# DSA-QAG
Newsletter
October 2016

Welcome

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

Our aim is to continue to work with our practitioners (assessment centres, assistive technology service providers and non-medical help providers) to strive to enhance the services to students funded from the disabled students allowances (DSA).

Assessment Centres

Recently we reported to the Audit and Framework Committee that the number of assessment centres continues to rise, as at the end of September there was over 200 registered, including outreach assessment centres.

In September, we published a year on year comparison of the annual number of assessments; the graph below shows the total number per year from April 2012 through to 31 March 2016. In the main, the yearly assessment figures have remained fairly stable over this time, although the last twelve months has seen an increase of 5% on the previous year.
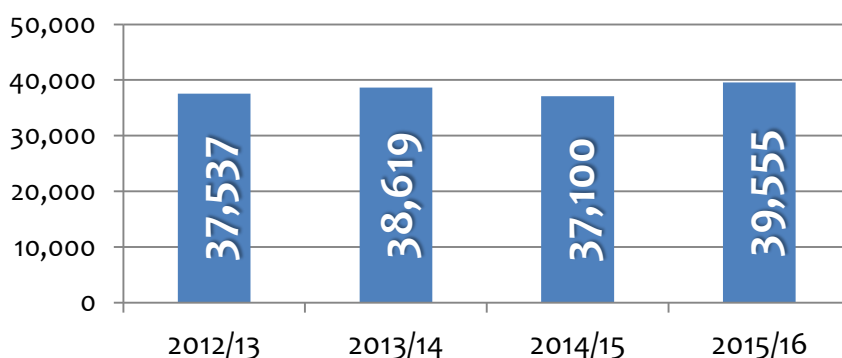
Demand continues to grow and for the first six months of this year (April to September) we have seen an increase of 6% assessments on the same period last year. However, the month of September 2016 has seen the highest number of assessments of any month in the last 3½ years, an increase of 10% on the same month of last year. Despite the significant increase in the number of assessments being conducted, the overall performance of achieving this within 15 working days of first contact remains high, 93% for the six months to the end of September, compared to 92% in the same period last year.

Following a significant engagement exercise with the IAC and NNAC, we released the latest version of the essential equipment list, version 8. Following feedback received from both hard of hearing and vision impaired specialists there may be further changes in the coming months. We are in discussion with IAC and NNAC representatives to finalise these revisions.

A new version of the needs assessment report was issued by SLC and has been adopted by all assessment centres. With the changes in the report, we released an updated version of the QAF which contained a new version of the QA checklist to be disseminated and completed by QA personnel.

With the continued demand for new outreach centres from registered assessment centres , we have introduced an online application process; this new process is to assist centre managers with the application process and will assist the Central Administration Unit to streamline the process.

For those Centre's who operate outreach assessment centres you will have received your annual registration fees via PayPal. The deadline for payment of these invoices is **Friday 11th November**. If you do not pay by the deadline date this may affect the centre's registration and could lead to the facility being suspended until payment is received in full.

Assistive Technology Service Providers

The total number of orders placed with the ATSP's in the first six months of this year (April to September 2016) was 14,658, The graph below shows this year's activity compared to the same period last year. The variance in activity is marginal at just 0.5%

In the same period the headline performance of delivering within 10 days of the order being placed remains high, 98% for the period to the end of September compared with 96% in the previous year.
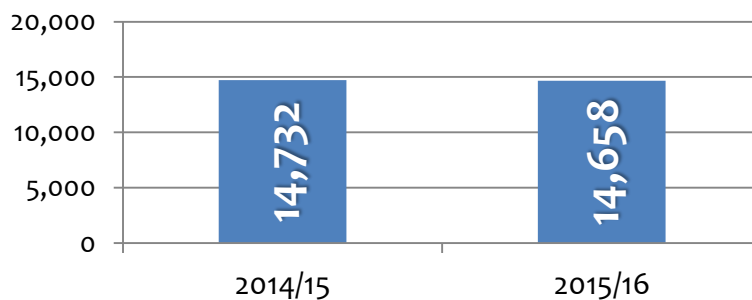
Following consultation with the ATSP representatives we have successfully launched the revised online survey; this allows us to capture the student experience of the aftercare support being delivered by suppliers.

Non-Medical Helper Providers

We have now received over 850 applications with 600 now fully registered. There were a number of duplicate applications, withdrawals or applicants who did not meet the DfE mandatory criteria to register. To aid providers through the process, we have sent and received nearly 9,500 emails (this excludes bulk communication messages). In addition to this, we have received over 1,500 telephone calls in our efforts to support the NMH providers successfully register.

The next phase of the process will be the audit programme which we will embark upon early in the New Year. We established a working group comprising members from each of the different groups of providers, sole traders, HEI's and large organisations. The group also has input from Department for Education, SLC and study needs assessment

centres (IAC and NNAC). The aim of the group is to provide input and inform the self-assessment phase of the audit programme and the audit tools.

We are currently undertaking a number of pilot audits to help us develop our compliance tools and make the process as efficient as possible for all of the NMH providers.

We have also released a revised quality assurance framework issued which incorporated revisions to the standard timesheet and student support checklist (Workplan/ILP).

Shortly, we will also be embarking upon a collection exercise for DfE to gather Organisational and support worker Conflict of Interest declarations.

Central Administration Unit

To support the Central Administration Unit in its delivery of the compliance programmes for all practitioners we have embarked upon a recruitment programme to supplement the current resources. This will include the establishment of new posts to support the NMH programme. However in the meantime we have bolstered our current resources, this has included the following members of staff:

Lance Johnson took up the post of Administration & QA Officer in July 2016. Lance has a number of years in various administrative positions in the United States of America and will be responsible for supporting the DSA-QAG team in the administration of audits.
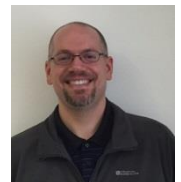
James Galbraith took up the post of Administration & QA Officer in September 2016. James has joined us after spending a significant period of time working in various government departments, including the immigration dept. He is currently supporting the NMH programme but will be extending his role to supporting the DSA-QAG team in the administration of audits.

Steve McGill took up the post of NMH Project/Audit Consultant in September 2016. Steve has joined the team to assist in the development of the NMH audit programme. So far this has included the development of student and support worker audit tools and subsequently testing those in the pilot programme. Steve joins us having spent a significant period of time in compliance roles with IBM and brings a wealth of experience to the team.

Michael Greening took up the post of Outreach Auditor during October. Michael joins us having spent most of his career in various senior roles across the banking sector. Michael's primary role will be to undertake audits of the outreach assessment centres.

Website Update – NMH Search

We are pleased to announce that the new NMH search facility has now been launched and this incorporates all of the changes we announced previously. The new search facility will allow assessors the opportunity to search for specific roles and modes of delivery by higher education institution. This will provide a tailored response and reduce the impact for assessors when completing the needs assessment report. The NMH website has been developed on a new platform, and the assessor's experience of the time for results to be displayed will be greatly improved.

You can access the new platform via http://nmh.dsa-qag.org.uk/nmh-search

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

Continuing students

http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/6973/sfe-1617-dsa-continuing-dsa-student-guidance-v11-sept.pdf

New Students

http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/6972/dsa-guidance-document-for-new-dsa-students-in-ay-2016-17-version-13-october-2016.pdf

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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.

Please email your suggestion to Jim Kerrse, Operations Manager on Jim.kersse@dsa-qag.org,uk