

DSA-QAG

Newsletter

June 2016



Welcome

Welcome to the latest newsletter from the Disabled Students Allowances – Quality Assurance Group (DSA-QAG).

Since the last newsletter, we have been busy working with our practitioners (assessment centres, assistive technology service providers and non-medical help providers) to enhance the services to students funded from the disabled students allowances (DSA). This has included:

- Revisions to the Quality Assurance Frameworks (QAFs) for
 - Assessment Centres (ACs)
 - Assistive Technology Service Providers (ATSPs)
- Improved due diligence through revisions to the audit tools
- Publishing Study Needs Assessment Fees for each Assessment Centre
- Facilitation of revisions to the DSA Computer Specification Matrix
- Successful implementation of the Non-medical Helper (NMH) provider registration system
- Successful launch of the NMH Quality Assurance Framework
- Successful launch of the NMH Register via the DSA-QAG website

Assessment Centres

Currently there are 68 main assessment centres accredited to DSA-QAG. The map below outlines their geographical distribution across England and Wales.

These centres are audited on annual basis and are required to comply with the QAF to ensure continued accreditation. Where areas of improvement are identified during the centres' audit, we continue to work closely with our practitioners to implement the necessary changes to ensure students are not disadvantaged.

However, if any centre falls below these standards, they will be suspended from providing services to DSA students until they have resolved any outstanding issues.

The audit cycle runs from November through to October of each year. The latest compliance outcomes for the last completed cycle showed that 90.6% of centres were in compliance, this compares favourably with 86.4% in the previous year.



Whilst the number of assessment centres has remained relatively stable in recent years, there has been a continued steady growth in the establishment of outreach assessment centres. Presently, there are 124 centres and in the forthcoming twelve months this is expected to grow by at least 10%.

During the latter part of the year, we published on the DSA-QAG website, the cost of providing a study needs assessment at each of the centres. This was to allow students a greater opportunity to make a choice on where they can attend. Assessment centres are also required to display these needs assessment costs on their website.

Assistive Technology Service Providers

We have seen a small reduction in the number of ATSPs since the last newsletter, there are now 15 companies providing specialist equipment, support and assistive technology training to DSA students across the UK.

The audit cycle for the ATSP begins in January each year and runs through to June. The latest available compliance outcomes from the audits indicates there are year on year improvements, this year showing 89.5% compared to 89.4% in the previous year.

Non-Medical Helper Providers

Within the last six months we have seen the introduction of the new NMH registration process. The ultimate aim of registering all of those organisations and sole providers is to ensure those students who require additional support receive it from individuals who are suitably qualified to do so.

Although we have received some 700 applications, there are just over 400 who have are currently appearing on the published list of providers. During the registration process some providers have withdrawn their applications, others have been rejected as they did not meet the criteria and others are on hold whilst the providers consider the implications of being able to comply with the QAF. Of those who haven't managed to complete the process yet, circa 150, we continue to support those applicants where we can.

To date we have sent and received over 5,000 emails (this excludes bulk communication messages) and taken over 1,000 telephone calls in our efforts to support the NMH providers successfully register.

As we complete this phase of bringing the NMH members on board we will shortly embark on designing tailored audit programmes to ensure those providing the service are complying with the terms of the QAF.

DSA Computer Equipment Specification Matrix

We continue to facilitate the review and implementation of the computer equipment specification matrix but would not have achieved the outcomes we have without the significant input from all of our stakeholders, ACs, ATSPs, BIS, SFE and SFW. To date we have facilitated the successful revisions made in November 2015 and June 2016.

Annual Statistical Figures – Needs Assessments 2015/16

The table below shows the annual statistical returns reported by assessment centres for needs assessments carried out during the period of 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. In overall terms there has been a 2.5% drop in assessments conducted from 2014-15. The percentage breakdown of disabilities remains relatively similar with SPLD ranking the highest, despite seeing an 11.8% drop compared to the previous year. Mental health ranked second and has grown by 17.9%. The third highest area of activity is student with two or more disabilities; the increase in the number of assessments for this disability has been 14.4%.

Disability	2016 Volume	2016 Percentage	2015 Volume	2015 Percentage
No known disability	76	0.2%	54	0.1%
Student has Autistic Spectrum Disorder or Asperger's Syndrome	1601	4.0%	1269	3.1%
Student is blind/partially sighted	528	1.3%	502	1.2%
Student is deaf/hard of hearing	650	1.6%	653	1.6%
Student has an unseen disability, e.g. diabetes, epilepsy	2554	6.4%	2591	6.3%
Student has a mental health Condition, such as depression	5482	13.7%	4651	11.3%
Student has specific learning difficulty, e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D	21665	53.9%	24563	59.7%
Student is a wheelchair user/has mobility difficulties	1506	3.7%	1365	3.3%
Student has a disability or special need not listed above	1000	2.5%	1078	2.6%
Student has two or more of the above disabilities/special needs	5099	12.7%	4458	10.8%
Totals	40161	100%	41184	100%

SFE DSA Policy Guidance 2016/17

The guidance for continuing DSA students and additional guidance for new DSA students for the 2016/17 academic year can be viewed at <http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/policy-information/guidance-chapters.aspx>.

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DSA-QAG is committed to providing a quality service to practitioners, students and stakeholders. We welcome all suggestions you may have for our consideration.