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University – Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) – a guide for students & Teachers of the Deaf (ToDs)

What is it?

A higher education student living in England can apply for a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) if they have a disability, including a:

- long-term health condition
- mental health condition
- specific learning difficulty, eg dyslexia

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs) are paid on top of other student finance. They help you pay the extra costs you may have because of your disability eg. specialised equipment, non-medical helpers etc. They don't have to be repaid.

How much you get depends on your individual needs – not your household income. If you're a part-time student your 'course intensity' can affect how much you get.

How does it work?

You apply for a DSA through Student Finance England (or Wales if appropriate). There are different forms depending on whether you are also asking for other student finance eg. A tuition fee loan.

The forms can be downloaded from here: <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/how-to-claim>. They ask questions relating to your personal details, residence & nationality, course and disability (you will need to provide evidence of this eg. A letter from your audiologist)

If you are a ToD, it is advisable that you encourage all hearing impaired students applying for university to apply for a DSA. This can be done at any time throughout their university application process or study but naturally the sooner it is done, the better.

Once your application has been received and processed by Student Finance, they will arrange for an assessment to take place. You may need to visit a regional assessment centre for this or the assessor may come to you. The assessor will look at what difficulties you are having/are likely to have during your studies and put together a report with some recommendations. This is a really important step of the process because you will only be provided with equipment recommended by the assessor. If you have any thoughts about which equipment you would like or experience of equipment that work for you, this is the time to say. You also need to make sure that the assessor has all the information they need about your hearing instruments so they can include all appropriate shoes/connections in their recommendations.

Be aware that assessors work with all kinds of disability and are generally not specialists in hearing loss, the impact it can have on studies or the assistive equipment available. Connevens works with assessors across the country offering advice and carrying out training sessions on deafness and the equipment we can provide to help students but nobody is better placed to understand the difficulties than the student themselves!

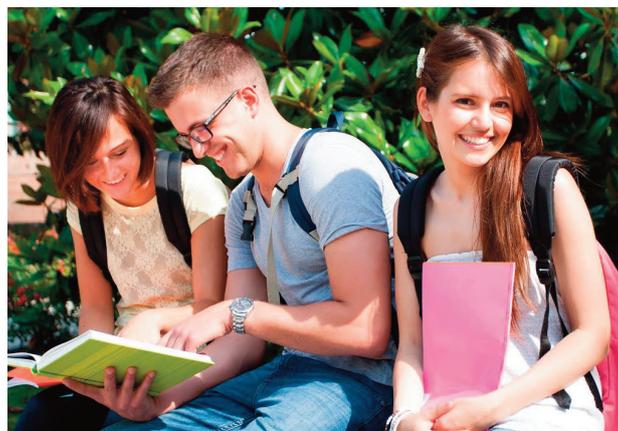
ToDs should ensure that all students have details of the exact make and model of their hearing instruments and also what programs they have. Depending on how involved in their own hearing equipment they have been, students may already have this information.



Student Finance will usually fund a radio aid system for deaf or hard of hearing students and an associated training visit. They may also approve non-medical helpers such as note takers, lip readers or BSL interpreters but there are limits on how many hours support you are entitled to. The assessor will be able to explain how this works.

At Connevens, we specialise in radio aids and work with Student Finance a lot. From our experience, the most popular systems at the moment are the Phonak Roger Pen and the Connevens fmGenie. Both systems have pros and cons for use at university and we are happy to talk to you, your family, a Teacher of the Deaf or the assessor about which system would be the most appropriate for you and your studies.

As well as the standard system, we would always suggest that you also ask for a digital voice



recorder and leads to connect it into your radio aid. This will mean you can record the lesson and listen back to it later, allowing you to take notes at your own pace, ensuring you don't miss anything.

If your course includes listening to sound from a TV or computer (e.g media studies) then you should also ask for connections to allow you to use these with your radio aid as well.

What happens next?

Once Student Finance have received the needs assessment report from the assessor, they will process the recommendations and decide on what funding you are entitled to. They will issue you with a 'DSA2' letter detailing the exact support/equipment that you have been awarded and the suppliers that have been approved. You cannot order equipment or instruct support without this letter of authorisation.



Once you have your letter, you will then usually need to contact each of the suppliers yourself to order the equipment and arrange for delivery. They will generally ask to see a copy of the letter in full so scan it into a computer or take pictures of it to make it easy to email.

At Connevens, whenever we are asked to carry out a training session with the supply of a radio aid (which is most of the time); we will send out a Training Questionnaire. This is single sheet which asks for information such as the address where the training is to take place (usually somewhere near to you such as your university campus) and also details about your hearing instruments and situation. This is not complicated and is just aimed at ensuring that our trainers have all the information they need to carry out the best training session for you. It also helps us make sure that the equipment that has been recommended by the assessor and approved by Student Finance will work for you and your hearing aids. Unfortunately, sometimes aids change or assessors don't have the required information to include the correct small but crucial accessories such as hearing aid direct input shoes and without these the system won't work.

Once we've received all the information from you and are happy that everything is going to work, we will dispatch the equipment by a courier service (it will need a signature). We generally send the equipment in advance of the training session to allow you to familiarise yourself with the different elements, read the instruction books and charge the batteries.

We will also allocate you one of our local trainers and pass them your details so they can contact you and arrange the training session. A trainer on behalf of Connevens will be an experienced deaf services technician, former Teacher of the Deaf or qualified Educational Audiologist – so they really know their stuff! Training sessions aren't a set time and will last as long as is necessary for you to feel comfortable about how the equipment works and how to get the best out of it. Generally we say to allow a couple of hours, although this may be less if you have used a similar radio aid at school or more if you have additional needs.

Our Top Tips for students:

- 1. Make sure that the assessor knows the exact make and model of your hearing instruments.** You'd be surprised how many come to us for a radio aid to go with '2 x digital hearing aids'
- 2. Make sure that you know what programs your hearing aid has** – most radio aids require the 'FM' program and if you don't already have it, you'll need to visit your audiologist
- 3. Ask for a training visit to be included** – this will make sure you know how to make the most of the advanced equipment you're being provided with.
- 4. Do some research before-hand. If you have used a system at school and you're happy with it, or if there is a new system on the market that you'd like** – make sure you know the details and let the assessor know. It might not be suitable or possible but if you don't ask...
- 5. Don't forget to talk to your Disability Advisor or Student Support Service about any other equipment you might need as part of your daily life at university.** For example, an accessible fire alarm should be provided for you in residential accommodation.
- 6. MOST IMPORTANTLY – while you're still at school and have the support of a TOD, try to learn as much about your hearing aids and radio aids as possible.** You won't always have the fantastic support teachers provide so make the most of the opportunity and take control of your own assistive equipment.



If you have any questions about DSA, how it works, what sorts of equipment are provided and anything else, please contact Connevens on 01737 247571 or info@connevens.com