SLC Model for Assessing Course Related Needs in the Context of DSA

Quality Auditing the DSA Assessment of Need Report

1 Introduction

The Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) are available to help students in higher education with the **extra** costs they may incur on the course as a direct result of a disability, mental health condition or specific learning difficulty. DSAs are not intended to cover disability-related expenditure that the student would incur even if they were not attending a course of higher education, nor are they intended to cover study costs that any student might have regardless of whether they are disabled. The availability of DSAs does not remove the duty placed on Higher Education Institutions by part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001) to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure that a disabled student is not placed at a 'substantial disadvantage'.

DSA needs assessment guidelines

The following guidelines are based on the work of DSA assessors who have piloted a related model in the South East and South West and on good practice gleaned from needs assessment reports sent to the SLC centralised pilot at Darlington. The SLC will ask students who are potentially eligible for DSAs to have a DSA needs assessment carried out so that the help they will need on their course can be identified and arranged. The student has a right to expect an individual assessment. Each assessment report should be an evidence-based stand-alone audit-proof document.

DSA assessors should note that these revised guidelines have been approved by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and will form the basis of future SLC Awards Officer training.

2 The Structure of the SLC DSA Assessment of Need Report

The structure of the SLC DSA Assessment of Needs Report aims to ensure information is easy to access for the student / funding authority, and easy to quality audit in accordance with DIUS guidance.

Information Gathering - Section A of each report ensures that the process is bespoke and provides a context. It focuses on the student background as follows:

- Nature of Disability;
- Previous Education / Employment;
- Course Requirements.

Identification of Need - Section B highlights the effects of the student's disability on the following aspects of their academic life:

- Research;
- Composition;
- Note-taking;
- Proofreading;
- Time Management;
- Access to ICT, Course Technology, Practical Study Activities;
- Examinations;
- Communication;
- Mobility.

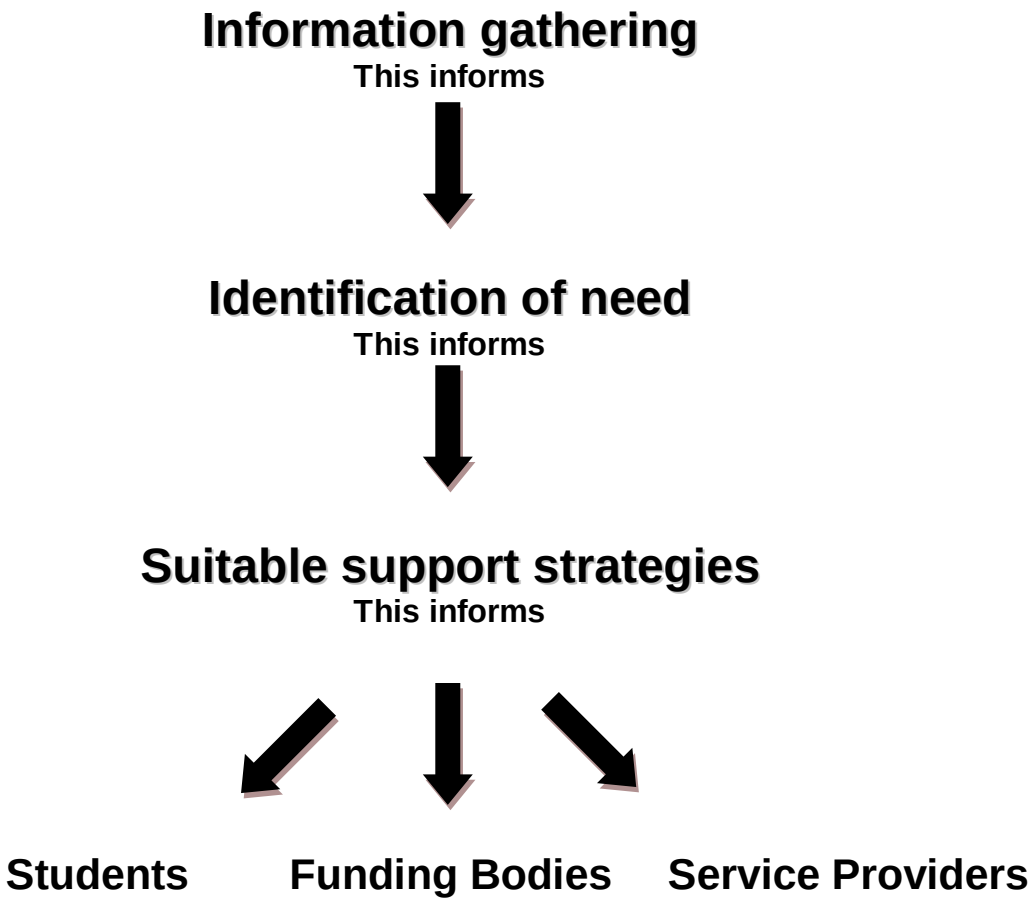
Suitable Support Strategies - Section C details how each area discussed in B above can be assisted with appropriate strategies (with detailed recommendations for all equipment strategies and non-medical support strategies).

Section D is the specification for the equipment and non-medical.

Section E lists the suppliers and an optional list of appropriate recommendations for the HEI concerned.

For quality assurance purposes the awards officer should be able to read from A-D and backward from D-A. Every recommendation is a solution, which stems from a strategy which stems from a need, which is based on the gathered information and *vice versa*.

The DSA Assessment of Need Report is as follows:



2 Study Aids and Study Strategies Assessments – an overview

While respecting that the needs of every student differs, when assessing students with disabilities in the context of DSA, if one looks from the perspective of the context and the desirable outcome, there are two essential variants when using the headings listed above:

VARIANT I – Assessing Accessibility
Ensuring that the teaching and learning environment is accessible to students including any related ICT:

This relates to the students ability to access the physical environment / curriculum of the university by providing an accessible home workstation to complement HEI provision, or support strategies / tools to assist with access to the curriculum. Examples of this would include students with physical disabilities, visual and hearing difficulties; and examples of recommendations would include:

- **Travel allowance;**
- **Alternative input technology e.g. speech to text software;**
- **Screenreaders;**
- **Ergonomic furniture;**
- **Note-takers / Readers / Communicators.**

VARIANT II – Assessing Perceptual Difference
Enabling access to strategies which enhance the students learning and study ability:

This relates to students who have problems accessing the teaching and learning environment because of the teaching strategies, styles and the medium used e.g. students with Specific Learning Difficulties; mental health difficulties; and examples of recommendations include:

- **Non-subject specific study skills;**
- **Mentoring;**
- **Text to speech software;**
- **Mind mapping software.**

Variant I: Assessing Accessibility

The strategy approach to assessing requires assessors to use the medical assessment / reports as the basis of his / her recommendations and these should include some information on the effects of the disability. This should be complemented with the student's observations on how they have learned to adapt previously and / or how they are more likely to adapt using the array of ergonomic aids / input technologies available at a typical assessment centre.

The assessor should investigate any significant areas of difficulty and categorise under the headings Research, Composition, Proofreading, Note-taking, Time Management, Access to ICT / Course Technology / Practical Study, Examinations, Communication and Mobility. The assessment report should determine what strategies the student has developed to compensate and complement these with strategies which suit the student's existing way of working;

Examples of the areas assessors may wish to cover are summarised in the table below:

Research	The impact of Fatigue	Researching in a library / access to print	Ability to take research notes	Current research strategies
Composition	Ability to use standard input technology (keyboard and mouse)	Ability to access workstation	Use of Speech to text	Current Strategies
Proofreading	Visual difficulties	Is alternative format required?	Screen reader / text to speech	Current Strategies
Note-taking	Impact of fatigue on concentration	Is typing / recording an alternative?	Are lecture notes available on-line?	Current Strategies
Time Management and Organisation	Adhering to submission Deadlines	Is disability affecting use of Timetables?	Need for a portable device	Current Strategies

Access to ICT/ Course Technology / Practical Study	Is there a need for a home ergonomic workstation?	Is there a need for course software?	Portable devices to support access to practical study – labs / studios etc.	Current Strategies
Examinations and Assessment	Is there a need for the provision of reader / amanuensis support?	Current strategies		
Mobility	Taxi / Petrol Allowance	Mobility Training	Mobility Support – Non Medical Assistant	Current Strategies
Communication and Social Interaction	Portable Induction Loops	Communicators / Note-takers	Additional means of accessing information – ISP	Current Strategies

Variant II: Assessing the Impact of Perceptual Difference

The strategy approach to assessing requires assessors to use the diagnostic assessment as the scientific basis of his / her recommendations but that this should be complemented with the student's observations on how they have learned to adapt previously and / or how they are more likely to adapt using the array of multi-sensory strategies available at a typical assessment centre. In other words, assessors are looking for areas of significant discrepancy to target i.e. when a student's literacy achievements are not what one would expect from someone of his / her ability.

A DSA assessor's role is to look for anomalies and to provide targeted strategies that should assist the student in overcoming obstacles to them producing coursework commensurate with their underlying ability.

The following methodology is based on there being two models of diagnostic assessing within the majority of diagnostic reports

- discrepancy model: the difference between the student's ability and their attainment - this is what we measure when we look at their past and at their IQ scores et al i.e. Is there a discrepancy between their potential and their actual attainment? Recommending strategies to bridge this gap being the role of the DSA assessor;

- in-depth analysis of student's cognitive thinking skills, particularly weaknesses in phonological processing, working memory and particular psycholinguistic errors.

The aim of this approach is to develop a means of allowing all downstream services (IT Training, Study Skills provision etc.) to follow up on an assessor's recommendations ensuring a better and more cohesive service to the customer concerned. This entails formal feedback from trainers / study skills providers on the efficacy of the strategies being recommended by assessors which will inform future recommendations. This feedback loop is required of all centres, recommendations must be informed and based on student testimony and / or research.

All of the above is informed by the Working Party on SpLD (2005) report which states:

> **"The student's performance in other areas of testing can then be considered within the context of his/her underlying ability. Qualitative observations should be made about the student's test performance and profiles of scores should be discussed, with particular reference to any significant discrepancies between verbal and non-verbal ability, and to weaknesses in working memory or processing speed if these cognitive functions have been assessed. Information about both verbal and non-verbal ability should be reported. Gathering information about underlying ability is a vital component of assessment. The assessment of verbal and non-verbal ability throws light on the extent to which students are likely to be able to develop compensatory strategies, and informs specialist teaching intervention. The effect of SpLD on a student's learning can be evaluated more effectively when underlying ability is taken into account".**

The SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC) is taking a lead in implementing a number of the Working Group report's recommendations. Further information about the work of SASC can be found on their website: www.sasc.org.uk

Working with Diagnostic Assessments

An assessor's role is to look for anomalies in a student's profile and to provide strategies that should assist the student in overcoming obstacles to them achieving learning outcomes commensurate with their underlying ability. This three point focus of every assessment of a student with dyslexia can be summarised as follows:

- Investigate any significant areas of underachievement highlighted in the student's diagnostic assessment and categorise under the headings Research, Composition, Proofreading, Note-taking, Time Management;
- Determine what strategies the student has developed to compensate for this area of difficulty and complement these with strategies which suit the student's existing way of working;
- List the strategies in the assessment report for subsequent action by IT Trainers and the Study Skills Providers.

Examples of the areas assessors may wish to cover are summarised in the table below:

Research	Reading attainment	Researching in a library	Use of Web-based research	Current research note-taking strategy
Composition	Spelling attainment	Drafting process and typing speed	Feedback on previous coursework	Current strategies
Proofreading	Visual difficulties	Working Memory score	Does the spellchecker spot all their errors	Current strategies
Note-taking	Working Memory Score and Handwriting Speed	Typing Speed	Are lecture notes available on-line?	Current Strategies
Time Management and Organisation	Adhering to submission Deadlines	Use of Timetables	Need for a portable device	Current Strategies

Translating Need into Recommendations

The correlation between need and DSA recommendations can be seen in the following tables:

Research

Assessment of Need **Strategies Recommended**	**Diagnostic Assessment** **Basis on which Strategy Recommended**
<u>Specialist Equipment Allowance</u> Scanning and Text to Speech: TextHELP / ClaroRead Spider Research Notes: Inspiration / MindManager etc. **<u>General Allowance</u>** Book Allowance Internet Access **<u>Non-Medical Helper Allowance</u>** Study Skills: tuition in reading skills: reading for different purposes, skimming, scanning, identifying and recording key information	**auditory working memory (e.g. low scores for digit span, history of difficulty memorising multiplication tables, alphabet etc)** **single word reading (score below average when educational experience is taken into account, difficulty decoding unfamiliar words out of context)** **prose reading (inaccuracy, over-reliance on context, difficulty reading unfamiliar words)** **silent reading speed (below average of approximately 300 words per minute)** **non-word reading (low score; lack of awareness of detail in letter sequences)** **reading comprehension (low scores; inaccurate summaries of texts; very large number of errors in prose reading) vocabulary (low score leading to comprehension difficulties)**

Composition

Assessment of Need Strategies Recommended	Diagnostic Assessment Basis on which Strategy Recommended
<u>Specialist Equipment Allowance</u> Touch typing software Mind Mapping: Inspiration / MindManager / Cygnius etc Narrated Slide Shows / MS PowerPoint **<u>Non-Medical Helper Allowance</u>** Tuition in structuring and producing written assignments – skills taught should be sufficiently generic to apply to subsequent tasks.	**low score for graded (standardised) spelling test** **punctuation and / or grammar weakness evident in free writing** **discrepancy between oral competence an written language skills: limited vocabulary, immature writing style** **slow handwriting speed in copying task: indicates fine motor skills problem and integrating visual and motor skills** **slow writing rate in free writing task; indicates problems with the composition process – thinking of words and phrases to express ideas;** **weakness in reading skills: leads to lack of reading experience, and consequently lack of awareness of formal written language**

Proofreading– Editing

Assessment of Need Strategies Recommended	Diagnostic Assessment Basis on which Strategy Recommended
<u>Specialist Equipment Allowance</u> Printer Text to speech: TextHELP / ClaroRead Specialist Dictionaries Portable Dictionaries **<u>General Allowance</u>** Inkjet cartridges	**inaccurate reading** **confusion of similar words in reading** **poor spelling** **poor non-word reading; decoding difficulties**

Note-taking

Assessment of Need Strategies Recommended	Diagnostic Assessment Basis on which Strategy Recommended
<u>Specialist Equipment Allowance</u> Typing lecture notes (Notebook Computer or Portable keyboard) Recording Lectures **<u>Non-Medical Helper Allowance</u>** Tuition in note-taking techniques: identifying key information, use of abbreviation, coding and numbering, use of headings etc.	**handwriting problems: speed and legibility** **weak auditory working memory (e.g. digit span)** **difficulty integrating motor skills with visual and / or auditory processes (e.g. low score in WAIS III Digit Symbol)** **very weak spelling**

Time Management and Organisation

Assessment of Need Strategies Recommended	Diagnostic Assessment Basis on which Strategy Recommended
<u>Specialist Equipment Allowance</u> Portable Organiser **<u>Non-Medical Helper Allowance</u>** Tuition in time and information management	**poor working memory (e.g. digit span, history of difficulty with rote learning)** **weakness in spatial awareness, non-verbal reasoning (Performance IQ)** **motor clumsiness** **history of Dyspraxia or of poor Coordination** **handwriting difficulties**