

# Cylchlythyr | Circular

## Changes to support for English-domiciled disabled students from 2015/16 and 2016/17

**Date:** 20 November 2014  
**Reference:** W14/43HE  
**To:** Heads of higher education institutions in Wales,  
Principals of directly-funded further education colleges in  
Wales and other interested parties  
**Response by:** No response required  
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This circular provides information on the proposed changes to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for English-domiciled students recently announced and some potential implications of these changes for Welsh higher education providers.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please telephone us on (029) 2068 2225 or email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular provides information on the proposed changes to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) for English-domiciled students recently announced and some potential implications of these changes for Welsh higher education providers.
2. Disabled Students' Allowances are non-repayable grants that assist with education costs incurred by disabled students in relation to their higher education study. These grants can include the purchase of computers and assistive technologies, assistance with travel costs and provision of support workers where necessary.

## Background and policy context

3. For Welsh-domiciled students DSAs are part of the student support package provided by the Welsh Government to Welsh students via Student Finance Wales.
4. For English-domiciled students DSAs are provided by Student Finance England. Forthcoming changes to DSA support for English-domiciled disabled students announced by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will have implications for all UK higher education institutions accepting English-domiciled disabled students.
5. In April 2014, the then Minister for Universities and Science [announced proposed changes](#) to DSA affecting English-domiciled students accessing higher education. The changes are described as a 'rebalancing' in that they place greater emphasis on universities to discharge their duties under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments for English-domiciled disabled students, particularly in relation to non-medical help.
6. The key changes announced were as follows:
  - DSA will pay for higher specification or higher cost computers where a student needs one solely by virtue of their disability. It will no longer pay for standard specification computers or the warranties and insurance associated with them. It will no longer pay for higher specification and/or higher cost computers simply because of the way in which a course is delivered.
  - Items of computer equipment and consumables that have become routinely funded through the DSA irrespective of the specific needs of the student will no longer be covered.
  - Students with moderate to severe specific learning difficulties, as evidenced by assessments, will continue to receive support through DSAs, with institutions expected to make reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of students with a mild specific learning difficulty.
  - The most specialist non-medical help will be funded. Higher Education Providers (HEPs) are expected to consider how they deliver course

information to students and whether strategies can be put in place to reduce the need for support workers and encourage greater independence and autonomy for their students.

- The additional costs of specialist accommodation will no longer be met by DSAs, other than in exceptional circumstances.
7. The following changes will be implemented from the start of 2015/16:
    - Universities and higher education colleges will 'in most cases' have a duty to meet the additional cost of accommodation they or their agents provide for English-domiciled disabled students, although DSA will be available for the extra costs of private accommodation.
    - Disabled students will have to meet the first £200 of the cost of any computer and assistive software that they need because of their impairment.
  8. In September 2014, the Minister for Universities and Science announced that some of the proposed changes, set out in paragraph six above, have been postponed to 2016/17. This was following concerns expressed by the English higher education sector and other agencies that some changes originally proposed from 2015/16 would not allow sufficient time for universities to make additional investment where required. The announcement can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-education-student-support-changes-to-disabled-students-allowances-dsa-2>.
  9. From 2016/17, for English-domiciled students, including those studying in Wales, in most cases there will no longer be DSA funding for standard non-medical support such as note-taking, transcription, or library or workshop support, with UK universities expected to deliver their courses in accessible ways, so that only those English-domiciled students with the most specialised support needs will be able to claim DSA funding.
  10. **The changes, other than changes to non-medical help, will apply to all English-domiciled full-time, full-time distance learning, part-time and postgraduate students applying for DSA for the first time in respect of an academic year beginning on or after 1 September 2015.**

### **The position in Wales**

11. The proposed changes for English-domiciled disabled students place a greater emphasis on all universities to meet their statutory duty to disabled students under the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, these changes will impact on Welsh institutions which will be expected to invest in additional support for English-domiciled students.
12. We encourage Welsh institutions to consider the implications of these funding changes across the whole student experience, taking into account existing practice, provision and services and considering any potential

resource gaps that may need to be addressed. Some institutions will want to audit institutional teaching and learning facilities available for all students, regardless of their disability while others may want to review specific inclusive curriculum provision. We encourage institutions to promote their provision to disabled students, take advice from students and other parties and to share effective practice.

### **Future developments in Wales**

13. Within the current stakeholder engagement exercise on the [Welsh Student Support Regulations](#), the Welsh Government has proposed a technical change, which will be implemented from 2015/16, making the definition of disability explicit within the Student Support Regulations. The disability definition aligns with the Equality Act 2010 definition. **From 2015/16 Welsh-domiciled students who fall within this definition will be able to apply for DSAs.**
14. In making the definition of a disability explicit within the regulations the intention is that it becomes a 'finding of fact'<sup>1</sup> as to whether or not a student is disabled. Student Finance Wales will require evidence that a student has a long term condition (at least 12 months) which has a substantial (more than minor or trivial) impact on their day to day activity (including education). Guidance regarding how this will be done will be issued in due course.
15. Early in 2015, the Welsh Government will consult stakeholders on proposed changes to DSA funding in Wales from 2016/17, inviting comments on the impact of the changes and the current position in the higher education sector in Wales.

### **Further information**

16. For further information, please contact Jane Johns, Head of Widening Access and Inclusion, (tel 029 2068 2219; email [jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:jane.johns@hefcw.ac.uk)).

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<sup>1</sup> See the *Welsh Government – [Changes to be included in the Welsh Student Support Regulations for Academic Year 2015/16](#)*, p. 5