

## What is DSA, and who can get it?

If you have a diagnosis of a medical condition (including mental ill health or a specific learning difference) you can apply for Disabled Students' Allowance. 'Specific Learning difference/difficulty' mean things like dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADD, and Asperger Syndrome.

Applying for DSA is a way of getting some tailored support to enable you to perform to the best of your abilities while you are studying. The support offered can include special computer software and payment for mentors or proof reading.

This support does not affect your grades, and your work will be marked at the same academic standard as every other student.

DSA is a grant, not a loan, so you will not be asked to pay this back at any point.

**If you *suspect* you may have a specific leaning difference, but you *do not have a formal diagnosis*, see Appendix 1 (below) on how to obtain a diagnosis. You will not be able to apply for DSA without a formal diagnosis.**

## Making an application for DSA

For the clearest guide to this process, and links to the relevant application forms, see:

<https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/overview>

If you are applying for other student finance products you can tick to say you are applying for DSA and they will automatically share data so you do not have to repeat information.

### Step 1: Complete the DSA application form and attach a copy of your diagnosis

Once you have completed your sections of the DSA application form you will need to send it to us, because there is one section which we must complete. This section confirms that you will be a student with us, for how long, and if you are full- or part-time. Contact [disability@queens.ac.uk](mailto:disability@queens.ac.uk) to let us know that you will be sending us your form. Once we receive it we will complete our section and either return it to you or post it directly to Student Finance England, depending on your instructions.

*NB. If you have ever had student finance of any kind in the past (even if 30 years ago!) you will need to add your student number to the form. Not adding this could seriously delay your application.*

*[NB. This guide assumes you are resident in England. If you live in Wales, you will deal with Student Finance Wales instead.]*

## Step 2: Student Finance England (SFE) process your application

SFE is the organisation that deals with DSA payments, *whether or not* you have any other finance from them. They may be in touch to ask for further information in support of your application. Then, if they think you are eligible for DSA they will write to you and refer you to an Assessment Centre. They will tell you how to find your nearest assessment centre.



## Step 3: Go to an Assessment Centre for a needs assessment

There are assessment centres all over the country, often based in universities, but they are independent of university control (they are simply there for convenience). It is usually up to you to contact the assessment centre of your choice from the ones SFE recommend and arrange an appointment.

Staff at the Assessment Centre will ask you what you are going to study and how, and then they will make recommendations about what they feel you need. The needs of someone who is doing a Geology degree (with field trips into ravines and so on) will be significantly different from the needs of someone with the same condition who is studying theology.

You may also be asked if your university has a student support department. The answer for this is **no** but we will support you directly in your studies.

*NB. Appendix 2 of this document gives a brief description of the type of study, teaching and assessment that you will experience at Queen's – this is for you to take to the Assessment Centre to help explain about us*

One of the ways we do this is through a local support worker who is available to work with our students. She is qualified for many of the non-medical support worker roles that you may be advised to use. Her details are:



Alison Earey, M.Ed.  
Alison Earey Ltd - Dyslexia Specialist Support Tutor & Assessor  
SpLD APC (Patoss), AMBDA FE/HE  
Twitter: @alisondyslexia  
Email: [alison@dyslexia-consultant.com](mailto:alison@dyslexia-consultant.com)

There may be other support that you need, or that Alison may not be available to fulfil, or you may choose to request a different provider. In this case please explain to the Assessment Centre the small size of Queen's and ask for recommendations for other local suppliers of such services. The details of the cost and the suppliers approved to do the work (or to supply the relevant equipment) will be included in their report.

## Step 4: The Assessment Centre produce a report

The Assessment Centre will write a Needs Assessment Report and send this to you and to Student Finance England, confirming what you are entitled to. The ordering of equipment and commissioning of services is done by SFE directly. Any providers (including, for instance, Alison) will invoice SFE directly for their time, in line with the parameters of the report. Queen's will not directly employ anyone and then claim the cost of their salary back from DSA.

## Step 5: Queen's will work with you to make a plan for your support

If you ticked the box on your application form to say that you didn't mind sharing the Needs Assessment Report with your learning provider, Queen's will also receive a copy of it. This will contain a section which advises us about adaptations we should make for you.

You should discuss your Needs Assessment Report with the appropriate member of staff before your studies begin: Dave Allen if you are an Independent Student, or Rachel Starr if you are a Ministerial Student. Together you should draw up an initial personal plan.

## How long will it take?

Note that applications can take **approximately 3 months** from start to finish so please **apply early enough** to ensure you have support in place before you start your studies.

If you receive support from an external provider, please let Queen's know their details so that we can give them an induction into the campus and anything else that may help them to assist you.

## If you need help...

If you need any assistance with any part of the application process please contact: [disability@queens.ac.uk](mailto:disability@queens.ac.uk)

## Future years

After your first year you will need to **reapply** for DSA, but there is a shorter form to complete and you will not need to go to the Assessment Centre again unless there has been a significant change to your diagnosis.

# APPENDIX 1 - Getting a diagnosis (for applying for DSA)

## Disability or Long-Term Health

If you have a medical condition, go to your GP and ask for a formal medical diagnosis. *[If you are moving to Birmingham or living on campus, it will be useful to your new GP if you get your medical records up to date with a visit to your existing GP to review any long-term health condition.]*



You can download a form for them to fill in here: <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/eligibility>

## Mental Health Conditions

If you have a mental health problem, please download this form <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsas/eligibility> for your consultant or GP to complete if they are not happy to write one themselves.

## Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. Dyslexia)

If you suspect you may have a specific learning difficulty (or you know that you have, but you were last diagnosed when you were a child), read on...

## Diagnostic testing for Specific Learning Difficulties

The cost of a diagnostic text is usually around £250-£400. The test itself can take several hours and the report will be detailed. It is not *this* report that determines what DSA you will be entitled to. DSA entitlement is determined by the Assessment Centre when they look at your diagnostic report and put that together with a discussion with you and knowledge of the latest equipment and advice.

Unfortunately, there is no NHS or DSA funding that covers the cost of *diagnosis* for a specific learning difficulty. Even if you eventually get DSA, they will not reimburse you for this cost. You will require an *adult diagnosis* completed by a recognised professional.

**Ministerial students:** If you are being sponsored for ministerial training (e.g. by the Church of England or the Methodist Church) then it is likely that your sponsoring denomination will meet this cost. Contact the Director of Methodist Formation ([craskej@queens.ac.uk](mailto:craskej@queens.ac.uk) - for Methodist students) or Director of Anglican Formation ([eareym@queens.ac.uk](mailto:eareym@queens.ac.uk) - for Anglican students) and they will contact your Church to arrange funding.

**Independent students:** If you are not being sponsored by a church and do not think you can cover the cost of this diagnosis then contact [disability@queens.ac.uk](mailto:disability@queens.ac.uk) for details of any bursary schemes which *may* be able to assist you with a contribution towards this cost.

(Please note that there is no *guaranteed* funding, and no refund for the diagnostic tests if they show that you do *not* have a specific learning difficulty.)

## Getting a diagnostic test

To find a recognised practitioner who is qualified to provide a diagnosis, you can use the PATOSS Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties) website:

<https://www.patoss-dyslexia.org> and go to the section titled ‘Find a Tutor/Assessor’

Because of the variety in cost it is worth asking for a quote. Look for those who offer “full diagnostic assessment” and whose experience includes “Age range: HE”. Alison Earey (see above) is qualified to carry out diagnostic tests, but you do not *have* to use her – a more local practitioner may be more convenient. Before you commit to using a particular professional, contact them and check that they are qualified to do diagnostic testing for specific learning difficulties to be used for a DSA application for Higher Education.

There is also helpful information about assessment on the British Dyslexia Association website: <https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/>

# APPENDIX 2 - Studying at Queen's: Information for the Assessment Centre

## General background

The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education provides vocational training for students preparing to become clergy or lay ministers (and a variety of other voluntary roles) in the Methodist Church, the Church of England, and other Christian Churches.



*Part of the Queen's campus*

## Validation

Programmes of study are validated by one of our partner universities. For any new student this would either be **Durham University** or **Newman University**. This is NOT a franchise arrangement. We do not receive OfS funding, but our programmes are designated by OfS in order to allow students to have access to any student finance that they may be entitled to. We do not have access therefore to 'Access to Learning' funds. We can assist students, however, in applying for external bursaries for part of the cost of diagnosis.

## Students, staff and facilities

The college has around 350 students, many of whom are part-time and all of whom are aged over 21. There are approximately 19 members of faculty plus a variety of associate tutors. Accommodation, lecture rooms, study space and a library are available on campus.

Many students follow pathways which involve evening classes and residential weekends and there is full tutor support during those periods. Distance Learning students have a personal tutor along with module tutors and access to central support services such as registry via email or phone.

## Assessment and teaching

All programmes are assessed with 100% coursework. These take the form of written assignments, theological reflections, book reviews, presentations, learning journals, portfolios, placement reviews, exegeses, group work, commentaries on sermons/presentations, etc. Assessment takes place throughout the year, following the relevant module teaching – the first summative assessments are due for new students therefore during term 1. The teaching year is long (mid-September to early July) because of the additional vocational requirements of study and placements. Teaching contact hours are high to suit the needs of our adult learners with a wide variety of academic backgrounds.

Time for private study therefore is slightly less than in a normal undergraduate university situation for our subject area. Teaching styles are very varied and there is far less emphasis on formal lectures and more on discussions and explorations.

## Online and library resources

There is a virtual learning environment (Moodle) for all teaching materials and which is also used for submission of assignments. A small number of modules are delivered online via skype seminar and weekend residential only. The library has 50,000 books and 60 current journal subscriptions, plus access to over 500 journals online and some ebooks (see <http://www.queens.ac.uk/library/>). Unlike most university libraries, we do not have a “short loan” period. Our shortest loan period is the Week Loan, with up to four online renewals, provided the book has not been reserved. Additional renewals may be available on request.



*The Queen's Foundation library*

## Student support

Given the small nature of the college there is not a dedicated student support centre with staff qualified to provide specialist support. However, we have one contact who is qualified to provide support for those with Specific Learning Difficulties, and who has done so successfully for many of our students. However, **we welcome any recommendations for the provision of support workers from approved providers along with recommendations for adjustments to be made for any student.**

Although we do not have a dedicated student support centre we do provide much more extensive than average dedicated personal tutoring and pastoral care systems.