

What is a needs assessment?

Disability Advice and Support



Student Services

Contents

Who is this booklet for?	2	What happens after I've had my assessment?.....	6
What is a needs assessment?.....	2	Why should I give permission for Disability Advice and Support to be sent a copy of my report?	6
How do I apply to have an assessment?	2	Will Disability Advice and Support send my report to anyone else in the University?	6
Where will my needs assessment take place?.....	3	What should I do when my DSAs are agreed?.....	6
How do I find an Assessment Centre?	3	What action will my Funding Provider take when my DSAs are agreed?	7
Are all Assessment Centres the same?	3	What if I change my mind about which course I study?	7
Can I have a needs assessment before I go to university?.....	3	What if my circumstances change?	7
Who will pay for my needs assessment?	3	What if I decide to take a year out?	7
What if I change my mind about going to university after I've had my assessment?.....	3	What if I want higher specification equipment than recommended in my report?.....	7
Can I prepare for my needs assessment?.....	4	What if I'm not happy with my equipment supplier?	8
How should I prepare for my needs assessment?	4	What if I'm not happy about some of my human support?	8
Is there anything else I need to do before my assessment?	5	Useful contacts and resources	8
How long will my assessment last?	6		
What if I am unable to attend the appointment?.....	6		

Who is this booklet for?

This information is for anyone applying to university or studying at De Montfort University, who:

- Have a disability, long-term medical condition, Specific Learning Difference (including dyslexia) or suffer from mental health condition which will affect their studies
- Intend to apply for the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs)

and would like to know what a 'needs assessment' involves.

You will need to apply to your Funding Provider, see 'Useful contacts and resources' at the end of this booklet. If your course will be funded by a Research Council or the NHS you should contact your Funding Provider to establish the application process.

Some students will apply to NHS Student Bursaries, while others will apply to their Research Council. For this reason, the term 'Funding Provider' will be used throughout this booklet.

If you suffer from a mental health condition, such as depression, you may be able to apply for DSAs. The University has a Mental Health Adviser who will advise you on this and support you through the application process; see 'Useful contacts and resources' at the end of this booklet for further information.

The official name for the 'needs assessment' is 'Study Aids and Study Strategies Assessment' (SASSA), although Funding Providers and university staff usually call it a 'needs assessment'.

Disability Advice and Support staff have produced a series of booklets relating to disabilities, including Specific Learning Differences and support at the University. The term 'needs assessment' is used in these booklets; see 'Useful contacts and resources' at the end of this booklet for further information about Disability Advice and Support series of booklets.

What is a needs assessment?

It is an assessment during which appropriate support to help you overcome the effects of your

disability, medical condition, Specific Learning Difference or mental health condition on your studies at university will be determined. It is not a test. The types of support vary, and could include:

- Human support, for example a note taker
- Technological support, for example a computer with assistive software; a recording device for lectures
- Other support, for example a photocopying allowance.

How do I apply to have an assessment?

The needs assessment is part of the application process for the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs). When you have sent your Funding Provider written evidence of your disability, medical condition, Specific Learning Difference or mental health condition, and they agree that it will affect your studies at university, they will write to you with permission to have a needs assessment.

We have produced the following booklets about the types of evidence acceptable to Funding Providers:

- Proof of Specific Learning Difference (including dyslexia) required when applying for Disabled Students' Allowances
- Proof of disability or medical condition required when applying for Disabled Students' Allowances.

Our series of booklets also includes titles about the DSAs, which both explain what they are and how to apply for them. These are available on request; see 'Useful contacts and resources' at the end of this booklet for further information.

Where will my needs assessment take place?

The majority of needs assessments are conducted at places called Assessment Centres. These Centres are usually based in a college or university. Assessment Centres specialise in conducting needs assessments for people with disabilities, medical conditions, Specific Learning Differences and mental

health condition. Most of the assessments are for students entering Further or Higher Education, but sometimes employers refer employees for an assessment, so that they know what support the person needs to enable them to do their job.

De Montfort University is now a satellite centre for the Open University Assessment Centre. This means that Open University Assessors conduct needs assessment for De Montfort University applicants and students on our Campus.

Disability Advice and Support will not automatically receive a copy of the letter from your Funding Provider giving permission for you to have a needs assessment. You should therefore inform Disability Advice and Support when you have received permission from your Funding Provider, and check whether it will be possible for you to have your assessment at the University.

How do I find an assessment centre?

Your Funding Provider may send you a list of Centres when they write to you with approval to have an assessment. Alternatively, the National Network of Assessment Centres' website contains a list of Centres.

See 'Useful contacts and resources' at the end of this booklet for further details.

Are all assessment centres the same?

No. Some Centres specialise in providing assessments for people with particular disabilities, but do not assess others. When you contact a Centre, you will need to state your disability, medical condition, Specific Learning Difference or mental health condition.

Additionally, administrative procedures vary from Centre to Centre. Some send student's forms to be completed and returned before an appointment is arranged, others send forms to be completed when you make an appointment, while others do not use forms at all. Centre staff will explain what is required of you when you enquire about an appointment.

Can I have a needs assessment before I go to university?

Yes, in fact the sooner you have your assessment, the better! If you have your assessment early, there's a strong chance your support can be put in place for your first week at university.

Funding Providers can give permission for a person to have a needs assessment when the following conditions have been satisfied:

- The person has started the application process for the Student Support Package (Maintenance Loan and/or fee support), and is eligible for support
- The Funding Provider has received formal, written evidence that the applicant has a disability, medical condition, Specific Learning Difference or mental health condition which will affect their studies.

Who will pay for my needs assessment?

Your Funding Provider will arrange for the cost of the assessment to be paid from the DSAs.

What if I change my mind about going to university after I've had my assessment?

If you change your mind about going to university, your Funding Provider will not invoice you for the cost of the assessment.

Can I prepare for my needs assessment?

Yes. Preparation is very important, because the more information you provide to the assessor about your disability, medical condition, Specific Learning Difference or mental health condition and its effects on your studies, the more able the assessor will be to recommend the correct level of support for you at university.

How should I prepare for my needs assessment?

There are four main areas which you should prepare for in the assessment.

1. The aspects of studying which cause you the most concern, because of the effects of your disability, medical condition, Specific Learning Difference or mental health condition.

This may include concerns about some of the following:

- Taking notes, as you find it hard to keep up and therefore miss information
- Writing assignments, as your teachers or lecturers often make comments about your spelling, grammar and essay structure
- Following verbal instructions, for example in a laboratory, as you often can't remember everything you are told to do
- Being in a lecture without a BSL interpreter or lip-speaker and a note taker
- Learning safe routes around Campus in the first few weeks of term without a Campus guide or 'buddy' and tactile map
- Being able to do your best in exams without support, for example extra time; modified exam papers; papers in enlarged font
- Travelling to and from university, as you need to use adapted transport.

2. The course you intend to study.

You should find out as much as possible about what is required of students on the course you intend to study. This is often the type of information you will have requested when deciding which courses you are going to apply for. It should include:

- Whether or not you will have formal exams at the end of each term
- Whether or not you will have phase tests throughout each term

- Whether or not you will be assessed via coursework (essays; assignments; reports)
- How many pieces of coursework you will have to complete each year, and the length eg, four assignments consisting of 2500 words and two consisting of 6000 words per academic year
- Whether or not field trips or placements are a compulsory component of the course
- How many hours of lectures you will have per week each academic year
- How many hours of seminars or tutorials you will have per week each academic year
- How many hours of laboratory work you will have per week each academic year
- How many weeks there will be in the academic year – at De Montfort University, this varies depending on the type of course.

If you are unsure of some of this information, you should provide the assessor with the name and contact details of a member of staff involved with your course who should be able to provide this information. This may be the Admissions Tutor or Course Leader.

3. Disability-related support you have previously received in education.

This could include:

- Study strategies tuition – this is most commonly given to students with Specific Learning Differences, including dyslexia
- A note taker for lectures
- Handouts of teachers'/lecturers' notes
- Copies of overhead transparencies used in class/lectures
- Examination support, which could include extra time; use of a computer; a reader; a scribe; modified exam papers; enlarged font on exam papers; exam papers on disk
- Assistance with accessing information in the library, for example a library browser

- Extensions to coursework deadlines
- The use of a computer with or without assistive software
- The use of a recording device to capture information in class or lectures
- English tuition for d/Deaf students with BSL as their first language.

When thinking about support you have received in the past, it will also be helpful if you consider whether or not you found it beneficial, and why this is the case.

4. **Strategies that you have developed throughout your education.**

Examples of these may include:

- Photocopying from source books and marking relevant text with highlighter pens
- Asking a family member or friend to help you structure your work
- Asking a friend or family member to read source books aloud to you, as you find it easier to digest information this way than when you read silently to yourself
- Tracking text with your finger or a ruler when reading so that you don't lose your place
- Using a computer's spell-checker or asking a family member or friend for a spelling check as you find using a paper dictionary too slow
- Copying friends' notes from class or lectures as yours are often incomplete
- Printing information on cream or pastel coloured paper, as you find it easier to read than that printed on white paper
- Re-reading text several times to make sure you have understood the information.

You may find that your preparation produces quite a lot of information. You can take notes to the assessment to make sure that you don't forget to mention anything.

Is there anything else I need to do before my assessment?

Yes. The requirements vary among Assessment Centres, but you will certainly need to send the following, when you have made your appointment.

- A copy of the letter from your Funding Provider, giving you permission to have a needs assessment
- A copy of your written evidence of your disability, medical condition, Specific Learning Difference or mental health condition. If you sent more than one piece of evidence to your Funding Provider, you should send a copy of each to the Assessment Centre

Staff at the Assessment Centre you will have your appointment at will explain what they require of you. Many Centres send you two forms to be completed and returned to them before the assessment. You should complete one of the forms. Don't be put off by the length of the form, as not all of it will apply to you. The other form should be completed by a member of staff with very detailed knowledge about your course, for example the Course Leader. This is because they will be able to provide information about every year of your course, including for example, the computer hardware and software used on your course.

How long will my assessment last?

The length of assessments varies, although many last for approximately two hours. Some students have very complex needs, and therefore the assessment could last for several hours, in which case, you may need rest breaks during the assessment.

What if I am unable to attend the appointment?

You should inform staff at the Assessment Centre as soon as you realise that you will be unable to attend the appointment. If you give the Centre's staff enough notice, they will be able to offer your appointment to someone else. This will mean that the appointment is not wasted. Wasted

appointments slow the whole process of applying for DSAs down for everybody.

What happens after I've had my assessment?

The assessor will write your needs assessment report. Assessment Centres have timescales within which assessors aim to have written the report. However, there can be delays, for example if the assessor:

- Has to research a very specialised piece of equipment or software
- Finds it difficult to establish the hourly rate for eg, a library browser in the city in which your university is based
- Finds it hard to speak to the Course Leader to check some information about the course you intend to study.

The Assessment Centre will send you a copy of the draft report for you to check. You are usually given a timescale in which to respond. If you do not respond, the Centre will assume that you are happy with the content of your report. It is therefore important that you check the report. If there is anything that is not quite right, or you are unsure of what it means, you should contact the Assessment Centre.

The Assessment Centre will then print a final version of the report. A copy of the final version will be sent to you and a copy will be sent to your Funding Provider. Disability Advice and Support will only be sent a copy if you have given permission.

Why should I give permission for Disability Advice and Support to be sent a copy of my report?

Your report may recommend that Disability Advice and Support or your university arranges or supplies some of the support. Staff will not be able to make arrangements for you if they don't know exactly what support is recommended in your report.

It also means that DAS will keep a copy of the report in your confidential file for the duration of your course and for six years after you graduate.

Will Disability Advice and Support send my report to anyone else in the University?

Disability Advice and Support will make a copy of your needs assessment report available to your Faculty Disability Contact.

It is helpful for your Faculty to have a copy of the report to enable staff in your Faculty to support you appropriately.

What should I do when my DSAs are agreed?

Your Funding Provider will send you a letter which explains what they have agreed to fund. It is important to remember that your needs assessment report contains recommendations, which depend on your Funding Provider's approval, and is not a document detailing what you must have. The letter will also explain how you should arrange for your support to be put in place.

Some Funding Providers may send Disability Advice and Support a copy of the letter, but most do not do this, therefore staff will not know that your DSAs have been agreed unless you inform them. If you would like staff in Disability Advice and Support to assist you with making any of the arrangements, you should provide them with a copy of the letter. Disability Advice and Support will not be able to help you make arrangements without having a copy of the letter of agreement from your Funding Provider, as they will not be clear about what has been agreed.

Alternatively, you may be confused by part of the letter and want Disability Advice and Support to explain it to you. They will not be able to do this without having a copy of the letter.

What action will my Funding Provider take when my DSAs are agreed?

Funding Providers give Student Finance England details of your DSAs award.

Although DSAs funding is a grant, not a loan, payments will be made on behalf of your Funding Provider.

NHS Student Bursaries make payments themselves.

If you have given permission, SFE will make payment directly to suppliers of equipment or services on your behalf.

If you decide that you would like to receive payment yourself, you will have to send proof of purchase for equipment and timesheets for human support workers to SFE.

We strongly recommend that you give permission for payment to be made directly to suppliers, as it will be easier for you when you are managing your finances. This is because it will mean that you are not invoiced for support by suppliers, eg, one-to-one tuition; note takers; computer equipment. It will also mean that you have to send fewer receipts to Student Finance England and can concentrate on using your support to help you with your course.

Your Funding Provider should inform you of any action they will take, and any they expect you to take in the letter they send you to inform you that your DSAs have been agreed.

What if I change my mind about which course I study?

You should contact your Funding Provider immediately to inform them. You may have to request a review of your needs assessment, as your needs on the new course may not be the same as they were on the first course. You must have your Funding Provider's permission to have a review of your needs assessment.

You should also contact your Funding Provider to inform them if you decide to study at a different university. You may have to request a review of your needs assessment.

What if my circumstances change?

If there is a change in your disability or medical condition which affects your studies, you will need to inform your Funding Provider. You will also need to

provide updated formal evidence which details the change(s) and request a review of your needs assessment. You must have your Funding Provider's permission to have a review of your needs assessment.

What if I decide to take a year out?

You must inform your Funding Provider immediately. Your needs assessment report may need to be updated shortly before you go to university, and you should ask your Funding Provider's permission for this to be done. The majority of the report should still be relevant, especially if you intend to study the same course. However it is likely that there will need to be changes made to the equipment recommended in the report.

What if I want higher specification equipment than recommended in my report?

You can have higher specification equipment than is recommended in your report if you pay the difference in price. You must discuss this with your Funding Provider. You will also need to make it clear with the equipment supplier that this is what you want, so that they know to invoice you, not your Funding Provider for the additional items.

What if I'm not happy with my equipment supplier?

First of all, you should contact the supplier to explain which aspect of their service you are not happy with. Companies which supply equipment funded through the DSAs are keen to provide a good service and want their customers to be happy with their equipment and the overall service they have received.

However, if you are not satisfied with the way in which the company responds to your concerns, you should contact your Assessment Centre and explain the situation.

Companies and Assessment Centres are also interested in receiving positive feedback from students.

What if I'm not happy about some of my human support?

Firstly, you should contact the company who employs the human support worker, and discuss the matter with them. It may be best for you to meet a member of staff from the company, so you can discuss your concerns face-to-face.

However, if you are unsure how to deal with the situation, or are not comfortable contacting the company yourself, you should contact Disability Advice and Support to discuss your concerns. It may be a good idea for you to meet a member of staff from the company with a member of staff from Disability Advice and Support to discuss your concerns fully and resolve the issue.

Remember that companies which provide human support workers want to provide a good service and want students to be happy with their support.

Companies are also interested in receiving positive feedback from students.

Useful contacts and resources

Disability Advice and Support

The contact details for Disability Advice and Support at De Montfort University are:

T: (0116) 257 7595

E: disability@dmu.ac.uk.

Disability Advice and Support
Student Services
De Montfort University
The Gateway
Leicester LE1 9BH.

We have produced a series of booklets relating to Specific Learning Differences, disabilities and support at university. Copies of the booklets are available from the Student Services Resources Area on the ground floor of Gateway House.

The booklets are also available on our web pages at dmu.ac.uk/disability

These booklets can be requested from Disability Advice and Support in alternative formats.

Mental Health Adviser

The University's Mental Health Adviser can be contacted by telephone via (0116) 257 7602.

Funding Providers

Student Finance England

W: direct.gov.uk/studentfinance

T: 0845 300 50 90.

Student Finance Wales

W: studentfinancewales.co.uk

T: 0845 602 8845.

Student Finance NI

W: studentfinancenl.co.uk

T: 0845 600 0662.

Student Awards Agency for Scotland

W: saas.gov.uk

T: 0845 111 1711.

- Contact your national Student Finance Service for an update on your funding application
- If you still haven't applied for your funding, you can do so online at the above websites
- You can download all student finance forms (PN1, PR1, CO1, Tuition Fee Loan Request form) from these websites

Technology

Leanne Franklin

T: (0116) 250 6114

E: lfranklin@dmu.ac.uk

Assessment Centres

If you need to find contact details for Assessment Centres, you can view a list on the National Network of Assessment Centres' web site at nnac.org

Faculty Disability Contacts

Each Faculty has a Faculty Disability Contact. In some cases, this person is also the Faculty Manager, while in others, it is another member of staff. The list of Faculty Disability Contacts is:

Art & Design

Rob Cummings

T: (0116) 250 6160

E: rcummings@dmu.ac.uk.

Business & Law

Tracey Lee-Adams

T: (0116) 250 6292

E: tlee-adams@dmu.ac.uk.

Health & Life Sciences

Sarah Thomson

T: (0116) 257 7884

E: sthompson@dmu.ac.uk.

Humanities

Victoria Bilbao

T: (0116) 2577621

E: vbilbao@dmu.ac.uk

Donna Neal

T: (0116) 257 7003

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