

AccessHE Disability Action Forum – pool funded-project proposal

What are we proposing?

With input from the Disability action Forum we would like to create an IAG resource toolkit for use in schools and further education colleges, which helps university applicants with a learning difficulty/disability or mental health condition to access Disabled Students Allowance (DSA).

The toolkit will comprise both physical and online materials to maximize accessibility. Following consultation with forum members and other stakeholders in an information webinar on 15th November 2019, a number of resources have been suggested, and these are listed below.

- Student vlog linked to AbilityNet’s ‘Claim It!’ campaign
- Medical evidence guidance
- Worksheets/activities around knowing how you learn best – ‘what type of learner are you?’
- Case studies of current students and alumni/professionals, focussing on their lived experiences
- Subject guides and DSA pages for PG students (possibly in collaboration with The Student Room)

In the webinar it was agreed that the resource toolkit should take a full lifecycle approach, covering the support available to students both pre-entry and post-enrolment, through to progression into employment. This would also enable the toolkit to address common barriers experienced by students at all stages of study. As an indicative guideline, the toolkit will cover the following areas:

- Application process and key timings/deadlines
- Guidance on confidentiality and disclosure (as students are often concerned where their personal information goes, and if academics will see it – the message is that they are in control)
- Skills for HE and the workplace
- Access to Work funding – support continuing into employment after HE
- Intersectional factors such as being a commuter student and being disabled

An advantage of developing the resource toolkit via the action forum is the access that forum members have to national networks and partner organisations, through which the finished project can be promoted. It is hoped that the resources will be widely adopted by the IAG community and the HE sector, and that by extension they can help to initiate a wider conversation about the term ‘disability’ and issues relating to understanding of and identification with it.

Why are we doing this?

The DfE and OfS have made support for disabled students a key priority area and our project seeks to offer exactly that, complementing existing initiatives such as Ability Net’s *Claim It!* Campaign with information for prospective students across London. There is [clear evidence](#) to suggest that take-up of DSA positively impacts on continuation rates, yet the lack of clarity around how to claim it is the most frequently cited barrier to accessing it. In fact, the majority of students aren’t even aware that the support exists in the first place – as a recent OfS Insight Brief pointed out, only 40 per cent of disabled students knew about DSA before starting their course.¹ This underscores the

¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1a263fd6-b20a-4ac7-b268-0bbaa0c153a2/beyond-the-bare-minimum-are-universities-and-colleges-doing-enough-for-disabled-students.pdf>

obvious benefits of developing a resource that promotes DSA and simplifies the application process, both for students and for HE providers.

Who will benefit?

AccessHE member institutions participating in the Disability Forum and the applicant/student network this forum engages in London. If the resource is favourably received by students and member providers, it could be rolled out across England.

How will we do this?

HEI Members of the AccessHE Disability Forum and affiliates such as AbilityNet, A2B Assessments and other organisations have extensive experience advising prospective students on the DSA. The Forum is therefore well placed to act as a steering group for the project, reviewing and revising working drafts of the resource – which can be produced by AccessHE – as well as providing in-kind support such as video facilities for filming vlogs/case studies. AccessHE’s London Programmes and Communications Coordinator, who is co-convenor of the Disability Forum, will oversee the production and design of the full resource toolkit in an operational role.

What will it cost?

Anticipated costs are modest and relate primarily to AccessHE administrative support (general project management and drafting of resources) and production of materials. Indicative costs will be provided once agreement as to the format of the resource toolkit is reached.

Project milestones

15 November 2019	Forum Chair and AccessHE to host information webinar for HEI members and forum stakeholders interested in developing and pool-funding the resource
December 2019 (prior to UCAS applications closing)	Mini-resource (e.g. a student vlog/webinar) to be launched
January 2019	Disability Forum, supported by AccessHE, to begin work on full resource toolkit, to encompass: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guides • Teacher/student worksheets • Video case studies
March/April 2020	Launch of full resource toolkit
2020-2021	Resource to be evaluation and updated

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