



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

### **Improved stakeholder communications**

We received feedback from you that we need to engage with you more closely and increase the level of communications with you. Now that the Student Finance England services is operational, our engagement will focus on delivery performance and resolving issues as well as providing input to design and improvements to the service.

### **New Disabled Student Stakeholder Group**

We have a new Disabled Student Stakeholder Group which will review and advise on aspects of the operational delivery of specialist support to disabled students and has representatives from SKILL, NNAC, NADP, NASMA, NUS, AMOSSHE, ADSHE, ASASA, PATOSS, OU, DSA-QAG, SASC and BDA.

### **Open Day**

The first meeting of key members of this group was a DSA Open Day in April at our Darlington offices where our then Minister for Higher Education, the Rt Hon David Lammy invited representatives from disabled student organisations to discuss key operational issues regarding the delivery of student finance to disabled students with senior SLC management.

### **Continuing communications**

The group has met twice since the Open Day and discussed process and service improvements to our specialist support.

The outcomes of these meetings will be communicated using bulletins like this which will also be available on the practitioners' website.

### **Improvements to employee training**

The priority outcome of the DSA Open Day was the requirement to provide specialist training to our employees handling phone calls from disabled customers and the DSA processing team. This training will enable them to understand the requirements of disabled students and offer a better service to them.

SKILL, NADP, NASMA and NUS as well as other stakeholders are holding a motivational training day on 22 June for over 100 of our employees to help them better understand the needs of disabled student customers and the content will include an explanation of the social model of disability.

Additional training from BDA, SASC and ADSHE on dyslexia will be delivered separately. A film of the training will be made to roll out the training to other contact centre employees.

### **DSA Partner Seminars**

Over 350 people attended our five DSA regional events in Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle, Bristol and London throughout May. Our seminars gave us the opportunity to share and discuss the improvements we have made for DSA students for academic year 2010 / 2011 with practitioners from across England and the feedback has been positive. We are drawing on colleagues comments for next year's DSA seminars. Answers to frequently asked questions raised during the seminars will be on our practitioners' site by end of June.

### **Service Improvements for 2010/2011**

#### **Our people**

We are increasing employee numbers in our DSA team from 24 to a target of 47.

We are also helping those processing DSA applications to focus purely on this activity by removing administrative tasks, like invoice processing, to an administration team.

## Processing

- To speed up the processing of DSA applications, we are reducing the time taken to establish the applicant's eligibility and checking their evidence from a target of 20 days to a target of 10 days.
- We have removed the '10 hour rule' and removed the need for an independent learning plan for new and continuing students.
- Medical evidence – we no longer require a student with a medical disability to ask his or her doctor to explain the impact of the student's disability on their HE course.
- We will accept the recommendation from the Needs Assessment Centre for specific non-medical helpers, where there is clear justification. This will remove the need for the Needs Assessment Centre to provide two quotes in these cases. See our [Practitioners site](#) for more information.
- We will no longer challenge all recommendations on Needs Assessment Reports. We will continue to audit a sample of these reports.
- If an HEI provides a disabled student with interim non-medical support and the Needs Assessor subsequently recommends non-medical support in the student's report, the HEI will be reimbursed their costs in line with the recommendations in the report.
- We are reviewing and rewriting our DSA letters to students to improve our correspondence. We are involving our Disabled Student Stakeholder Group in the review and rewriting.
- The general allowance for consumables will not be pro-rated, even if the DSA application is not approved until after the start of the first term.
- All 2010 / 2011 DSA paper applications and evidence received is now on our imaging system which helps make our application processing faster, more efficient and provide better customer service.

## DSA Eligibility Notification to Higher Education Institutions

In response to requests from HEIs who attended our DSA Partner Seminars in May, we are looking at a new process for notifying HEIs of a disabled student's eligibility.

If a student authorises 'consent to share' on their application, we could then inform their HEI that the student is eligible to attend a Study Needs Assessment. We would confirm a student's eligibility to attend a Study Needs Assessment by emailing their HEI.

Please tell us the email address that we should use for these confirmations by **30 June** by emailing: [disability\\_adviser@slc.co.uk](mailto:disability_adviser@slc.co.uk) with the subject header: ELIGIBILITY EMAIL REQUEST – DSA

### Need to contact our disabled student team?

Here are our contact details for partners and practitioners:

**For disability practitioners at HEIs**  
email - [disability\\_adviser@slc.co.uk](mailto:disability_adviser@slc.co.uk)

**For Needs Assessment Centres**  
email - [access\\_centre@slc.co.uk](mailto:access_centre@slc.co.uk)

**For submission of Needs Assessment Reports via encrypted PGP**  
email - [needs\\_assessment\\_reports@slc.co.uk](mailto:needs_assessment_reports@slc.co.uk)

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

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

**For suppliers submitting invoices, invoice queries or specific student queries**  
email - [invoice\\_team@slc.co.uk](mailto:invoice_team@slc.co.uk)

### Feedback:

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

We are also reviewing our Practitioners website and welcome any feedback on what would be useful for practitioners in the DSA section of the website.

Please email any feedback to - [michelle\\_wickenden@slc.co.uk](mailto:michelle_wickenden@slc.co.uk)

More information for practitioners is available on our Student Finance England practitioners' website [www.practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk](http://www.practitioners.studentfinanceengland.co.uk)