



Changes to Disabled Students' Allowances

What people said



This document was written by Easy Read Wales. It is an easy read version of '**Consultation – summary of responses to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)**'.

September 2020

How to use this document



This is an easy read version. The words and their meaning are easy to read and understand.



You may need support to read and understand this document. Ask someone you know to help you.



Words in **bold blue writing** may be hard to understand. They have been explained in a box below the word.



If the hard word is used again it is in **normal blue writing**. You can check what they mean on **page 34**.



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This document was made into easy read by **Easy Read Wales** using **Photosymbols**.

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Introduction



In 2019 the Welsh Government wrote about changes they are thinking about making to **Disabled Students' Allowances** – called **DSAs** for short.



You can read about this here:

<https://gov.wales/changes-disabled-students-allowances>



DSAs support disabled people to get higher education. They are **grants**.



A **grant** is an amount of money you can get that you do not have to pay back.



Welsh Government asked people to tell them what they think about the changes. This document is about what people said.

What people said

Question 1. Do you think that 1 overall grant would be better than 4 different grants?



Most people said having 1 **grant** would be better than 4 separate **grants**.



But most people still want to have a separate travel **grant**.



Some people want another separate **grant** for students who have to buy expensive equipment.

People said that 1 grant would be good because:

- It helps students who have **complex needs**



A person with **complex needs** may:

- have more than 1 disability
- have health problems
- not use words to talk.



- **Grants** would be the same for different levels of study.



- It is easier for everyone to understand. And cheaper and easier to organise.



- It is quicker to apply.



- It would be easier for students to use all of the different types of support. And they would be able to use the **grant** on the support they need the most.

People said that 1 grant would be bad because:



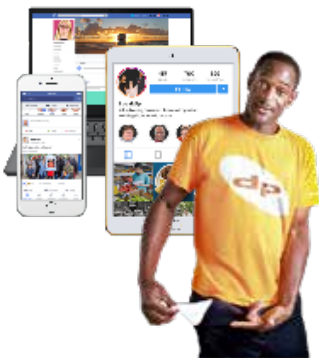
- Separate **grants** make it easier to understand what you can spend money on.



- 1 **grant** might mean that people spend all their money on non-medical help. For example study skills tutors and mentors. They may rely too much on this help, and do not do as much for themselves.



- Students should be allowed to spend more money to buy the equipment they need.



- Students who need to buy special equipment may be worse off. They may have to spend more at the start of their first year and not have much left over.



- There has been lots of issues with **Universal Credit**. This is now 1 payment. There will probably be similar issues with making **DSAs** 1 payment.



- There will be less money available for non-medical help. The **grants** should be separate so students can get individual support.



- The current system works well for students. It may not be best for students to change it.

People who were not sure about this change said:



- When people first start a course they have to spend a lot of money. A single **grant** needs to be able to pay for that.



- It does not matter if you get 1 **grant** or 4 **grants**. The important thing is that students have enough money to buy what they need.



- There must be clear guidance on how the money can be spent.



- 1 grant would be better if students were still able to get the same level of help.



- Students should be able to ask for the amount of money they need. This new system should not cut how much money is available.

Question 2. Do you think a ready made package of support could work for students?



A **package of support** would be based on what most students with certain disabilities need. This would be instead of giving every student a **study needs assessment**.

A **study needs assessment** is when a specialist advisor talks to you about your disability. And how this might affect your studies. They will say what extra support you need.



A similar number of people thought a package of support should **not** be used, as the number of people who thought they could work well.

Good points people said:



- It would be cheaper, quicker and easy to organise. As long as it is clear to students that they do not have to accept a **package of support** if they do not want 1.



- If it was explained clearly to students it would make it easier to get the **grant**.



- It would save lots of time and money if we stop forcing all students to have a **needs assessments**, when they do not really need 1.



- **Needs assessments** are only needed for more complex conditions.



- At the moment **needs assessments** cost too much. And they are done differently across the country. Assessors do not usually find out what support the university offers. So they often recommend support that students do not really need.



- Students can feel like they are being judged when they go for a **needs assessment**. Even though the assessors are supportive and helpful.



- For students with common needs, it would be useful to get equipment and support straight away. But if a student has complex needs they should have a **needs assessment**.

Bad points people said:



- At the moment students get individual support. A **package of support** would not do this.



- All students would have to tell the university about their disability to get **DSAs**. They might not want to and it might also be against the law.



- Staff in colleges and universities are busy. They would not have time to do this extra work. And they would not know how to do this new work.



- Students might not get support before they start studying. This makes it harder for students as they will not be ready to study.



- Many students would choose a **package of support** instead of getting the full support they need. They may not be confident enough or be able to ask for a **needs assessment** instead.



- Support and **assessment** should be ongoing because needs might change.



- It is wrong to think we know more about a students' support needs than they do. Students who have the same disabilities, may still have different needs. Everyone is different and every person's study needs support is different.



- It does not let students have a say about help that could make things better for them when studying, and learning to be independent.



- Students might get the wrong type of support. It is unlikely that staff will be able to predict what things are needed to provide support without a proper **assessment**.



- Students with autism need individual support. A **package of support** would not work for them.



- Many students are unaware of their support needs. And they do not know what support is available to them. If they are just offered a **package of support** they may miss out on the support they need.



- Without the help of an assessor many student may not realise how to use special equipment and software in the best way for them.



- Many students feel better after talking about their support needs with an assessor. They may not have had the chance to do this before.



- There could be a simpler **needs assessment** for students who have a clear idea of their support needs. Students who have no idea about their support needs, or who have complex needs could have a more detailed **assessment**.



- We could speed things up by giving support for clear support needs straight away. Then organising any further support as soon as possible after that.

Other points



- Who would check that **packages of support** are useful for students? We would need a way of checking this support is still working for people.



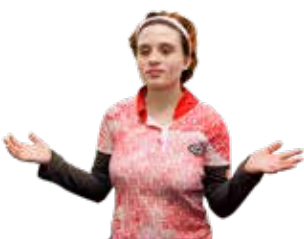
- **Packages of support** would rely on the labels given to disabled people, rather than seeing them as individuals.



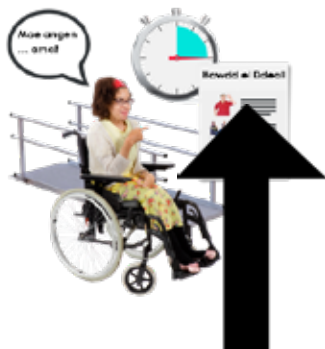
- Students who study at home might need different **packages of support**.



- Students who get a **package of support** might not realise other help is available.



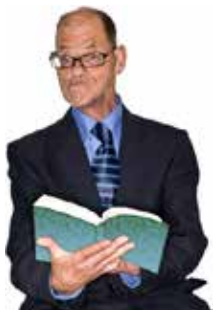
- Who would students talk to if they had a problem with their **package of support**?



- We need to make sure that the **package of support** is more than what the university must already provide by law.



- Students would need to know about their **package of support** before they started their course.



- We can use SEN Statements to help find out what support needs a student has.



- It would be good for students if there was a better way to get their paperwork. It would be good to have an online portal. And a better way of sharing information.



- We need to make sure support is offered and organising in a similar way in England and Wales.



- Part of any new change should be making universities more inclusive. They should have to show how they are working on this.

Question 3. Who should organise DSAs



Most answers said that universities and colleges should **not** organise **DSAs**.



But the same amount of answers either thought universities and colleges **should** organise DSAs, or were unsure either way.

Good points of colleges and universities organising DSAs



- If colleges and universities organise **DSAs** it will be more personal. They are better at organising this support and students like it more.



- It is easier for colleges and universities to support individual students and organise training around classes.



- Each university will know more about the problems that students will face at that university.



- Colleges and universities should make sure they all give the same good quality support. This should be based on what their students need.



- Students who get **DSAs** usually find things like organisation and planning hard. It would be good for them to have support to apply for **DSAs** from their college or university.



- **Assessment** centres based in colleges or universities will know more about what support is already available. And they will not suggest types of support that are not possible within that college or university.

Bad points of colleges and universities organising DSAs



- Students might get less choice.



- Colleges and universities should not check their own disability support. An outside organisation should always check their support.



- Colleges and universities might not have staff who know how to do [study needs assessments](#) well.



- Colleges and universities might think more about how to save money and not how best to meet their students' needs.



- The standard of support might be different in different colleges and universities. We should have 1 set of standards that all colleges and universities follow.



- Students might feel forced to tell the university or college about their disability.



- Students who study at home might have to travel to college or university to get support services. This can be difficult for disabled students.



- It is good for an outside centre to do the **study needs assessments**. Students can choose a centre near home. Students can choose an assessor who knows about their disability. And this can stay the same throughout their course.



- Sometimes students move to different colleges and universities. When this happens it is easier when disability support is organised by an outside centre.



- Students need their support to be ready for when they start their course. Sometimes they have support before their course starts.



- If students choose their college or university quite late they might not get their support on time.



- It is likely the universities and colleges will limit what software and equipment students can have, because they may not know about others. Or they may only have licences to use some.



- It is not right for university and colleges to be in charge of organising an **assessment**, deciding what support is needed and then providing that support. They may be base decisions on things other than the student's needs.



- Universities and colleges should organise **DSAs**. But they should work with others like GPs, support workers and parents and carers.



- Universities and colleges must make sure they spend the money they get for organising **DSAs** on **DSAs** only.



- Students should be able to easily get independent advocacy services. This is a service that helps students speak up for themselves and have their voices heard.



- Students who already have support in place may have to change to support provided by their university or college. This would not be good.



- If universities and colleges organise support, they will use the same services. There will be less competition for services to provide support. And the quality of services may go down. There must be good ways of checking the quality of support.

People who were unsure about this question said:



- We do not know what happens when Welsh students study at English colleges and universities.



- Sometimes colleges let other people run courses in their buildings. We do not know who would organise the disability support for these courses.



- It is good to have services organised by colleges and universities as well as outside centres. This is a good balance for students.



- Sometimes colleges and universities cannot give the right type of support. Sometimes they cannot do it quickly enough.



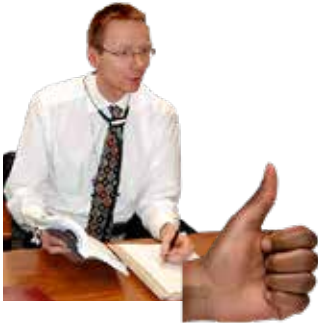
- **Assessment** centres should work together to make sure they understand what support is possible at different universities and colleges.

Question 4. Do you think raising awareness of DSAs would help more people to get DSAs?



All answers to this question agreed that we should tell more people about **DSAs**.

Good points of raising awareness:



- It would help doctors understand **DSAs** better. It would be easier for them to give the right medical information and this would cost less for students.



- Students could have a **passport** to show what disability support they need. This will help them as they go through education.



- Disabled students should have support during their whole education. This includes **DSAs** in colleges and universities.



- The process for getting **DSAs** should be started for students with long-term needs, without needing to ask for it.



- Colleges and universities should tell everyone at their partner schools about **DSAs**.



- There should be a **working group** to help make **DSAs** better. It would include students and staff from colleges, universities and community learning organisations.

A **working group** is a group of people who come together to share ideas and make something better.



- We must remember to think about older students when we tell people about **DSAs**.



- We need everyone to use the same language to talk about support and services. Using different names and terms for things is confusing.



- Staff who help students to apply to university should tell everyone about **DSAs**. And help people talk about disability without shame.



- Disabled students are not given enough time to apply for disability support.



- **DSAs** should follow the **Social Model of Disability**. Students should not need to give medical evidence about their conditions. Instead they should show evidence of the things that can stop them from studying.



The **Social Model of Disability** says that the way society works stops disabled people from doing things. Not their condition.



- If we teach staff in schools and healthcare about **hidden disabilities** more people would use DSAs. It would also help people understand **hidden disabilities** more.



A **hidden disability** is a disability that we cannot easily see. This includes autism, brain injuries and epilepsy.



- It would be good to make a **DSAs** guide that students can take to the doctor's. This will explain what medical information the doctor needs to give.



- We need more help when the medical information we give for the **DSA** is not accepted.



- It would be good to employ people to talk to schools and doctors about **DSAs**.



- People should hear from students' experiences. Students can tell people about how the disability support is helpful.



- It would be good to have a computer guide that tells you what support and information is available for different disabilities.



- It would be good to help students understand who **DSAs** can help. Some students do not see themselves as disabled



- It is better to raise awareness about disability and how to include everyone in teaching. If we could do this, students may not need individual support.

Other points



- Welsh Government should not assume that doctors are best placed to say how certain condition affect a student.



- There should be more, easy to understand and clear information about how to apply for **DSAs**. And how to arrange the support.



- We need to think about people who have already had **assessments** and diagnosis for their condition. And why they need to give evidence to support their application. We also need to look at people who were not awarded **DSAs**, But who the Department for Work and Pensions already class as disabled.

Other answers

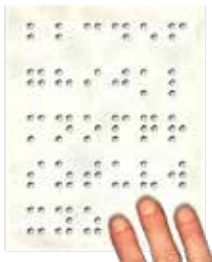
Welsh language



15 people wrote about how changes to **DSAs** might affect the Welsh language. They said:



- Any new system must include **Welsh language Standards**.



- There needs to be more Welsh braille support.



- All **assessments** must also be available in Welsh.



- Speakers of languages other than English might find it difficult to get information about **DSAs**.



- We need lots of Welsh-speaking people who do **assessments**, to make sure students who speak Welsh do not have to wait longer.



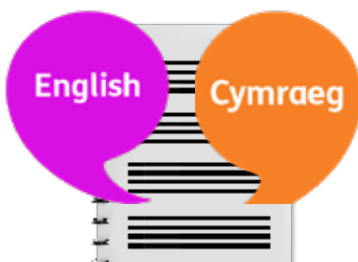
- Screen readers do not always work with the Welsh language. This will make things more difficult for students who prefer to speak Welsh.



- Students who speak Welsh might not get the same support as English speaking students. Students who speak Welsh should get other support to help them.



- Students should be able to choose what language they want to use when they start studying. Students would not then have to keep telling people what they want.



- Translations of **study needs assessments** from Welsh into English should be fast and good.



- Some Welsh language students study outside of Wales. They will not be able to use Welsh speaking centres that are only in Wales.



- Colleges and universities have to follow rules to make sure the Welsh language is protected. So these changes will not affect Welsh language.

Anything else

12 people wrote other comments. They said:



- If we have a **DSAs** [working group](#) it should have more students.



- **DSAs** do not work well. They are too expensive to organise.



- **DSAs** need to change but organisations must work together to do this.



- Students in colleges and universities get different support. We think college students do not go to university because they did not get enough support in college.



- The support should be based on the **social model of disability**. Colleges and universities should make sure all staff who do **study needs assessments** are trained to do them.



- Colleges and universities should make sure everyone can find and use all of their services.



- Students should have special student IDs that they can use to get services on computers.



- Students should get training on things like computers and equipment that can support them with their studies.



- The rules for **DSAs** are different in Wales and England. We think students should be treated the same way in both England and Wales. The rules should be clearer.



- Colleges and universities should know if students have applied for **DSAs**. This will make the process quicker.



- We think Welsh government should do more to make learning and teaching more inclusive in Wales.



- There is a difference in what disabled students and non-disabled students achieve. We should work to change this.



- The needs of people with sight impairments may change over time. Sometimes quite a lot. We need support that can change when needed.



- Somethings are not covered by **DSAs**. Like books. So people who cannot travel to the library are at a disadvantage.



- It can be bad for your mental health to have to prove you are disabled and have the right to support all the time.



- There are lots of really good service providers at the moment. But they may go out of business if universities and colleges become responsible for organising support.

Hard words

Complex needs

A person with complex needs may:

- have more than 1 disability
- have health problems
- not use words to talk
- behave in a way other people find difficult

Grant

A grant is an amount of money you can get that you do not have to pay back.

Hidden disability

A hidden disability is a disability that we cannot easily see. This includes autism, brain injuries and epilepsy.

Package of support

A DSA package of support would be based on what most students with certain disabilities need. Students will have the right to say no to a DSA package of support and can ask for a full study needs assessment at any time.

Study needs assessment

A study needs assessment is when a specialist advisor talks to you about your disability and how this might affect your studies. They will say what extra support you need.

Social Model of Disability

The Social Model helps us understand that a person is not disabled by having a disability or impairment. Someone is disabled by the barriers in society that make it more difficult for disabled people to do things. For example, a barrier might be a university not having a lift.

Working group

A working group is a group of people who come together to share ideas and make something better.

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