



## *Students with Special Needs*

The following notes are intended to help you to think about the possible needs of students who have special needs, such as blindness, deafness, dyslexia or other medical conditions or disabilities. Reading these notes is not intended as a substitute for discussing with individual students what their needs are, and how their requirements can best be met. To know that a particular student is either blind or partially sighted is actually to know very little about what they are able/not able to do.

### **STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

The Department for Education and Skills defines additional support needs as "*any activity that provides direct support for learning to individual learners, over and above that which is normally provided in a standard learning programme which leads to their primary learning goal. The additional support is required to help learner's gain access to, progress towards and successfully achieve their learning goals. The need for additional support may arise from a learning difficulty or disability, or from numeracy or language support requirements.*" (Department for Education and Skills).

The Scottish Executive have, over the last decade, made a commitment to putting measures in place to support learners with additional support needs. There has been a movement towards the attitude that "*everyone should have the opportunity to learn irrespective of their background or personal circumstances.*" (Scottish Executive). All academic organisations welcome students with special needs into its learning environment and aim to provide high quality training for all who seek access to its courses.

The goal is to avoid unnecessary barriers for disabled people by making anticipatory

adjustments to its provisions and increase accessibility for all. Most colleges and universities are able to provide support, advice and guidance for students with a wide range of additional support needs and are committed to providing inclusive education in a safe and positive environment.

Students with special needs may feel that they cannot cope with learning without support, so it is essential that when they approach your organisation, you understand their needs and act in a friendly and welcoming way.

Furthermore, your organisation may be able to offer a variety of special arrangements which you must be familiar with and relay that important information to potential students in need of such support. This ensures that an early identification of needs can take place and both parties can be assured that all required reasonable adjustments can be made.

Taking a proactive approach to identifying and removing barriers is likely to result in improved services for everyone. You and your organisation should:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment of disabled students.
- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled and other students.
- Take steps to take account of disabled students' disabilities, even where that involves treating them more favourably than others.
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled students.

### **Disabilities**

As a guide, the definition of a 'disabled' person is someone who has (or has had) a physical or mental impairment which has an



effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities. That effect must be:

- Substantial (more than minor or trivial)
- Adverse
- Long term (it has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least a year or the rest of the life of the person affected).

Physical or mental impairment includes sensory, impairment. Hidden impairments include, for example, mental illness or mental health conditions, learning disabilities, dyslexia, diabetes and epilepsy. Also included are people with severe disfigurements and some progressive conditions. When considering disability, day to day activities are activities which are carried out by most people on a fairly regular basis. These can include impairments affecting:

- Mobility
- Manual dexterity
- Physical co-ordination
- Continence
- Ability to lift, carry or otherwise move everyday objects
- Speech, hearing or eyesight
- Memory or ability to concentrate, learn or understand
- Perception of the risk of physical danger.

#### **Possible adjustments required**

- Changes to course content and course delivery
- Changes to course assessments
- Providing learning materials in alternative formats
- Providing sign language interpreters or note takers in classes or interviews
- Ensuring a field trip or outing is accessible
- Allowing extra time for an interview with an applicant
- Ensuring that support will be available
- Talking through the process of the examination, in advance, with the student

- Providing handouts in advance
- Making materials available in electronic format

#### **Support services may include**

- Note taking (manual and electronic)
- Providing texts in alternative format
- Video transcripts
- Help in the library to access books, catalogues, photocopying etc
- Help in laboratories
- Mobility support
- Other practical support
- Communication support for students with hearing impairments
- Support on course trips or visits, where possible

### **FINANCIAL HELP**

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#### **FURTHER EDUCATION**

##### **Course fees**

- Students with special do not need to pay any fees for a full-time further education course, if they meet the residence criteria.
- Students with special needs do not pay tuition fees on part-time courses if their course is specifically for people with learning difficulties or disabilities.

##### **Learning Allowance**

- Disabled students, full or part-time, who have extra costs arising from their disability whilst at college can apply for an **Additional Support Needs for Learning Allowance**.
- This allowance is not income assessed, and the college decides the allowance amount that they can receive.
- They can apply for this allowance to meet disability-related study or travel costs. For example, students may need to buy



additional software, Braille paper, or have extra photocopying charges.

- They may also apply for extra rent costs they may have because of their disability.

### Study costs

- Students may also be eligible for an allowance to cover certain costs such as:
  - ◊ items that are essential to the course
  - ◊ items required for health and safety
  - ◊ mandatory study trips.

### Travel costs

- Students with disabilities may have extra travel costs. For example, if they need to travel by taxi rather than bus, or they cannot walk a short distance to college. Help with paying these additional travel costs is often available through the Additional Support Needs for Learning Allowance. However, if they receive the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA), they will be expected to use this to provide transport to and from the college.
- If they are unable to get funding to pay for their travel costs and they do not receive the mobility component of DLA, they may be able to get funding from the local social work department.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

### Course fees

- Students with special needs studying part-time higher education courses do not have to pay tuition fees if they receive an Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance.
- Students with special needs studying full-time for a higher education course will have their tuition fees paid by SAAS, provided you meet the residency conditions.

### Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA)

- If the student has a disability, they may be able to get extra funding from the DSA. This allowance is intended to cover any extra costs or expenses they have while studying, which arise because of their disability.
- DSA is not income assessed, and the amount they can get depends on what their needs are. DSA is not intended to pay for:
  - ◊ disability-related costs that they would have whether they were a student or not;
  - ◊ study costs that every student might have.

DSA is made up of three parts:

#### (1) Large items of equipment allowance

- ◊ This allowance is for specialist equipment students need to participate in the course and to benefit fully from it. The maximum amount available is £4,905 for the whole of your course (not per year).
- ◊ Any equipment bought with the allowance belongs to them and they do not have to return it when you finish their programme of study. The allowance can be paid at any time during their studies, as long as the total payments do not go over the maximum.

#### (2) Non-medical Helpers Allowance

- ◊ This allowance is for any course-related personal assistance they need in order to benefit fully from your course. This includes the costs of sign language interpreters, readers or a mobility enabler. DSA does not meet the cost of extra academic tuition, however, if they need specialist tutorial support that is specifically related to their disability, for example study skills support for dyslexic students, they may be able to claim the costs from this allowance.



◇ As payments are usually for helper's wages or costs, they are usually made in regular instalments, and can be paid to them or their helper. The maximum amount available for each year of your course is £12,420.

### (3) Basic Allowance

- This allowance is intended to cover any costs related to disability and study that are not covered by the other specific allowances. The maximum amount of this allowance is £1,640 per year. This allowance can pay for extra books or photocopying, extra costs of medically-certified special dietary needs, tapes and disks. It can also be used to top up one of the other allowances.

### Applying for a DSA

- Students can get an application form for DSA from SAAS. Once they have been accepted on the course and have a SAAS student reference number, they can then apply for DSA.
- To apply for DSA they need to provide evidence of their disability to SAAS. This is usually a letter from their GP, a report from an educational psychologist or a report from another relevant organisation.
- Distance-learning or part-time students may also be able to apply for the DSA. The maximum amount they can receive for both the basic allowance and non-medical personal help is in proportion to a full-time course, but the maximum amount for large items of equipment is the same as for full-time students.

### **Travel costs**

- Students with special needs may have extra travel costs because of their disability. If this is the case, they should apply for the full amount of their travel costs, preferably at the same time as they apply for any Disabled Students Allowance. They will need to provide SAAS with

evidence that they cannot use public transport for disability-related reasons, and give details of the additional costs with competitive estimates where possible.

- If they're unable to get funding from SAAS to pay for their travel costs, they may be able to get funding from the local social work department.

### **OTHER DISABILITY-RELATED SUPPORT**

#### **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)**

Every college or university has a duty under the DDA to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that the student is not placed at a disadvantage in comparison to non-disabled students. This is an anticipatory duty, which means that education providers should anticipate the general needs of disabled students rather than simply waiting until an individual requests a particular adjustment. Support might include:

- ◇ changes to the course delivery if the student has a visual impairment or are deaf or hard of hearing;
- ◇ providing learning materials in alternative formats if the student has dyslexia;
- ◇ full access to the physical environment, such as providing a car parking space and adaptations to buildings if the student has mobility difficulties.

#### **Personal Care Assistance**

- Personal care assistance is the practical help and support students need to go about their daily life, whether studying or not. The main source of help with personal assistance for daily living needs is the local social work department.
- As a disabled student, they have the right to an assessment of needs from the social work department. This is intended to establish their eligibility for services, what needs they have and which of these needs social work services are able to meet.



## BENEFITS

Due to their disability, students with special needs may be in receipt of certain welfare benefits.

### Incapacity Benefit

- Incapacity Benefit is for people incapable of work. This is a contributions-based benefit paid at a set rate. There is also a non-contributions based type of incapacity benefit for younger people. Incapacity Benefit gives people of working age a replacement income when they cannot work or look for work because of ill health or a disability.
- Students under 19 and studying 20 hours per week or less are eligible. Any hours of tuition or classes only for disabled learners are not included. Students studying more than 21 hours per week will not be eligible.
- Students over 19 may be eligible. However, once the Jobcentre Plus has been informed they may decide that the student is no longer 'incapable of work'. However, many people are able to study but are not able to work. This may be due to the flexible study and support arrangements that can be made in colleges or universities.

### Housing Benefit

This helps students with the cost of rent if they're on a low income. Full-time students with disabilities in further education may be eligible to claim.

### Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)

- Since April 2001, people have not been able to make a new claim for SDA. However, if the student is already getting

SDA, it will usually continue. This is paid if they have not been able to work for at least 28 weeks in a row because of ill health or disability.

- The effect of study on SDA is the same as that of Incapacity Benefit.

### Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

- DLA is a benefit for disabled people who need help with personal care or who have mobility difficulties. This is a set rate of benefit and is not usually affected by savings or other income. DLA has a care and a mobility component.

### Tax Credits

Disabled students may be eligible for Working Tax Credit.

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- How to break down barriers and involve students with special needs?
- How to avoid discrimination?
- How to promote equality in learning?
- What kind of student support is available in your organisation?
- Discuss how these issues may influence the way you engage with students

## FURTHER INFORMATION

- Local information
- [Learn Direct – students with disabilities](#)
- [LEAD Scotland](#)
- [Scottish Executive Funding](#)