



Baroness Barran

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Baroness Sherlock and Baroness Hussein-Ece
House of Lords
London
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20 December 2021

Dear Maeve and Meral,

Further to the Oral Question asked by Lord Holmes of Richmond on 9 December 2021 on the operation of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), I am writing to provide further information on the points you raised about the evaluation and take-up of DSA.

I can confirm that the most recent major evaluation of DSA was the '*Evaluation of Disabled Students' Allowances*' report mentioned by both of you in the debate. This was published in January 2019 and is available at [Evaluation of disabled students' allowances \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk). The research included an online survey of 1,773 disabled higher education students, who were eligible to complete the survey regardless of whether or not they were claiming DSA.

Regarding the question of when students become aware of DSA, 87% of respondents to this research said that they had heard of DSA and 40% had heard of DSA before starting their course. Among students who received DSA, 58% were aware of it before starting their course while an additional 20% became aware within the first year. The authors of the report commented that this supported case study findings that higher education providers are signposting students who are eligible to apply for DSA if they disclose a disability during their course application, and that a 'second wave' of disclosures often comes during the registration process.

It may also be helpful to clarify that higher education providers have responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for all their disabled students. DSA is available for more specialist support on top of the reasonable adjustments made by institutions. This means that not all disabled students will need to apply for DSA because in some instances their support needs will be fully met by the adjustments made by their higher education provider.

Turning to your concerns about whether DSA is meeting students' needs, the Department is continuing to work closely with the Student Loans Company (SLC) to seek ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of DSA. A key recent change has been the simplification of the undergraduate DSA into one single allowance from the 2021/22 academic year (it was previously structured

as four separate sub-allowances). This means that a single allowance of up to £25,000 a year is now available to full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate students, with travel costs remaining uncapped. This change increases the flexibility for students to access the support that they need, and is likely particularly to benefit students with higher cost support requirements such as those with a visual impairment or hearing impairment.

There are also other projects to improve the delivery of DSA under way. SLC is looking to improve the application experience for students in receipt of DSA. This will take into account user experience, testing, and customer feedback, and implement improvements that will enable all DSA students to apply via a fully accessible application service, with access to digital assistance and support at every stage of their application for student finance. We are also intending to put in place contracts for the provision of needs assessments and assistive technology which should secure increased value for money and improve the service to students.

I hope this answer has been useful and I will place a copy in the House of Lords library.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Diana Barran".

BARONESS BARRAN

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE