



**UK Research
and Innovation**

**UKRI DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCE
FRAMEWORK (DSA)**

**ADVICE FOR RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS AND
UKRI STAFF**

April 2025

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Introduction

1. UKRI runs a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) scheme for students funded through our grants, as the students we fund are not eligible for support from other DSA schemes. Our scheme works differently from DSA for undergraduates. This document sets out the framework for how it operates.
2. Funding for UKRI studentships is awarded to Research Organisations (ROs) on the understanding that they will provide the necessary equipment and facilities to enable students to undertake and complete their studentship project and training programme. In some cases, the RO will distribute funding to partner organisations that host their own students. The education provider (whether the RO or a third party) is legally required to provide reasonable adjustments to disabled students, as described in the [Standard Terms and Conditions of Training Grant](#) ("the TGCs"). Where the studentship is funded by a UKRI grant to which TGCs apply (and, by exception, other grant conditions), the RO can reclaim additional costs required to support students where these are allowed in this DSA Framework. "UKRI" includes all of [our councils](#).
3. This document provides information for finance officers, postgraduate officers, disability advisers, supervisors and UKRI staff. It sets out additional support available for disabled students funded by UKRI and on the arrangements for seeking DSA funds from UKRI. The document does not seek to identify all reasonable adjustments that may be available to a student, nor does it identify all cases where extra costs may be incurred in studying because of a disability. ROs should therefore be mindful of their own legal duties in respect of disabled students. ROs may also be able to support disabled students using leave and other entitlements set out in the TGCs.
4. UKRI's councils operate a harmonised process for DSA, which is detailed in this framework. Unlike the undergraduate DSA schemes, ROs are required to arrange the assessment of need and to provide adjustments for the student when they are required. ROs can claim back eligible costs at the end of the academic year¹ by submitting a completed DSA claim form by 31 October each year. It is the RO's responsibility to ensure that the costs committed are eligible for UKRI funding.
5. In this framework, disability has the same meaning as in the Equality Act 2010 (in England, Wales and Scotland) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (in Northern Ireland) ("the Acts"). The Acts state that a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A simple guide to the meaning of disability is available from the [Equalities Advisory and Support Service](#) while the [UK government has published more extensive guidance](#). It is worth noting that the definition is broad and can cover impairments caused by a very wide range of health conditions.
6. UKRI's overall concern is to ensure that disabled students who wish to undertake postgraduate study are encouraged by their RO to do so, know where to go for advice, and receive the necessary support.

¹ Note: For the purpose of DSA claims the academic year is defined as 1 October to 30 September

7. It is the responsibility of the RO and partner providers to ensure that buildings, facilities and equipment are as accessible as possible and DSA will not cover these costs. Furthermore, DSAs are not intended to cover costs that the student would incur irrespective of whether or not they were undertaking postgraduate study. The social services department should continue to provide assistance towards personal care costs that will be incurred irrespective of whether or not the student is undertaking a postgraduate course. The RO must therefore satisfy itself that a student will by reason of a disability incur additional expenditure in undertaking their postgraduate study. UKRI will not cover costs that apply to all students undertaking the course or costs that would apply for any student undertaking a particular research programme. UKRI will not provide funding for equipment or resources that are already being provided or should be provided through another route.
8. All disabled students funded by UKRI are eligible for UKRI DSA, irrespective of whether they are a home student or an international student.

Accountability

9. ROs in receipt of DSA funds from UKRI are expected to ensure that there are reliable systems and processes in place for controlling the receipt and disbursement of those funds in accordance with established guidelines for the care of public funds. UKRI reserves the right to have reasonable access to inspect the records and financial procedures associated with the use of funds, including DSA funds.
10. Reasonable adjustments must be made in a timely fashion and students must be provided with a process to highlight any adjustments that are not fully implemented and issue a formal complaint if necessary. If a student makes a formal complaint, it is important that all staff at the RO continue to support the student.
11. UKRI requires education providers in receipt of UKRI studentships to have a policy on reasonable adjustments in place. [You should review the TGCs and training grant guidance](#) for more information on our expectations of ROs in making reasonable adjustments. [Note the standard terms and conditions of training grant are changing. Read the policy statement on changes that UKRI funded providers will need to put into effect from the start of the 2025-26 academic year.](#)

Disability Advisers or Officers

12. A Disability Adviser, Disability Officer or a named contact (all referred to 'Disability Advisers' in this framework) should be available at all ROs to advise on disability matters. UKRI value the expertise of disability advisers and their understanding of the research environment and of the nature of the postgraduate study that students will be undertaking. UKRI expects Disability Advisers to have a key advisory role in the DSA process and in providing assurance that DSA funds are being used appropriately. The role of Disability Advisers may vary between ROs. Generally, they may:
 - Offer disabled students advice on other sources of funding and support that may be available and advise students on all aspects of DSA funding
 - Arrange assessment of needs appointments on behalf of students
 - Advise on particular needs that may arise from specific studentship programmes

- Help put in place the support that is recommended in the needs assessment report
- Work with Accommodation Services, Social Services, Local Authorities and academic departments
- Co-ordinate training for support workers
- Make recommendations for the academic department in relation to students, for example, special exam arrangements
- Research, develop and help implement the RO's policy for reasonable adjustments
- Contribute to the development and implementation of the RO's disability strategies.

Evidence of a Disability

13. We have no specific conditions on whether or what medical evidence we expect you to review to be eligible to claim the costs of DSA from UKRI. We do however expect ROs to have a policy on reasonable adjustments in place and to satisfy themselves that a students' need for DSA is genuine.
14. The RO's policy should reflect [contemporary guidance](#) on what proportionate measures you require to verify what a student says about their health condition or requirements, or where you require expert evidence or recommendations to make well informed decisions. A degree of procedural formality will generally be appropriate. Where appropriate, this could include one or more of the following:
 - Evidence previously provided to the RO for other purposes (where the student's consent also covered these purposes).
 - A previous needs assessment.
 - A letter from a suitable healthcare professional.
 - Evidence of a diagnosis.
 - Other evidence you deem appropriate.
 - Where the RO is otherwise satisfied that the Student is disabled, no medical evidence.
15. You should be mindful of the impact of your requirements on students and that any requirements you impose are not unduly burdensome on the student, nor should they make it unnecessarily difficult to receive a needs assessment. Note too that some General Practices (GPs) will charge for a medical letter. Caution should be exercised if relying on a diagnosis, as a diagnosis can be difficult for the student to obtain (for example, because a condition is not easy to diagnose, or because there are significant waiting lists for medical tests) but You might still be legally obliged to provide reasonable adjustments.
16. Provided your approach is consistent with your policy, and your policy is consistent with regulatory guidance, we will accept the RO's judgement that the student is disabled and qualifies for a needs assessment.
17. [Please note the following paragraph will be updated later in 2025 as part of planned work to replace the Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S)]. You should be aware that where you collect evidence from the student about their health or medical condition, there may be circumstances where it is necessary for UKRI to review this for assurance purposes. In those circumstances, ROs should provide information to UKRI through a secure mechanism, such as encrypted file, and not upload the documents to Je-S or the Funding Service. UKRI handles all personal

data in accordance with current UK data protection legislation including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Assessment of Study-Related Needs

18. Once the RO is satisfied that the student is disabled and is likely to require support provided by this framework, the student will normally have to undergo an impartial assessment of need to identify the study-related support required. An assessment of study related needs should be arranged as soon as reasonably possible. Where appropriate and the student is amenable, the needs assessment can happen before the studentship has started.
19. The cost of the needs assessment will be met from DSA funding.
20. The needs assessment enables the RO to determine how much additional support the student will require. It is important that the student understands that the purpose of a needs' assessment is to identify the additional support required to undertake postgraduate study, taking into account the nature and profile of the student's project.

DSA Funds

21. Once a DSA needs assessment has been completed, the Disability Adviser should identify the DSA funds that are claimable from UKRI and should arrange with the RO for the support to be provided to the student. A record should be retained of all payments that are eligible for UKRI DSA funding, to allow costs to be reclaimed. Costs need to be claimed against the grant on which the student is supported, that is from which 50% or more of their costs were provided.
22. Claims can be made against a different grant in subsequent years if the student support moves to another grant.
23. [Please note the following paragraphs will be updated later in 2025 as part of planned work to replace the Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S)]. At the end of the academic year a separate claim form for each eligible student should be submitted as an attachment via Je-S Grant Maintenance. Up-to-date DSA Claim forms are available on the UKRI website: www.ukri.org/publications/disabled-students-allowance-dsa-claims
24. Please complete only one form per student. Claims for more than one student from the same grant should be submitted as a single, multi-page document. UKRI reserves the right to request further information and/or to decline to provide costs which it deems to be ineligible. Please ensure that the student's details have been entered on Je-S, against the correct grant, otherwise the claim will be rejected. The RO's Finance Services will be notified of the outcome of the claim. This payment will be included in the next scheduled grant payment as an additional funding stream to the specified grant.
25. For continuing students, claims should be submitted on an annual basis at the end of each academic year. Where there is six months or less remaining on the training grant the claim should be included as a claim within the Final Expenditure Statement (FES) rather than as a separate claim.
26. DSA funds will be paid to the RO and it will be the responsibility of the RO to have

systems in place for reimbursement of these funds to third parties (for example, a partner education provider where the student is based), within the RO (for example to their disability services department) or to the student, as appropriate.

27. DSA funds are for use in meeting the costs of supporting disabled students and may not be used for any other purpose. It is recommended that receipts are retained for any items or resource purchased through DSA support as this expenditure will be included in the final reconciliation on the grant and DSA may also be covered under UKRI's funding assurance visits.

Types of Funds Available

28. Resources which are eligible under DSA are detailed below. Where a Disability Adviser believes there is a resource which falls outside of these areas but, which may be eligible because of the student's particular requirements, or if it is not clear whether or not a cost is eligible, they are advised to contact us to discuss this before costs are incurred. Councils will not reimburse costs that they deem to be ineligible. Contact details are included at **Annex 1**.
29. UKRI does not have set rates for DSA but the Disability Adviser must ensure that all costs requested are justifiable and reasonable. It is the RO's responsibility to ensure that value for money principles are followed when spending public funds and they must ensure that costs are appropriate for the student's needs and the course or programme of study or research. Where there is a choice of options, the Disability Adviser should recommend the cheapest option or the lowest specification of item that meets the student's needs. Please see **Annex 2** for some examples of eligible and ineligible costs.

Needs Assessment

30. The costs of a needs assessment will be provided.
31. Recent graduates (for example from a undergraduate or a masters degree programme) proceeding directly to a UKRI studentship may be able to use their previous DSA needs assessment as a basis for seeking UKRI DSA. For example, a student can continue to receive non-medical assistance without a new needs assessment. If the student has to undergo a new assessment, whether because their circumstances have changed or the requirements of the postgraduate study are substantially different, the costs of the new needs assessment can be met from DSA funds. If the new assessment identifies equipment support, the Disability Adviser should consider whether the equipment the student received as for their previous degree meets the student's requirements at postgraduate research.

Specialist Equipment and Insurance

32. This may cover items of equipment (hardware and software) for which the need arises from the student's disability and which are necessary if the student is to undertake the programme of postgraduate studies. For example, assistive technology equipment or specially adapted furniture that is required for study purposes.
33. Assistive software can be provided where it is required solely due to the student's disability and is not available through any standard software provision the RO may have. Standard software costs can only be covered where this is needed to enable use of the assistive software.

34. Where training is required in the use of the specialist equipment or software that is provided, these costs will be met from DSA funds. Various options for delivery of the training should be considered, for example, the availability of online training which, provided it meets the student's needs, might be cheaper.
35. We are unable to cover the cost of a higher specification computer where this is linked to a requirement for the course or programme of study, in other words, where any student on the course or programme would require this specification. Where the need for a higher specification arises solely from the disability (that is, in order to run disability-related software) then it will be possible for costs, minus a £200 contribution², to be claimed².
36. Specially adapted furniture can be claimed for either the students' own residence (where it will be necessary for the student to study from their own residence) or for the office, library, laboratory or elsewhere at the RO. Before purchasing new equipment for the office, library, laboratory or elsewhere at the RO, the RO should ascertain that suitable and freely available equipment is not already available.
37. Students should be advised to ensure that any equipment purchased is covered by insurance. Insurance or extended warranty costs for any repair and modification costs arising from the ownership of equipment purchased under DSA may be met from DSA funds within the duration of the studentship. Where students do not take out insurance or extended warranty or the insurance or warranty becomes invalid, and equipment is subsequently lost, stolen or damaged, any replacement or repair of the equipment will be at the student's expense. All equipment purchased with the help of DSA is and remains the property of the student. It is open to the student, at the end of the studentship, to offer the equipment to their RO for the use of other students.

Extensions

38. UKRI does not offer support for extensions to the UKRI studentship through DSA. However, students who cannot study due to a health condition have an allocation of medical leave, which can lead to an extension. Some ROs also allow additional time in some circumstances.

Non-Medical Assistance

39. Non-medical assistance covers readers, lip-speakers, note-takers, campus specific mobility trainers and any non-medical assistance where the RO is satisfied that the disabled student requires help to undertake postgraduate study. Non-medical assistance costs may also include specialist study skills support where the support is provided by a specialist tutor. These funds must not be used as a means of supporting extra subject tuition. Provision for non-medical assistance does not remove the duty of social services to provide for care costs that would have been incurred irrespective of a student's attendance on a studentship programme. However, in some circumstances a personal assistant may also provide course-related help for a student. In such cases it might be agreed to share the cost of the course-related help provided by the personal assistant with the social services.

² This is in line with the Student Finance England (SFE) guidance. Entry-level computers, costing £200 or less, are considered to be products that most students would own. DSA will provide the difference between the mainstream costs (£200) and the higher specification.

Extra Travel Costs

40. DSA is not intended to cover everyday travel costs that any student undertaking postgraduate study would incur. DSA will meet only the additional travel costs that arise as a direct result of a disability and that a disabled student has to incur in order to undertake postgraduate study. An example would be the extra costs incurred by a disabled student with mobility who may need to use taxis rather than public transport. In this case, we will only provide the difference in the cost between the taxi and public transport, not the full cost of the taxi fare.

General disabled students' allowance

41. These funds may be used to contribute towards other disability-related needs e.g. specific consumables such as tapes and Braille paper. Funds are not provided to cover general items such as printer cartridges, paper or books or to cover internet access.
42. UKRI is unable to cover costs which are not associated with the student's postgraduate study such as dietary needs.

Period of Eligibility for DSA Funds

43. DSA costs are eligible from the point at which a studentship is offered. This allows needs assessments to be organised before the start of their studentship and adjustments put in place for the start.
44. Where a student does not start their course, and wherever reasonable, providers should return any unused equipment to the supplier and not claim the cost from UKRI. If equipment is provided to a student *after* they have informed the provider or RO that they will not take up their studentship, these costs are not eligible for recovery under UKRI's DSA Framework. If equipment is provided to a student, and the student subsequently informs the RO or provider that they will not take up their studentship, these costs are only recoverable from UKRI if:
 - a. the RO or provider recovers the equipment from the student AND
 - b. the RO or provider cannot get a refund from the supplier.

The aim of the above requirement is to ensure that students have equipment ready and available for the start of their course, while incentivising ROs to put controls in place so that the system is not abused.

45. If, after the student has started their course, the student withdraws from the studentship or the studentship is terminated, no further funds will be payable. Where a student leaves part way through a course, the RO may submit a claim only for those eligible costs incurred whilst the student was registered and funded by UKRI. The claim would be in accordance with the general process described earlier.
46. If a student, who has started a programme of postgraduate study, receives DSA equipment and subsequently leaves postgraduate study, there is no provision for recovery of the equipment, regardless of the length of time the student spent on the course. This is because the award is made with statutory authority and the purpose for which the equipment is supplied has already materialised.
47. UKRI expects ROs to support students to submit their thesis or equivalent within their funded studentship. However, many ROs allow a grace period after the

funded studentship has ended. DSA can continue after the end of the Studentship provided:

- a. the adjustment was in place before the end of studentship AND
- b. the student remains registered at the RO.

The arrangement may last up to the earlier of either:

- c. 18 months after the end of the studentship OR
- d. until the student has had their viva and submitted any corrections.

DSA Support Requested in the Final Stages of a Course

48. We recognise that some students may not wish to disclose their disability but, where they need support, we encourage them to apply for it as early as possible so that they can gain full benefit throughout the course. Some students may apply for DSA support in the latter stages of the final year of their studies. Many of the students who apply later for DSA support do so because they may have been reluctant to disclose their disability before. It is important that the student receives the appropriate support even if it is only for a short period. If a need for disability-related support is identified in the latter stages of study, a claim may be made in the normal way though hiring equipment rather than purchasing new equipment should be considered.
49. DSA claims cannot be backdated to cover costs incurred prior to the academic year in which the student is deemed eligible for this support.

Disability Organisations

50. National disability organisations such as [RNIB](#) (Royal National Institute of the Blind) [RNID](#) (Royal National Institute for Deaf People), [Advance HE](#), [Disability Rights UK](#) and [LEAD Scotland](#) provide valuable specialist support and advice upon which ROs can draw. These organisations can help in one or more of the following ways:
 - Providing information on particular disabilities
 - Assessing students' needs
 - Helping with the training of Student Support Officers
 - Increasing awareness of DSA in their own constituent groups
 - Providing a network of wider help for ROs
51. While every effort should be made to avoid issues arising, [the Office for the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\) good practice framework provides advice for ROs supporting disabled students when things go wrong.](#)
52. ROs are required to have a policy to support the efficient and satisfactory identification and resolution of complaints from Students. ROs must ensure that all Students funded by UKRI and their supervisors are aware of mechanisms to provide feedback and resolve complaints. Where a student is not satisfied with the RO's response to a complaint, they may wish to take their complaint to the relevant student ombudsman, or to take forward legal action.
 - [Students in England and Wales can complaint to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator](#)
 - [Students in Scotland can complain to the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman](#)
 - [Students in Northern Ireland can complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsmen](#)

- [Students considering taking legal action can find more information from Citizens Advice.](#)
53. The Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights, across England, Scotland and Wales, and can provide advice to students on their rights. It can be contacted in the following ways:
- By telephone: 0808 800 0082
 - By writing a letter to: FREEPOST EASS HELPLINE FPN6521
 - By submitting the online form on the [EASS helpline's website](#)

April 2025

Annex 1: UKRI - Research Council Studentship Contacts

UKRI - Research Council	Contact
Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)	psa@ahrc.ukri.org
Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)	gfmt@bbsrc.ukri.org
Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)	RTDenquiries@esrc.ukri.org
Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)	DSAclaims@epsrc.ukri.org
Medical Research Council (MRC)	ResearchFundingPolicyandDelivery@mrc.ukri.org
Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)	researchcareers@nerc.ukri.org
Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)	studentships@stfc.ukri.org
Research England	talent@ukri.org
Innovate UK	talent@ukri.org

Annex 2: Additional guidance

The table below provides a summary and examples of eligible and ineligible costs. This is intended as a guide to support DSOs in determining whether a cost can be claimed from the UKRI - Research Council. In exceptional circumstances the DSO should contact the relevant UKRI - Research Council contact listed in Annex 1 to discuss specific cases.

Allowed	Not allowed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cost of the needs assessment to identify the study-related support required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs not recommended in the needs assessment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs that have not yet been incurred (that is, we only make DSA payments in arrears).
Specialist equipment needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items of equipment (hardware and software) for which the need arises from the student's disability and which are necessary if the student is to undertake the programme of postgraduate studies. For example, assistive technology equipment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items of equipment (hardware or software) that almost all students would be expected to own, such as, entry-level specification computers, standard software, smartphones, tablets, portable media players, and equivalent.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specially adapted furniture that is required for study purposes in the student's own residence (because, as a result of the disability, it is necessary for the student to study there) Or for the office, library, laboratory etc at the Research Organisation, where suitable equipment is not already freely available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assistive software required solely due to the student's disability. Standard software costs can only be covered where this is needed to enable use of the assistive software. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Costs of training in the use of the specialist equipment or software that is provided. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insurance or extended warranty costs for any repair and modification costs arising from the ownership of equipment purchased under DSA may be met from DSA funds within the duration of the studentship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Replacement or repair of equipment where insurance or an extended warranty was not taken out or where the insurance or warranty becomes invalid, and equipment is subsequently lost, stolen or damaged.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where a computer of a higher specification is considered to be essential, the costs, minus a £200 contribution, can be claimed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The cost of a higher specification computer where this is linked to a requirement for the course or programme of study, in other words, where any student on the course or programme would require this specification. This includes the purchase of products such as MacBooks rather than standard PCs or laptops.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Items which the student requires for general use, such as tinted spectacles.
Non-medical personal support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Readers, lip-speakers, note-takers, campus specific mobility trainers and any non-medical assistance where the Research Organisation is satisfied that the disabled student requires help to undertake postgraduate study. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist study skills support where the support is provided by a specialist tutor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funds to support extra subject tuition.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist study skills support where the support is provided by a specialist tutor 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-medical assistance that would have been incurred irrespective of a student's attendance on a studentship programme.
Miscellaneous	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional travel costs that arise as a direct result of a disability and that a disabled student has to incur in order to undertake postgraduate study. The difference in the cost between the taxi and public transport can be claimed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Every day travel costs that any student undertaking postgraduate study would incur
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other disability-related needs e.g. specific consumables such as tapes and Braille paper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General items such as printer cartridges, paper or books or to cover internet access
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost which are not associated with the student's postgraduate study e.g. dietary needs.

Annex 3: List of updates

The table below highlights the main changes made to the guidance. It does not include minor changes of wording that have been made for clarification.

Section	Paragraph number	Change	Updated
Whole document	Whole document	Amended to reflect changes discussed in Policy statement: review of the training grant conditions	April 2025
DSA Funds	12	Broken web link updated	December 2023
Disability Organisations	32	Updated references	September 2021
Non-disclosure		Removed. To ensure students receive the full support they are entitled to, applications for DSA can no longer be submitted directly to UKRI.	September 2021
Whole document		Amended to reflect UKRI (removal of RCUK references)	February 2020
Introduction		Removal of notification of changes and timing relating to 2016	February 2020
Evidence of a disability	10	Clarification on supporting documentation and how sensitive information is stored	February 2020
DSA Funds	13	Updated link to DSA Claim documentation	February 2020
Acknowledgements		Removal of out of date links	February 2020
Annex 1 – Research Council Studentship contacts	11	Amended to reflect new email addresses	February 2020