



The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP

Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

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tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

15 January 2024

Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your letter. As you will know, Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) helps students with the additional costs they may face in higher education because of their disability, including British Sign Language (BSL) support. DSA can also fund other support for deaf students in addition to BSL support, such as a specialist note-taker and a specialist support professional to enable access to and understanding of carrier language and to support access to research sources and the preparation of assignments.

I have responded to each of your specific questions below.

- **How will the DfE ensure the higher education sector helps students who are recommended DSA funded non-medical helper support but do not receive that support?**
- **What measures are in place to ensure that higher education providers make timely reasonable adjustments for disabled students?**

The Government is committed to ensuring that all students receive the support they need to enable them to study alongside their fellow students on an equal basis. Higher education providers must fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 by making reasonable adjustments for students with a disability, if they would otherwise be put at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with non-disabled persons. Disabled students should therefore expect to have reasonable adjustments made by their higher education provider to ensure that their needs are met through inclusive learning practices. The Office for Students' new Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR), launched in March 2023, identifies insufficient academic and personal support as risks in relation to continuation, attainment and progression in higher education for some disadvantaged and under-represented groups, including those with disabilities. The OfS is asking providers to have regard to these national level risks identified by the EORR when writing their new Access and Participation plans, which providers started to implement from September 2023.

- **Has the DfE identified a shortage of BSL interpreters or other specialist support on its non-medical helper supplier list? If so, what is the Department doing to rectify the shortfall?**
- **Will the DfE make the DSA system more flexible so students can fund non-medical helper support from the NRCPD register if necessary?**

DfE operates a system whereby all suppliers of DSA-funded non-medical help (NMH),

including BSL, are required to register with DfE. The registration process is light touch and intended to ensure that students receive support from appropriately qualified support workers. There is no charge for registering. The terms and conditions are straightforward and set out mainly that support workers must meet DfE's qualification requirements for the role they are providing, hold the relevant insurance, declare any conflicts of interest, comply with DSA policies, and comply with any audit requests. Full details of the registration process can be found at [Guidance for NMH Suppliers \(slc.co.uk\)](https://www.slco.co.uk) under the heading "Registering as a New NMH Supplier".

DfE is aware of instances where a student has experienced delays in getting their support in place due to a shortage of support workers in their area, particularly for BSL support and for other very specialist roles such as mobility trainers for students with a vision impairment. DfE officials are engaging with experts in the sector to understand the causes of these shortages and are considering possible solutions, including sourcing support from other routes such as through the NRCPD register. DfE officials will contact Mr Martin McLean of the National Deaf Children's Society to discuss the evidence he gave to the Committee in more detail.

If a student's assigned supplier cannot provide their support within 14 days of the student contacting them, DfE expects the supplier to refer the student back to the Student Loans Company (SLC) so that they can be transferred to another supplier. Students can also contact SLC themselves to request a change of supplier.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Halfon', written in a cursive style.

**The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education**