a result of delivering the support themselves.

On the other hand, concerns were raised about the current model. Respondents reported that the process of obtaining the support is often long, complicated and burdensome for students. In some instances, students are expected to liaise with several different suppliers. These issues mean that students often require the help of their HEPs either to navigate the system or to provide support while they wait for the DSA-funded support to be agreed, which places an additional administrative and financial burden on those HEPs. Some respondents also believed that the current medical model is not suitable for students with some conditions and that they would benefit from a more holistic approach.

Some respondents thought that the benefits of a HEP responsibility model would include a streamlined process and better join-up of support. Other respondents were not in favour of a HEP responsibility model and were concerned about the financial and administrative burden it would put on the HEP, as well as inconsistencies in students receiving different types and levels of support depending on the HEP they were attending. Other respondents discussed their preference for hybrid models, with those NMH roles that could benefit from a more holistic approach being allocated to HEPs.

We are considering any next steps following the call for evidence and will communicate these in due course.

Methodology

Responses

The call for evidence was open for 12 weeks, launching on 10 April 2024 and closing on 3 July 2024.

In total DfE received 595 responses to the call for evidence.

Table 1: Breakdown of respondents by individual or organisational responses

	Total	Percent
Individual	412	69%
Organisation	176	30%
Not answered	7	1%

Table 2: Breakdown of respondents by type¹

	Total	Percent
Charities	22	4%
Higher education providers	149	25%
Higher education providers who are also DSA suppliers	29	5%
DSA suppliers	127	21%
Prospective student in higher education	12	2%
Current students in higher education	124	21%
Graduates or leavers of higher education	48	8%
Parents²	21	3%
Other	23	4%
Multiple	40	7%

Analysis

The call for evidence collected data about respondents' views and contained 2 multiple choice questions followed by a free text box and 14 open-ended questions for written feedback. To ensure the views of all relevant stakeholders were reflected in the summary of responses, all submissions to the Call for Evidence were reviewed and included in our analysis.

Caveats

When reading this report, it is important to note that the results are only representative of those who responded to our call for evidence and cannot be taken to represent the views

¹ Some respondents selected multiple categories and therefore a new 'multiple' category has been created.

² This was not a specified category in the call for evidence; however, as a number of respondents stated that they were parents in the 'other' box, it was decided to treat them as a category in their own right.

of all individuals, professionals and organisations. The suggestions and recommendations made by respondents in this report represent the views of those who responded to our call for evidence – we recognise there may be alternative views on specific issues, and the inclusion of these does not mean they are endorsed or accepted by the Department for Education.

Next steps

The Government will consider the findings of this call for evidence to inform next steps.

Summary of responses

Current NMH system

Questions 1 – 6 asked respondents for personal information, such as their name and email address and whether they were happy to be contacted directly regarding their response.

What works well in the current NMH system

Question 7: What do you consider is working well for students in the current NMH system?

Question 8: What do you consider is working well for HEPs in the current NMH system?

Question 9: What do you consider is working well for DSA suppliers in the current NMH system?

The existence of DSA: Respondents discussed the value of DSA and the importance of DSA in ensuring that disabled students are able to access support that will help them progress through their higher education (HE) course and achieve success academically. Wording such as “invaluable”, “lifechanging”, “DfE should be proud of their accomplishment on DSA”, and “something the UK should be proud of” was used to describe DSA. Some respondents expressed how important it is that this funding exists and that there is guaranteed support for eligible students.

Wider package: It was also noted that a valued benefit of DSA for students is that non-medical help is a part of a wider package, and that DSA-funded software, travel, etc. all contributed to a good package where the different support types complement each other and ensure that students are able to access and progress in HE.

Quality: Quality was a prominent theme that was discussed widely, and many respondents felt that ensuring quality should be a priority. Respondents identified a number of factors which contribute to high quality support within DSA as a whole. Respondents noted that the current qualification requirements³, auditing and registration process were paramount

³ [nmh-qualifications-matrix-july2023-updated-sept-23.pdf \(slc.co.uk\)](#)

to ensuring quality and knowledgeable support workers who can design and deliver consistent one-to-one sessions to meet specific needs, with some responses specifically saying that they would be very concerned if these aspects were taken away from the DSA system. Quality amongst needs assessors was another factor, and it was noted by respondents that ensuring that needs assessors have a good understanding of disabilities and varying needs and are able to design a specialist package that best meets those needs thoroughly is an important part of the process. Having good quality support works well for students as it enables them to continue on their HE course. A number of HEP respondents felt that the existence of DSA reassured them that their students were receiving the support they needed, A number of supplier respondents stated that they felt proud that they were providing disabled students with high quality support that makes a difference to their studies, and that it was rewarding work.

Process: Student respondents noted that the flexibility of the process worked well. Students are able to change suppliers if necessary, can benefit from the range of support available, and are able to choose where, when and how they receive their support and whether they would prefer face-to-face or remote delivery. Respondents reported that the fact that the process is student-centred enables this to happen and that it is beneficial for students to have control of their support. For HEP respondents, HEPs receiving a copy of the DSA2 letter⁴, a helpful SLC advice line, independent recommendations from the needs assessors, and students being able to continue with their previous supplier if they move HEP all made it easier for HEPs to support their students through the DSA process. Supplier respondents felt that what worked well for suppliers was that they did not have to put much work into getting the support set up because it is easy for students to lead on the process. HEP responses mention that clarity in terms of who delivers what support is a big help for them so that they are clear on what it is that is expected of them and what is expected of the suppliers and that the boundaries are clear. Having one point of contact simplifies the process for the suppliers as they only need to contact SFE with any queries, and do not have to go through each HEP individually.

Independence from HEP: Another prominent theme was the value students placed on DSA being a system that was independent of their HEP. Respondents believed that because budget and support is not determined at an institutional level, all students are able to access high-quality support regardless of which course they are studying and which provider they are attending. A number of respondents believed as that many HEPs are overstretched and do not have the resources to provide the support that DSA supplies, the DSA system means that students are still guaranteed support despite their HEP's financial

⁴ SLC share a copy of the student's needs assessment report and DSA2 letter with the student's HEP, where the student has given permission for them to do so. The DSA2 letter sets out the support that has been agreed for a student.

position, resulting in fairness for all students. Another reason why respondents said they valued the DSA system being independent of HEPs was because in some instances students wish to keep their disability confidential from their HEP, and because they do not have to disclose any information to the HEP, they feel more confident that the university will not discriminate against them. The independence of DSA is also an aspect that is working well for the suppliers as they are able to set their own pay rates, recruit their own staff, offer specific training and develop their own systems. Some suppliers notes that the fee banding structure⁵, the qualification requirements, etc. help guide them to operate well and efficiently.

HEPs who are also DSA suppliers: Despite this, many respondents believed that the process is simplified and the quality of support is higher when HEPs are also the suppliers of the support. This is because HEPs have an oversight of the situation, the whole DSA process and their students' needs and are able to tailor a full package to support them. Staff in this scenario are often employed full time and are therefore given time to prepare for the sessions, join up with the general HEP disability support and train the academic staff on the students' disabilities, unlike staff from external suppliers, which means the overall support package is much better. Being suppliers themselves also enable HEPs to be flexible in being able to offer support for students in instances where they have a high number of students with a particular disability and would therefore warrant employing support staff in-house, or if they have very specialist courses where they believe the students require tailored support for that particular course. HEPs who deliver NMH support themselves feel confident that they are able to do this successfully.

Communication: Some respondents felt that where there is join-up and good communication between HEPs and DSA suppliers, this works well for students as they can receive holistic support where they would receive reasonable adjustment support from the HEP that complements the DSA support. Good communication also works well to ensure that suppliers are able to understand HEP and course nuances and tailor the support around those elements. Some respondents also saw the benefit of good communication between the HEP and supplier as a more practical element, as the HEP could ensure that the students are provided with a suitable place for DSA sessions to take place or the HEP could provide the supplier with information such as the students' timetables and/or course details which could help the supplier to better tailor the support that they deliver. In instances where the students consent to provide the HEP with details regarding their DSA support, such as sharing the DSA2 letter, the HEPs feel that they are able to help the student navigate the journey and access the support that they need.

⁵ Cost ranges are set for each NMH support role. DSA will not generally be payable for more than the maximum of each cost range.

Reduced burden: For most HEP respondents, what works best for them as a result of DSA is that the financial and administrative burdens on HEPs are lessened due to the DSA NMH system. Respondents noted that because of this, HEPs are able to use their available funds to ensure they meet their Equality Act 2010 responsibilities while also being able to address any gaps that exist for disabled students which are not otherwise within the remit of DSA (for example, international students who are not eligible for DSA). HEPs are reassured that their students are receiving high-quality support through DSA regardless of the HEP's financial situation and staff expertise. Some respondents did, however, criticise this and expressed concerns that the existence of DSA means that HEPs are able to take less responsibility for their disabled students. Other respondents had a different perspective again, and saw the link between NMH suppliers and HEPs as a way for HEPs to learn more about disabilities from the NMH suppliers and to receive guidance from them about different ways they can implement strategies/interventions to better support disabled students in their HEP.

Financial and reputational benefits: According to respondents, aspects such as high quality support, independent advice and a streamlined process all result in students receiving support that enables them to continue and thrive on their HE course. Respondents highlighted that this results in reputational and financial benefits for the HEPs, as students are more likely to graduate and achieve higher grades. Some respondents were concerned that without DSA there would be an increased risk of discrimination against disabled applicants due to the costs of providing support. It was also reported that suppliers benefit financially from the DSA's existence. Supplier respondents commented that the DSA gets paid directly and that they have regular income which sustains a successful business. Respondents also stated that suppliers value the flexibility of work in DSA. They mentioned that while some people valued consistent work and were able to receive that through DSA, others value flexibility, and the system meant that they were able to plan their work to ensure that flexibility.

What is not working well with the current NMH system

Question 10: What do you consider is not working well for students in the current NMH system?

Question 11: What do you consider is not working well for HEPs in the current NMH system?

Question 12: What do you consider is not working well for DSA suppliers in the current NMH system?

Awareness: The most prominent theme that emerged in the answers to this question was the process itself. Issues raised began from the beginning of the process, with responses saying that not all students are aware of DSA. Respondents commented that there is little

information available to students about applying, and who can apply for DSA support. Responses talked about the lack of awareness around DSA, not only of its existence as a whole but what the different roles are and how they can be used. Students are not often aware of what the support it is that they are getting entails and they feel very confused by the system.

Process: Once the process has begun, issues arise concerning the complexity of the process. Issues such as a heavy administration burden, long waits, lack of flexibility so that a student cannot access support when their condition is fluctuating, a lack of continuity from a dedicated assessor throughout their time at the HEP to check in on how things are going and a clunky website were all issues that were reported in the responses. Comments were also made about the letters, and that they are too lengthy and complicated for a student to understand. Some respondents reported that the process was so long and complex that students are often months into their course before they have support, and some are so put off by the complexity of what they need to do that they decide not to continue and go without support.

HEP support: The complexity of the process often means that HEPs are required to support students and help them navigate the system, fill in the forms and contact the suppliers, which puts additional administrative burden on the HEPs. Respondents felt that this burden on HEP staff was in addition to the struggles that they already have in terms of being over-stretched and under-resourced. Respondents discussed this in the context of the HEPs' obligations under the Equality Act 2010, noting that some were struggling to meet those obligations due to stretched resources and lack of funding, and that supporting students with DSA exacerbates the situation.

Multiple suppliers: Respondents reported that the fact that some students require more than one type of NMH support, and can be allocated different suppliers to deliver each type of NMH support, is an added complexity to the system. This was an element of the process which did not work well for suppliers either. Respondents felt that suppliers would prefer to provide the whole package of support so that they can be confident that the student is receiving a joined-up delivery, rather than trying to communicate with other suppliers to join up support.

Student responsibility: Respondents stated that the issues raised above in relation to the DSA process are made worse by the fact that it is the student's responsibility to drive forward the process. Many respondents commented that this was difficult for students with some disabilities such as specific learning difficulties (SpLDs), autism and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), either because they lacked awareness of the need to contact the suppliers or because they didn't understand what to do and found it overwhelming. This means that suppliers are unaware that they are expected to be delivering support. This results in a number of students disengaging with the support, and/or HEPs having to take on the workload and do it on their behalf. Comments were also made about students being bombarded with emails and not understanding the DSA terminology.

Supplier issue: There were elements of the process which did not work well for suppliers either. These issues included not receiving the DSA2 letter automatically from SLC and not receiving information such as the student's timetable from the student or their HEP, which delays beginning the support. The respondents also reported issues around too much paperwork including invoicing and timesheets. Some respondents noted that suppliers are not notified if a student changes suppliers, unless the students themselves let them know, so that leaves them thinking that they have work when they do not. A similar situation is when a student is allocated a certain amount of hours and the suppliers plan for that, but the student doesn't take up the hours. Respondents also feel that other suppliers who are not truthful about their capacity should be penalised, as they are often given the work further down the line to compensate for another suppliers' lack of capacity and this leaves them in a difficult situation of having to organise support quickly.

Region definitions: The definition of regions on the NMH supplier list is also causing difficulty within the system. For example, Yorkshire is defined as a region, but is a very large area, so if a supplier is based in one area of Yorkshire, it may be a couple of hours' drive from another area and therefore they cannot provide support there if they are recommended.

Allocation of work: Respondents are also concerned that needs assessors may have preferential suppliers and recommended them, rather than the suppliers who would suit the student best⁶. Some respondents reported that there was too much competition and that the market was saturated. It was also reported that HEPs who are also suppliers are not always chosen as external suppliers' quotes are lower; however, some respondents believed that HEPs are cheaper in truth as they do not charge VAT and needs assessors are looking at the net costs rather than the gross costs⁷. They do not believe that this is working well, as often the HEP will have already supplied the student with the support and therefore by changing suppliers there is a lack of consistency for the student.

Gaps in support: Respondents reported that students in some cases were being left with little or no support due to gaps in support available. These examples included that some students are not receiving sufficient BSL support due to the maximum cap, DSA is not extended to international students, and some support workers are reluctant to deliver face-to-face support. Some respondents also reported that there are some gaps in support for specific conditions such as some SpLDs and ADHD. When situations such as these arise, the burden falls to HEPs to fill in the gap to ensure that students are receiving the support

⁶ Guidance to the needs assessment suppliers on the selection of NMH supplier is available at [guidance-on-nmh-selection-sfe-v20.pdf \(slc.co.uk\)](https://www.slcs.co.uk/guidance-on-nmh-selection-sfe-v20.pdf). SLC and DfE monitor NMH supplier recommendations carefully.

⁷ SLC compare net costs, not gross costs, for NMH quotes. This reflects the amount being paid to the NMH supplier for the work.

that they need. The HEPs say that these situations are difficult to predict and therefore difficult to plan for, and can often be last minute without any pay for the work from DSA, which puts additional administrative and financial pressure on the providers.

Support workers: Respondents reported that lack of DSA support and HEPs having to provide that support is made worse by shortages of support workers more generally within the sector. One reason stated for this was that suppliers are struggling to find people who are qualified appropriately in line with DfE's requirements and a call was made for these to be reviewed. Respondents reported that there are instances where someone has provided high quality support to disabled students for a number of years, but now has to pay to go on courses in order to meet the requirements to deliver DSA work despite having relevant experience. Pay and conditions were cited as other factors that contributed to the struggle to recruit and retain support workers.

Financial burden: Respondents state that DSA can cause a financial burden for HEPs. This is often the case when HEPs are required to provide support for their disabled students which respondents feel should fall into scope of DSA but does not, as discussed above. It also arises when HEPs are required to fund a student's support when they reach the cap, most often for students who receive BSL support. This is especially difficult for smaller providers. Some HEP respondents stated that the funding given to HEPs through the Strategic Priorities Grant is getting less and less.

Poor communication: Although it was discussed under the 'what works well' section that good communication leads to good quality DSA support, some respondents reported on instances where poor communication lead to more difficult situations. In instances where join-up between HEPs and suppliers was poor, this caused the HEPs difficulty in ensuring that the support provided by the HEP and the suppliers were joined up and that the student was getting the support that they needed and that there were no gaps or duplication. Respondents reported that in instances where the external suppliers did not communicate with HEPs, they had little knowledge of the HEP and/or course, and therefore may be providing inaccurate advice to the student. Respondents say that it is particularly difficult to maintain relationships where there are many suppliers involved with providing support for their students. Other responses referred to more practical elements, such as the students not being given rooms in which to have their DSA sessions in the HEPs.

Medical model: The requirement for a diagnosis and medical evidence in order to access DSA was raised as an issue for some students by respondents. This was particularly true for conditions where there is a long wait for a diagnosis, and calls were made for us to consider alternative evidence. It was also noted that not all students consider their difficulties to be a 'condition' and as a result do not see themselves as disabled, but still require support, and the medical model does not suit them. Respondents who were graduates or leavers of higher education also reported that a financial burden is put on students when trying to get medical evidence to confirm eligibility for DSA. For example,

students are sometimes required to pay for a diagnosis. One respondent commented that many GPs are charging to write letters or fill in DSA medical evidence forms.

Quality: Respondents raised concerns regarding the quality of support. Some respondents said that the quality of support can differ between suppliers, and that students are not always getting the high-quality support that they need. Some suppliers are also more reliable than others, and while some students may have a consistent individual working with them, others might have someone different turn up for each session, or some support workers might be late, etc. Complaints were also made about suppliers not knowing enough about the HEP and/or the course, which meant that they were unable to tailor the support for the student. Respondents admitted that they were aware of boundaries being blurred by suppliers and were worried about this. There were claims that support workers are ‘making their own job roles up’ and are being left to it, with, for example, some students receiving counselling support rather than the study-related support that is supposed to be funded under DSA. For HEPs, concern regarding quality extended beyond the sessions themselves and to matters such as safeguarding, where they felt that while they were able to manage recruitment checks such as enhanced DBS checks on their internal staff, they had no reassurance that any external staff accessing the HEP buildings were vetted to the same level.

Two-quote system: There were many concerns raised regarding the two-quote system⁸, which it was claimed led to questionable quality from suppliers due to suppliers needing to quote lower prices in order to obtain the work. Respondents stated that this results in suppliers not being able to pay their support workers fairly, which, along with poor working conditions and zero-hour contracts, make it difficult to retain their staff. Some suppliers reported that they are making a loss on DSA work as they are having to pay the support workers a higher wage than the funding that they are receiving. They feel that they cannot increase their quotes as that would result in not getting any work at all. Respondents also expressed that it was difficult for support workers as they are only paid for the time that they are with the students and not for the time they spend training, doing admin, preparing for sessions etc⁹.

⁸ Needs assessors are required to provide two quotes from any of the registered NMH suppliers. SLC then chooses the best value supplier that can meet the student’s needs.

⁹ The hourly rate quoted is expected to include any travel and preparation time.

Suggestions for improvements to DSA

Question 13: Do you have any suggestions for how the current NMH system could be improved?

Awareness: Some respondents noted that work needs to be done on raising awareness of DSA amongst students and what the process is. Respondents suggested that clear instructions and information should be provided because applying for DSA can be confusing. Information should also be available more readily on what types of support are available because some students may not realise that they could be provided with support.

Needs assessments: In terms of needs assessments, it was suggested that the needs assessor that conducts the assessment should be appointed as a first point of contact throughout the student's time at the HEP and check in to ensure that the support is going well throughout the course.

Suggestions were also made on the supplier list that NAs are made aware of suppliers' availability and geographical location changes in real time so that NMH suppliers are not being recommended work that they cannot supply¹⁰, as it can then take weeks then to find a new supplier and delay the process for the student¹¹. These respondents believe that making changes to this part of the process would result in a more efficient and quick process for the students to access support when needed. Suggestions were offered on the needs assessors choosing the suppliers who could offer the most appropriate support rather than the cheapest ones¹². Respondents also suggest that a HEP should communicate with the NA to say which suppliers they found preferable so that the students are recommended ones that the HEPs have a good working relationship with.

Suggestions were also made that students should be allocated a person who would be able to support them throughout the whole application process and help the student to make sense of what it is that they need to do to organise the support and act as a point of contact should the student require help. It was also noted that students should not be recommended any support that they do not need or do not understand. Other respondents

¹⁰ DfE expects needs assessors to confirm capacity and pricing with each of the NMH suppliers they are recommending before submitting the needs assessment report to SLC.

¹¹ DfE's expectation is that if an NMH supplier cannot put support in place within 14 days of the student contacting them, the student should be referred back to SFE.

¹² Guidance to needs assessors on NMH supplier selection is available at: [guidance-on-nmh-selection-sfe-v20.pdf \(slc.co.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-on-nmh-selection-sfe-v20.pdf).

would like to see smaller suppliers/sole traders being considered as equal to the larger companies by needs assessors.

Process: The process itself was also a prominent theme. Respondents believed that the process should be simplified and that there should be a way of tracking the application and process through a medium such as an online dashboard, so that navigating the system is made easier for students. Respondents also suggested that ensuring that the chosen suppliers get a copy of the DSA2 letters from SLC would mean that the burden on students would be reduced and that support could be arranged more quickly as suppliers would be aware that they need to organise it. Respondents also suggested that when situations arise where a student needs multiple NMH support roles, a supplier who can provide all of the support is chosen so that there is only one point of contact rather than the student having to manage relationships with many different suppliers. Requests were made by the respondents to make the letters clearer and for less jargon to be used so that students can better understand what is going on. Respondents also said that the suppliers should be expected to offer face-to-face provision (or at least be transparent regarding this matter)¹³.

Communication: Respondents believed that a better join-up between HEPs and the DSA system would improve the quality. This would enable HEPs to better support the students in a way that complements their DSA support and to ensure that students have rooms to access their DSA sessions. Some respondents felt that communication improved when the HEP was also the supplier, and that this results in a higher quality provision. Respondents also said that students should be made aware of the benefits of declaring their disability to the HEP so that they are able to support them and that NAs should discuss this with them during their assessment.

Some respondents feel that there should be more opportunities for disabled students to communicate with the HEPs and DfE to ensure that the student voice is prominent in any decision-making.

Quality: Respondents say that more should be done to ensure that NMH suppliers are providing high quality support. Some respondents took this a step further by highlighting a need for a new quality assurance system. Respondents who were graduates or leavers of higher education thought that the best way of ensuring good quality support would be to

¹³ DfE's policy is that it is a student's choice whether NMH support is delivered face-to-face (i.e. in person) or remotely (e.g. through video call). Students should be able to switch between face-to-face and remote support should they so wish. NMH suppliers must therefore be prepared to provide support either face-to-face or remotely, or a combination of face-to-face and remote support should the student choose blended support at any point in their studies. Further information can be found at:

[update-on-arrangements-for-remote-support ssin december-2021 final.pdf \(slc.co.uk\)](#) and <https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1941/update-to-policy-on-exemptions-from-providing-face-to-face-nmh-support ssin april-2022 final.pdf>.

source suppliers from internally at the HEP itself. Consistency was identified as another part of the quality that needs to be assured, with respondents highlighting that there should be regular contact between students and support workers, and more consistency in the recommendations of needs assessors and the allocation of support, particularly where a student has received interim support from their HEP and it would be best for the HEP to be assigned as their DSA supplier. Another suggestion was that if the student has received in-house support from the HEP while waiting for the DSA support, the HEP should automatically be chosen as the DSA supplier in order to ensure consistency. A few respondents felt that the HEP should be allowed to recommend a few suppliers to the needs assessors based on the ones that they have the strongest relationships with to ensure the best chances of a good join-up.

Two-quote system: Other respondents thought that the two-quote system would need to change in order for quality to be assured. A suggestion was made that each supplier should be paid a fixed rate for the support rather than providing quotes so that suppliers were chosen on the basis of quality and best fit for the student rather than the cheapest. Some respondents stated that where suppliers are not encouraging students to become independent so that they book more sessions, resulting in more pay for the suppliers, action should be taken to prevent this. Other suggestions included that the qualification requirements should be reviewed and that suppliers should be held accountable in situations where it is found that they are not providing high quality support. Other respondents raised concerns about the quality of support that is provided by sole traders. A couple of responses said that we should get rid of the agencies and keep a register of individual support workers instead as agencies take a chunk of the fees.

Finance: Suggestions were also made regarding finance issues. It was suggested that recommendations should be made on the basis of the gross cost and not the net cost. Many respondents said that the cap should be removed for students with higher cost support needs. Respondents wished to see DSA funding continue to be ringfenced and to increase. An idea was presented that a band system could be introduced where “lower need” conditions could be capped at a much lower cost, so that “higher need” conditions could then be extended.

Terms and conditions: Respondents felt that terms and conditions such as the pay rates, travel costs, qualifications and cancellation terms should be reviewed. Respondents reported that support workers who work for agencies lose quite a bit of money compared to working independently as the agencies will take a chunk of their fees. These respondents reported that these terms and conditions are making it very difficult for them to take on DSA work and that they do not feel that the pay they receive is reflective of their roles. Respondents suggested that these terms and conditions are reviewed and improved in order to recruit and retain staff. It was also suggested that DfE should advertise and provide training opportunities to encourage people to move into the sector, while another suggestion was that DfE should have a national register to facilitate the recruitment and vetting of new professionals.

Medical model: Respondents expressed their concern about the medical model and said that they would prefer a social model and that evidence should not be required for students to access support. In addition to the absence of medical evidence, respondents believe that adopting a social model would mean that DSA could offer a more holistic package of support which could include counselling, exam support, etc.

HEP responsibility: Many of the responses talked about the HEP's responsibility. Some answers said that the HEP should be given more opportunities to get involved with a students' DSA process, while others went further by saying that DSA funding should be given directly to HEPs so that they are able to manage it. Some suggested that HEPs could then enter into contracts with a couple of suppliers and manage those relationships themselves to simplify the process. A couple of respondents believed that the opposite would be best and that HEPs should not be given additional responsibility. Some other suggestions fell outside the remit of DSA as they talked about HEPs improving their disability support in general, such as educating lecturers and ensuring that learning is inclusive. Respondents called on DfE to review whether HEPs are delivering the support that is expected under the Equality Act 2010 and the Band 1 and 2 NMH roles¹⁴ to ensure that the basic provisions are in place. Suggestions were made about extending the join-up, with schools and UCAS sharing information ahead of the students starting at the HEP to help get support early.

Scope of DSA: Some respondents stated that DSA support should be open to more students, including international students and students on shorter courses.

Specific roles: Some responses referred to role specific ideas. These ideas are presented in more detail in question 20.

Other suggestions: Some other themes raised by a small number of respondents were to extend DSA support beyond studying (e.g. to include extra-curricular and social activities), ensure that safeguarding procedures are implemented consistently across all suppliers, undertake a review of the complaints process for complaints against the suppliers, develop a mechanism to receive consistent feedback on DSA, undertake a review of the procurement reform implemented in 2024 for assistive technology, assistive technology training and needs assessments before making any decisions on changes to NMH, look at how technology could enhance the provision of NMH, and ensure better transition support from school / FE settings.

¹⁴ From 2016/17 responsibility for providing less specialist non-medical help (largely the Band 1 and 2 NMH roles) moved from DSA to HEPs under their Equality Act 2010 responsibilities.

Fundamental Principle

Question 14: Do you consider it more important for a student to have an individual entitlement for more specialist NMH support or for a HEP to have overall responsibility for the whole of a student's NMH support?

Question 15: How do you think giving HEPs overall responsibility for the whole of a student's NMH support would affect the provision offered?

Question 16: Do you think a single approach will work for all students and HEPs?

Question 17: What do you think the potential equality impacts are of the individual entitlement model compared to the HEP overall responsibility model?

Table 3: Do you consider it more important for a student to have an individual entitlement for more specialist NMH support or for a HEP to have overall responsibility for the whole of a student’s NMH support?¹⁵

	Individual entitlement more important	Overall responsibility more important	No answer
All respondent types (n=595)	72%	12%	16%
Charities (n=22)	82%	4%	14%
Higher education providers (n=149)	68%	15%	16%
Higher education providers who are also DSA suppliers (n=29)	48%	21%	31%
DSA suppliers (n=127)	76%	11%	13%
Prospective student in higher education (n=12)	83%	8%	8%
Current student in higher education(n=124)	73%	12%	15%
Graduates or leavers of higher education (n=48)	71%	13%	17%
Parents (n=21)	81%	10%	10%
Others + multiple (n=53)	70%	11%	19%

Nearly three quarters of the respondents believe that an individual entitlement model is more important than a HEP responsibility model. HEPs who are also DSA suppliers were most in favour of a HEP responsibility model, while charities and prospective students were least in favour of the HEP responsibility model.

¹⁵ Note: percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding

Table 4: Do you think a single approach will work for all students and HEPs?

	Yes	No	No answer
All respondent types (n=595)	17%	74%	9%
Charities (n=22)	14%	77%	9%
Higher education providers (n=149)	18%	70%	12%
Higher education providers who are also DSA suppliers (n=29)	24%	72%	3%
DSA suppliers (n=127)	4%	83%	14%
Prospective student in higher education(n=12)	33%	66%	0%
Current student in higher education (n=124)	19%	68%	13%
Graduates or leavers of higher education (n=48)	8%	77%	15%
Parents (n=21)	24%	76%	0%
Others + multiple (n=53)	13%	83%	4%

Around three quarters of the respondents do not think that a single approach would work as a DSA model. DSA suppliers and other respondents felt the most strongly about this while prospective students and HEPs who are also DSA suppliers were most in favour of a single approach.

The free text answers to these questions are summarised below.

Hybrid model: Some respondents talked more generally about their thoughts on hypothetical situations, such as hybrid models, where the HEP develops an inclusive culture while the individual entitlement continues to exist. Another respondent said that a procurement model similar to the recent DSA changes could work in order to achieve a balance of administrative and cost efficiencies while also ensuring that students continue to receive individualised support. Other suggestions included that both models could exist and that the students could choose which one they prefer or that students with “high needs” conditions could continue to receive an individual entitlement, while other conditions could be more suited to a social model approach.

Wider package: A couple of respondents talked about the process and said that it would not be possible to adopt a single approach as students would still need to apply for their travel/software/accommodation support through DSA even if NMH operated differently, which would mean that an element of individual entitlement would still exist.

Benefits of the HEP responsibility model: Some respondents identified benefits to a HEP responsibility model. Firstly, HEPs would have oversight of the support that each student is receiving and could offer additional support to address any gaps from the NMH support. Secondly, the support could be better tailored to students' degrees and/or specialisms where needed and students would be less confused about where their support was coming from as it would all come from the HEP. Finally, some respondents believed that there would be better join-up as NMH staff employed by the HEP would have stronger relationships with the teaching staff compared to external suppliers and could therefore ensure that students have the lecture notes, etc., required. Other respondents felt that students would face a lower administrative burden as they would be better supported by the HEP and the system would be simplified, and that a better oversight of quality could be achieved along with a strengthened ethos of inclusivity. Some respondents feel that HEPs are already delivering Bands 1 and 2 NMH support successfully, and therefore have the experience that they need in order to implement more responsibility successfully. Respondents also saw financial benefits to the HEP responsibility model as middle-man costs would not be needed, and HEPs could direct funds to where they are most needed. They did however state that some HEPs may gain positive or negative reputations for their level of support and this could influence students when choosing a HEP.

Disadvantages of the HEP responsibility model: Other respondents disagreed and expressed concerns about HEPs being overstretched. Respondents believed that HEPs are struggling to deliver what is already expected of them, and that putting additional pressure on them would be too much to ask. Respondents also expressed concerns about the expectation of HEPs taking on additional responsibility relating to disability when they do not have the expertise in-house to do so; some respondents said that staff at HEPs are academic experts, not disability experts. Comments were made about the quantity of students requiring support, and that it would be impossible for HEP staff to come to know them and understand them at the same level as current NMH support workers do as there are simply too many to manage. Respondents noted that historically, funding for HEPs has been cut, and they expressed their concerns that this could be the case if DfE moved the responsibility to HEPs, leaving HEPs in a difficult position of trying to continue to offer the support but with reduced funding. Some respondents were worried that HEPs would be more likely to reject disabled students due to financial costs. Others felt that even if HEPs were given sufficient funding, they would not utilise it as they should and that the funding would be used for other purposes. It was claimed that decision-makers in HEPs have little understanding of disabilities and therefore are not best placed to be deciding on where the budget should go. Other respondents said that in order to save on costs, HEPs might use

technology in place of human support and this again would compromise on the quality of support received by students.

Meeting specific needs: The majority of the respondents stated that they believe that the individual entitlement model is the most important. One of the reasons for this is the ability to tailor the support to the student's individual needs. Respondents stated that all students have different needs, both in terms of their disability and in what and where they are studying and therefore need support that reflects those specific needs. Suppliers believed that disabled students need a consistent support worker who can sit down with them over a period of time to understand their needs and tailor those strategies specifically to those needs in order for this support to be successful. Respondents did not believe that HEPs would have the ability to tailor the support in the same way as external suppliers can.

In addition to students having various needs, respondents stated that all HEPs are also different, and that each HEP will be different in things such as size, culture, different specialities and budgets, meaning that one approach would not benefit all HEPs as they also need to work in ways that suit them. Respondents believe that all HEPs are on differing journeys towards becoming inclusive environments and are currently at different stages so cannot be treated the same.

Inequalities: Respondents commented that HEPs with more resources would be able to provide better support than those with fewer resources, which means that students studying at some HEPs would receive better support than others. Some respondents believed that inequalities would exist between different disabilities because HEPs would prioritise students with high needs (such as VI support and BSL interpreting) on the grounds that they are most in need and that would result in students with "lower needs" going without support. On the other hand, other respondents felt that HEPs might prioritise quantity and target funds at support such as study skills, leaving deaf and VI students without support. Some respondents reported that this inequality already exists following the reforms of the Bands 1 and 2 roles in 2016 as HEPs are not spending the money that they are given for disability support on that.

Concerns were raised that inequality would also lead to fewer students receiving support and that they might need to pay for support themselves, which isn't feasible for students from a low socio-economic background. Respondents state that disabled students from a lower socio-economic background would be disadvantaged by a HEP model as their personal support network may be less able to navigate the system, and that students from wealthier background could benefit from 'parents who shout the loudest' should the need arise where students are having to fight to receive support in HEPs that are stretched.

Student autonomy: Respondents were concerned that autonomy would be taken away from the student and that they would no longer be in control of their support if the support moved from an individual entitlement model to a HEP responsibility model. According to these respondents, this would mean there would be less freedom for students to change

their suppliers if the original supplier did not work out. Some respondents also said that they were concerned that students would lose their flexibility of support (in terms of being allowed to choose when the sessions happen and whether they are face-to-face or remote, etc.) if the support was provided by the HEP. Respondents stated that disabled students would not be able to choose the HEP or course of their choice due to needing to choose the HEP with the best disability support and that this would mean inequality in choice compared to their non-disabled peers. Confidentiality was another prominent theme, with concerns raised regarding students having to disclose their disability to their HEP if the HEP were responsible for their support. This could also present in students' choice of HEP, where students feel that they must choose a HEP based on the disability support rather than other factors. Others talked about the importance of encouraging students to become independent whilst at their HEP and that being able to organise their own support helps with that.

Implications: Respondents suggested that having HEP responsibility rather than an individual entitlement could result in a higher drop-out rate amongst students. They stated that the support would not be sufficient, meaning that disabled students would be more likely to leave higher education as they would not be able to complete their degrees. Other respondents said that this move to a HEP responsibility model would have consequences for the supplier sector and that NMH suppliers would go out of business and support workers would lose their jobs.

Equality impact assessment: While the general consensus was that the individual entitlement has a positive impact on disabled students, and a HEP model could result in negative impacts for disabled students, due to the benefits and issues of the models discussed above, there were some other differing schools of thought. Another respondent made the point that international students would be on a par with their home student peers should this change be implemented as they would then all be accessing the same support.

NMH roles

Question 18: Are some of the existing DSA-funded support roles more suited than others to be delivered by HEPs? If so, which roles?

Many of the respondents were very clear that they did not believe that any of the roles currently funded through DSA should be delivered by HEPs.

Study Skills/Mentors: The majority of the respondents who did specify roles said that study skills mentoring roles would be best suited to be delivered by HEPs. Reasons for this included that they have a high rate of students who need them (and therefore human resources planning would be easier as they are needed on a frequent basis), and also that they are roles that are quite closely aligned to what HEPs are already offering. The responses also noted that a good understanding of the HEP and course and having a good join-up is important for the quality of provision in these roles. However, these were suggested with the caveats that they must be adequately funded, with that funding ring-fenced only for the purpose of this support.

Deaf/VI related roles: Many respondents also referred to Deaf/VI disability related roles. Respondents say that they would be well suited to being delivered by HEPs because sighted guides and mobility trainers need a good knowledge of the HEP, the course and the timetable in order to conduct those roles. Other justifications were that HEPs are already paying for any provision beyond the cap, and therefore it would be simpler if they had oversight of the whole provision. Others say that it is possible that more than one student might require BSL in the same lecture, and that they could then use the same interpreter and HEPs would be in a better position to co-ordinate this. Respondents also stated that people who deliver deaf/VI related roles are already trained and this doesn't need to be arranged by the supplier, so this would make it easier for HEPs to recruit to these roles.

Specialist Notetakers: While some respondents did note that specialist notetakers would be well suited to be delivered by HEPs, the majority of these respondents did not explain why. Of those who did give reasons, these included that technology could do some of this work, that HEPs could coordinate their timetables so that multiple students could benefit, and that these are the least specialist of the DSA-funded roles and require the least qualifications to deliver the support.

Other: Some respondents said that many roles, if not all, could be delivered by HEPs, as some are already doing this successfully. Other respondents said that roles which could work with multiple students at the same time would also work well under a HEP system. Others argued that while roles could be delivered under a HEP system, some difficulties could arise, especially for smaller providers, that it would take a long time to scale up so that HEPs had these support workers in place, that they would need significant funding in order for it to happen, and that they might still rely on outsourcing. Respondents also

caveated that HEPs would need to be held to account on the quality of their support if they were to deliver some roles themselves.

Question 19: Are there any DSA-funded NMH roles that you consider are no longer needed, or should be adapted?

A significant proportion of the respondents said 'no'. Some respondents called for a formal review of all the roles to be conducted.

Study Skills/Mentors: The majority of suggestions related to the mentoring and study skills roles. Some respondents were of the opinion that the study skills role and the mentor role should be merged, as they felt that the boundaries between the two were often blurred and a duplication of support was given, and also that students felt fatigued by having to attend two different sessions. Other respondents said that the study skills and/or mentor roles should not always address only one disability, because often students have more than one disability; for example, students with autism and a mental health condition would benefit from having a support worker who dealt with both at the same time rather than two different ones. Many calls were made for an ADHD-specific role, and for the SpLD roles to be broken up in order to be tailored to all types of SpLD such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. A couple of respondents called for a review of the role definitions to be undertaken because they believed that some of the support had become too generalised and not specific enough to study in HE. Respondents believed that the sessions should not be clinical or therapeutic in nature. Some respondents believed that study skills/mentoring sessions could be delivered as group sessions, as many students require the same support.

VI-related roles: On VI-related roles, respondents said that more support was needed for VI students, while another said that it was unclear what a mobility trainer's role is. The remaining respondents said that VI support needed to be made more reliable and the shortages, etc., be addressed.

Deaf-related roles: In regards to deaf-related roles, some respondents said that speech to text reporting (STTR) and re-speaking was no longer needed, while another felt that lipspeaking could integrate with a BSL interpreter and that a STTR could integrate with a specialist notetaker. Respondents said that they rarely saw lipspeaker, STTR and respeaking being recommended. Respondents also said that the terms and conditions for BSL interpreters need to be reviewed in order to recruit and retain staff.

Generally, respondents stated that all interpretive roles should be monitored due to technological advances.

Specialist Notetakers: In terms of notetakers, a few respondents recognise the development of technology and feel that technology could perhaps be used instead of notetakers. A couple of other respondents steered their answer in a different direction and

felt that specialist notetakers should be extended to all disabilities, as there are students with ASD who struggle to write along with physical disabilities¹⁶.

Assistive technology training: A few respondents referred to assistive technology training. One acknowledged that although there is a low take-up of it from students, they think that there is much value to it, especially as technology develops, and that it should continue to be promoted. Another respondent made note of the fact that not many people are able to deliver specific technology training on software products for VI and deaf students, and that this means that support is delayed.

Question 20: Are there any NMH roles not currently funded by DSA that you think should be?

Some respondents stated that no more roles need to be created for DSA.

Study Skills/Mentors: Many respondents thought that the mentoring and study skills roles should be broken down further in terms of different conditions. This included having an ADHD-specific role, breaking SpLD down into dyslexia, dyscalculia and dyspraxia, and including different types of ASD and physical conditions. Some respondents thought that there should be study skills and mentoring support workers available who have a better understanding of deaf and VI students so that they are able to deliver the support via BSL for example.

Whole HE experience: Suggestions were also given regarding a role which would support students with their university experience outside of their study (e.g life skills and extracurricular activities), to ensure that they are able to experience the whole HE experience.

Notetakers: Some respondents expressed a need for specialist notetakers for all disabilities, not just VI and HI conditions.

Medical support: Some respondents called for medical support such as therapists, counsellors and mobility assistance to be funded through DSA.

Technology: Other respondents thought that more use should be made of technology, such as having electronic notetakers and using AI to enhance support.

¹⁶ DSA only funds specialist notetaking for deaf and visually impaired students. Responsibility for basic note-taking was transferred from DSA to HEPs from the 2016/17 academic year as part of their Equality Act 2010 responsibilities.

Bands 1 and 2 roles: Many of responses talked about the need for Bands 1 and 2 roles to be funded by DSA again. These include roles such as general notetaking, proofreading, scribing, laboratory and library support etc. Points were made around confusion from students who do not understand the difference between DSA support and support provided by the HEP.

Disability advocates: Some of the current students who responded believe that disability advocates were needed. They highlighted that students needed someone to advocate for their support as many find it difficult to do it themselves. Others believe that having in-house needs assessors would also be beneficial to the system.

Question 21: Have you experienced any issues with specific NMH roles, and if so what are those?

Some respondents reported that they had had no issues with specific roles.

Deaf and VI related roles: Some respondents noted that shortages in deaf and VI roles are an issue. This was put down to pricing issues and terms and conditions not suiting their ways of working (requesting to be paid for half a day, and having two people signing for long periods of time, etc.). It was also noted that terms and conditions could vary by supplier, and therefore there were inconsistencies in this. One respondent highlighted that this resulted in students having their support cancelled or rescheduled at the last minute. Some respondents talked about their experiences of having to use assistive software in place of a VI/deaf support worker due to the shortages. Suppliers reported that agencies are struggling to retain staff due to the changes to the IR35 rules.

The expense of BSL interpreters was also mentioned as an issue, as the cost is often more than the maximum annual DSA cap and HEPs are left to pay the remainder of the support. An issue was raised regarding a situation where there is more than one supplier being used in order to meet the requirements of the student's timetable and the student is close to reaching the maximum cap; the supplier who gets the invoice in first is paid, but the other is left in limbo while they wait for the HEP to deal with the bill. Some respondents noted that shortages were sometimes worse in some geographical areas.

Study Skills/Mentors: A few issues were raised around mentor and study skills support. One respondent said that it was not clear what boundaries existed around their roles, and due to professional body requirements, this can sometimes result in therapeutic support being provided and SSP support workers being used as proof-readers rather than teaching study skills to the students. Practical issues also exist in regards to professionalism; it was reported that some support workers are going to the students' accommodation due to lack of space on campus. Concerns were raised about support workers transgressing

professional boundaries, with one current student reporting that their support worker offered them a cure for their ADHD.

It was also raised that it was difficult to provide support for students whose disability didn't fall within the remit of the existing mentor/study skills roles, such as ADHD students. Students with multiple needs found it difficult to attend sessions from multiple support workers (e.g having specialist mentoring for autism and for mental health), and believed that one support worker with an awareness of all conditions would suffice. Respondents felt that the number of mentoring and study skills hours should be capped as students get too reliant on the support workers and those workers may encourage that relationship as it means that they get paid for more sessions than the student needs. Some respondents reported that sessions were of poor quality as the support workers did not have knowledge of the providers or courses.

Notetakers: Different issues were raised in regards to specialist notetakers, with some providers saying that notetakers were not meeting students' needs, such as providing handwritten notes for VI students who require digital ones, and taking too long to get the notes to the students. A couple of respondents said that there is a shortage of specialist notetakers, while one respondent said that qualifications were a barrier for experienced staff who could provide specialist notetaking support.

General observations: Many of the respondents discussed issues relating to support workers, but did not specify which roles they were referring to. Students specifically highlighted that the individual supporting them was not trained in their disability, or university course, so they were not helpful. They highlighted that there were not enough hours available for them to utilise their support, or not enough staff to provide them with the support they needed. Poorly trained staff was highlighted as an issue by some respondents, who said that the support worker they received did not have the knowledge required to support them properly. In-person support was highlighted by many respondents as being needed. They commented that online support was not beneficial for them, and more in-person support would be helpful. They stated that there was high staff turnover, meaning that students have to keep repeating what support they need, which can be stressful and time-consuming for them.

Other respondent types also reiterated that the lack of face-to-face provision is a big issue, and that students are unable to access it in many cases. Training and/or qualifications was another issue that was raised generally without references to a specific role. Some providers believe that having to be qualified is a barrier preventing some people from being able to become DSA support workers, as despite having the experience instead they are not able to take on DSA work. Another response said that training varies between providers, and therefore support workers are of differing quality. There were differing views on the level of qualifications, with one provider saying that they are too difficult (making specific reference to a PGCE), while another said that there is not adequate training for autism as the current training is too general to be able to meet students' differing needs.

Question 22: Do you have any other comments on DSA-funded NMH support?

In this question, respondents discussed the value of DSA, concerns about the differing quality between suppliers and their wish for more funding to be allocated to DSA. Other respondents wished to share their view on the HEP responsibility model and changes that could be made to the existing model. All of these points have already been discussed in detail elsewhere in this document. Some comments were made about the call for evidence itself. These comments include that we need more data to inform any changes and should speak to students about their experiences to help inform this data, and that this call for evidence was issued at a difficult time of year for staff and students. Respondents also called on us to listen to disabled students to understand what support is needed and consult more closely with them. They highlighted that students know what support they need and that therefore we should work with them by implementing what they suggest will benefit the system.

Annex A

Purpose of DSA-funded NHM roles

This annex sets out, for reference, a description of the purpose of each of the NMH roles currently funded through DSA. This was also provided in the call for evidence document.

Sighted Guide

A sighted guide may be required to assist a student with visual impairment to navigate the campus and may be required for all or part of each day the student needs to attend the university. This role's objective is to support the physical attendance at lectures, tutorials, workshops etc. and not to support with accessing the information that is delivered.

Sighted guides must have good people skills and familiarise themselves with the student's routes around campus. They should have the skills and competence to work effectively at the direction of the student and have knowledge of sighted guide techniques and how to keep the student safe.

Lipspeaker

This support is provided to convey a speaker's message to lipreaders accurately using unvoiced speech. The support worker is required to work flexibly with an individual deaf student in lectures, workshops, tutorials, etc. Lipspeaking is provided by qualified and trained Lipspeakers who should understand how deafness affects learning in the HE context.

Specialist Notetaker

Specialist Notetaker - Deaf (SN-D)

There are a range of specialist notetaking options which can be provided for deaf students. DSA study needs assessors should discuss with the student which option will be most appropriate to enable them to access their course. This role is different from Specialist Transcription which is no longer DSA-fundable other than by exception.

The primary requirement of this support is to make a comprehensive set of notes to meet the needs of the student for access, review, and revision purposes.

The notetaker may be either a manual notetaker (handwritten notes or handwritten notes that are later typed) or an electronic notetaker. The notetaker will make a comprehensive (although non-verbatim) typed (electronic) or hand-written record of the content of lectures, seminars, discussions, etc. in the student's preferred style and format.

Electronic notetaking can sometimes involve a trained operator using a standard laptop and specialist software (e.g., NoteEd®, Speedtext® or Stereotype®) which enables them to provide summary notes. Many electronic notetakers prefer to use standard software packages which are accessible by the student, e.g. Microsoft Word, Google Docs, etc. However, this will differ for some courses. For example, students studying science, technology, engineering, and mathematical subjects (STEM) may prefer notes to be produced in LaTeX.

The support worker uses their own laptop.

Some students may wish to receive the information simultaneously on their own computer using specialist software or using Google Docs/MS Teams via an internet link.

If practicable in the context of the HEP's teaching arrangements, electronic notetaking may be delivered remotely. The notes can be sent to the student within a specified time frame or will be saved by the student at the end of the session.

Specialist Notetaker - Vision Impairment (SN-VI)

For visually impaired students there are now many forms of assistive technology that can provide some support in this area and may be considered as an alternative.

Assistive technology may enable students to become independent, autonomous learners in many cases and therefore should be considered first where a particular barrier exists and where assistive technology would fully meet the student's notetaking needs. DSA study needs assessors should discuss with the student which option will be most appropriate for them to gain access to their course. This is different from Specialist Transcription.

The role of specialist notetaker for visually impaired (VI) students is to produce a comprehensive set of notes in an accessible format, in accordance with the working preference of the student for access, review, and revision purposes.

The support worker uses their own laptop.

Some students may wish to receive the information simultaneously on their own computer using specialist software or using Google Docs/MS Teams via an internet link. Notes will most commonly be provided in document format e.g. Microsoft Word or Google Docs, but this will differ for some courses. For example, students studying science, technology, engineering, and mathematical subjects (STEM) may prefer notes to be produced in LaTeX. These notes should be formatted using a style sheet, with a clear heading structure to enable the student to navigate the document using assistive technology. Notes should include the interpretation and description of any visual information presented in the lecture. The NMH provider should aim to provide a specialist notetaker with the most appropriate skills for the student's needs (e.g. proficiency in mathematical symbols).

For visually impaired students who use Braille, the laptop could be linked to Braille reading equipment. For example, typed information can be converted into Braille by the student if they have the appropriate software/hardware and the notes have been prepared properly using a style sheet.

If practicable in the context of the HEP's teaching arrangements, electronic notetaking may be delivered remotely. Notes can be sent to the student within a specified time frame or will be saved by the student at the end of the session.

Speech to Text Reporter (STTR)

STTR involves a trained operator using a specialist chorded keyboard system and software to enable them to listen to speech and transcribe the text verbatim. The text is instantly displayed on a screen at 200-300 words per minute with an accuracy of 97-99% for the student. This support is available for deaf and hard of hearing students but should only be recommended where:

- a verbatim record is needed to enable the student to interact with others or to follow a session (for example, a tutorial where it is important to capture discussions in real-time), and
- the student has a high fluency in English.

Students who use British Sign Language are unlikely to require STTR in lectures, as they will be concentrating on the BSL delivery of the lecture. However, they will still require notes to be delivered by specialist notetakers trained to take notes for deaf and hard of hearing students.

STTR is not a standard recommendation for deaf and hard of hearing students and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. STTR can be provided remotely, if practicable in the context of the HEP's teaching arrangements.

Respeaking

Respeaking involves a trained operator listening to speech and simultaneously 'respeaking' this to provide a verbatim, real-time transcription of lectures, tutorials, etc. by using trainable voice recognition software. Text is provided to the student via a computer screen in a similar manner to Speech to Text Reporting (STTR), and a full print-out of the text is available at the end of the session should this be required.

This support is available for deaf and hard of hearing students but should only be recommended where:

- a verbatim real-time record is needed to enable the student to interact with others or to follow a session (for example, a tutorial where the student needs to interact with the tutor), and

- the student has a high fluency in English.

Students who use BSL are unlikely to require respeaking in lectures, as they will be concentrating on the BSL delivery of the lecture. However, they will still require notes to be delivered by specialist notetakers trained to take notes for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Respeaking is not a standard recommendation for deaf and hard of hearing students and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Respeaking can be provided remotely, if practicable in the context of the HEP's teaching arrangements.

Mobility Trainer

The Mobility Trainer provides a professional assessment of the campus location and then conducts a time limited programme of training. This training is particularly applicable for blind or visually impaired students who will require an individually developed programme based on the needs set out in their needs assessment report and who will need to learn with their coach safe routes around the campus. This support can also be recommended by exception for students whose disability means that they have difficulty with orientation, for example students who have significant difficulty with orientation because of acquired brain damage.

For ongoing support around campus, a sighted guide might be a more appropriate recommendation.

Specialist Mentor

Specialist Mentor – Mental Health (SM-MH)

The purpose of the Specialist Mentor (SM:MH) role is to support students in accessing their HE studies by:

- Supporting students in understanding what is required of them academically in higher education.
- Identifying barriers to the student's learning.
- Helping students to develop effective organisation and time management skills and strategies to manage their workload and deadlines in the presence of their mental health condition.
- Helping students with prioritisation and realistic goal setting, including producing plans of work and targets.
- Developing a support programme to facilitate the growth of the student's independence, reducing the need for support in the longer term.

The SM:MH must not offer any subject-specific support or tutoring, or any counselling or therapeutic support relating to the student's mental health condition. These are outside the remit of the SM:MH role.

It is expected that SM:MHs should have an understanding of different mental health conditions and the impact they may have on the student accessing their studies. This can include, for example, personality disorders, eating disorders, phobias, depression, anxiety, bi-polar disorder, psychosis (including schizophrenia), addiction, obsessive compulsive disorder, and identity issues. SM:MHs should also have an understanding and awareness of students with more complex presentations of multiple disabilities such as specific learning difficulties, long-term health conditions, or autism alongside a mental health condition.

SM:MHs should be alert to and follow up on concerns relating to the students they support. For example:

- The student is showing signs of disengagement or growing vulnerability (e.g. lack of attendance, late submission or non-submission of work, disciplinary issues, etc.).
- The student is showing warning signs such as: suicidal thoughts, actions, or plans; self-harm, including cutting; and threats of involvement in terrorism.

SM:MHs should be aware of the support offered by the HEP and by external organisations such as the NMH provider and make the appropriate onward referrals in a crisis.

SM:MHs should be able to understand and manage professional boundaries, establishing and maintaining productive working relationships with students while understanding the importance of professional record-keeping and confidentiality.

SM:MHs must work with students in a sensitive and empathetic manner and respond positively and calmly to students in distress. Professional listening, observation and communication skills are essential

Specialist Mentor – Autism Spectrum Conditions (SM-ASC)

The Specialist Mentor Autism (SM:ASC) role can be recommended for students with autism spectrum conditions (ASC), attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The purpose of the SM:ASC role is to support students in accessing their higher education (HE) studies by:

- Supporting students in understanding what is required of them academically in HE.
- Identifying barriers to the student's learning.
- Helping students to develop effective organisation and time management skills and strategies to manage their workload and deadlines in the presence of their condition.

- Helping students with prioritisation and realistic goal setting, including producing plans of work and targets.
- Developing a support programme to facilitate the growth of the student's independence, reducing the need for support in the longer term.

The SM:ASC must not offer any subject-specific support or tutoring, nor act as an advocate or counsellor. These are outside the remit of the SM:ASC role.

It is expected that SM:ASCs should have an in-depth knowledge and experience of autism and an understanding of the demands of study in HE. They should be able to recognise when there is a need to refer to other support services, both inside and outside the HEP.

Specialist one-to-one Study Skills and Strategy Support

Autism Spectrum Conditions (SS-ASC)

The Specialist one-to-one study skills and strategy support autism (SS:ASC) role can be recommended for students with autism spectrum conditions (ASC), attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

This specialist one-to-one support focuses on helping students to develop study skills and strategies to work effectively in a higher education context in the presence of their condition. It should be tailored to a student's individual needs, and support workers delivering this role should set out clear goals and timescales for achieving these goals. A reducing level of support to enable independence should be agreed, where it is appropriate.

Support workers undertaking this role should have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of autistic thinking and learning, together with an awareness of the strengths which students with these conditions can bring to a learning situation and the skills to help students make use of these strengths and overcome barriers to learning. An understanding of relevant assistive technology (AT) is also desirable.

Specific Learning Difficulties (SS-SPLD)

This specialist one to one support focuses on helping students to develop study skills and strategies to work effectively in a higher education context in the presence of their condition. This support can be recommended for students with an SpLD, and also by exception in cases where a student has another condition which has an impact on their learning similar to that of an SpLD (e.g. an acquired brain injury). This support should be tailored to a student's individual needs, and support workers delivering this role should set out clear goals and timescales for achieving these goals. A reducing level of support to enable independence should be agreed, where it is appropriate.

Support workers undertaking this role should have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the effects of SpLDs on language and learning in a higher education

context, together with an awareness of the strengths which students with these conditions can bring to a learning situation and the skills to help students make use of these strengths and overcome barriers to learning. An understanding of relevant assistive technology (AT) is also desirable.

British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreter

BSL interpreters are interpreters for students who are deaf and whose first or preferred language is BSL. The interpreter will attend lectures, seminars, tutorials, etc. with the student and will interpret from English to BSL or vice versa. Interpreters will use their skills and knowledge of BSL and English and their understanding of the differences between the two in order to receive information in one language and pass it on in another.

Interpreters must be regulated by NRCPD as either TSLI (Trainee Sign Language Interpreters) or RSLI (Registered Sign Language Interpreters) and should have an understanding of BSL interpretation in an HE context.

Specialist Support Professional – overview

This support is bespoke support for the individual needs of students with a sensory impairment which reflects their method of communication, educational history, and experience.

Support may include breaking down assignment briefs and English concepts, developing research and composition strategies, working on the structure and mode of presentations, organisation, time management, communication, etc., which should facilitate strategies for independent learning.

This support is not subject specialist support but support to enable access to the course. The SSP may also, where appropriate and with the student's permission, provide advice to the HEP's disability officers and teaching staff on the adjustments that could be made to create an inclusive learning environment for the student.

Deaf (SSP-D) / Deaf with BSL (SSP-D-BSL)

In addition to the overview above, the SSP role for deaf students uses appropriate communication strategies to enable access and understanding of carrier language (this is not subject-specific vocabulary), to support access to research sources and to support preparation for assignments. This support will include appropriate modification to allow for language of assignments.

Vision Impairment (SSP-VI)

In addition to the overview above, the SSP role for visually impaired students uses appropriate communication strategies to enable access to and understanding of the course, to support access to research sources and to support preparation for assignments.

The support provided by the SSP is bespoke to individual student's specific vision impairment. The student should be supported to develop strategies to overcome barriers to learning.

Multi-Sensory Impairment (SSP-MSI) / Multi-Sensory Impairment with BSL (SSP-MSI-BSL)

The support provided by the SSP-MSI role is bespoke to the combined vision and hearing impairments of the student (including deafblind students). The support worker uses appropriate communication strategies to enable access and understanding of vocabulary, and to support access to research sources and appropriate modification of the language of assignments.



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