Develop Us

# Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) Information Pack

This information pack provides details on the fully funded services we offer through DSA.

## Contact Details:

Website: www.developus.wales

Email: Info@developus.wales

Phone: 07575 678 567

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## DSA Specialist Mentor – Autism Spectrum Conditions

The DSA Specialist Mentor, Autism Spectrum Conditions (SM-ASC) provides highly specialised, one-to-one psychosocial support to autistic students in higher education. The mentor's role is to help students identify and develop strategies to overcome the psychological and emotional barriers to learning created by their condition.

This type of support is distinct from the Study Skills and Strategy Support (SS-ASC), as it focuses more on the impact of the condition on the student's wellbeing, emotional regulation and self-management within the university context.

### Key Areas of Support

The mentor works with the student collaboratively, focusing on building independence and self-advocacy.

### Emotional Regulation and Stress Management

A primary focus is enabling the student to manage the psychological demands of university life:

* Coping with Anxiety and Stress: Developing techniques for managing the higher levels of stress and anxiety often experienced by autistic students in a university setting.

* Managing Change and Transitions: Providing structured support during periods of change, such as starting university, changing accommodation or preparing for exams and life after graduation.

* Emotional Literacy: Working with the student to develop their ability to recognise, understand, and regulate their emotional responses, including dealing with meltdowns or shutdowns.

* Wellbeing and Self-Care: Establishing strategies for maintaining a healthy work-life balance, self-care routines and realistic study patterns.

### Social and Communication Skills

The mentor supports the student to navigate the complex and often confusing social environment of a higher education institution:

* Social Interaction: Developing strategies for approaching and managing social situations, such as interacting with peers, lecturers and university staff.

* Communication Techniques: Practising clear and effective communication, particularly in academic settings like seminars, group work and presentations.

* Understanding Social Cues: Exploring different social and institutional expectations within the university environment.

**Self-Management and Executive Functioning**

The mentor focuses on developing the practical skills necessary for sustained academic progress:

* Motivation and Goal-Setting: Working on overcoming procrastination, setting realistic academic goals (SMART goals) and maintaining momentum throughout the term.

* Time Management and Organisation: Creating effective systems for managing workload, prioritising tasks and meeting deadlines, especially when the student faces difficulties with executive functions (planning, initiating and sequencing tasks).

* Self-Awareness and Self-Advocacy: Enabling the student to better understand how autism affects their learning and well-being and to confidently communicate their needs and required reasonable adjustments to university staff.

**What the Specialist Menor Does Not Do**

* No Subject-Specific Tutoring: They cannot provide academic support related to the student's course material.

* Not a Counsellor or Therapist: While the support is psychosocial, it is not clinical counselling or psychotherapy.

* Not an Advocate: They cannot communicate with university staff on the student's behalf but instead help the student develop the skills to advocate for themselves.

## DSA Specialist one-to-one Study Skills and Strategy Support – Autism Spectrum Conditions (SS-ASC)

The DSA Specialist one-to-one Study Skills and Strategy Support – Autism Spectrum Conditions (SS-ASC) role is designed to help autistic students (and often students with ADHD) develop the academic skills and strategies necessary to thrive in higher education. This support is highly individualised and aims to foster independence over time.

This specialist, non-subject-specific tutor works with the student to:

**Develop Core Academic Strategies**

The primary focus is equipping students with effective, tailored study skills and strategies. This includes:

* Time Management & Organisation: Creating routines, prioritising tasks, managing workload, setting goals and developing a structured approach to study.

* Reading and Research Skills: Teaching effective strategies for academic reading, critical analysis of texts, efficient note-taking from lectures and texts and proper referencing/source use.

* Assignment Planning and Writing: Helping to understand assignment requirements, structure essays and reports, approach written assignments and develop effective proofreading techniques.

* Memory and Revision: Introducing and practising specific memory techniques and revision strategies for exam preparation.

* Utilising Assistive Technology (AT): Guiding the student on how to effectively integrate recommended AT software and equipment into their study methods.

**Address Autism-Specific Challenges**

The specialist has an in-depth understanding of autistic thinking and learning and works to address common barriers to academic success:

* Executive Functioning: Addressing issues with planning, initiation, sequencing and cognitive flexibility, which are often challenging for autistic students.

* Sensory and Environmental Needs: Helping students identify and implement strategies to manage sensory input and create a comfortable and effective learning environment.

* Managing Anxiety and Stress: Offering guidance on coping strategies for academic stress, anxiety, and the challenges of transition to higher education.

* Social and Communication Skills: Providing strategies for navigating the social and communication demands of a university environment, such as liaising with tutors or engaging in group work.

**Promote Strengths and Autonomy**

A key part of the role is using the student's unique strengths, often associated with autism (e.g., attention to detail, strong interests, logical thinking), to overcome barriers to learning.

* Individual Learning Plans (ILPs): The specialist creates and regularly reviews a bespoke ILP with the student, setting clear, agreed-upon goals and timescales for development.

* Self-Awareness: Helping the student identify their individual learning style and the specific impact of their condition on their studies, building metacognition.

* Independence: The support is usually structured to gradually reduce in intensity, ensuring the student is equipped with sustainable strategies for independent learning by the end of their course.

### 🚫 Support Not Offered by a Specialist Tutor

The specialist's role has clear professional boundaries to avoid duplicating the academic duties of a university or acting as a personal assistant or counsellor.

- **Subject-Specific Tutoring or Teaching:** They **will not** teach course content, explain lectures, or help with the academic substance of assignments (this is the role of the student's lecturers/tutors or the university's academic skills support).
- **Proofreading or Editing Work:** They **will not** check, correct, or rewrite a student's assignments to ensure a better grade. The support is focused on teaching **the student** effective proofreading and writing strategies to become independent.
- **Counselling or Mental Health Mentoring:** While they may address challenges related to attention, organisation, or anxiety that affect studies, they **are not** a substitute for specialist mental health support or counselling. Students with primary mental health needs are typically recommended for **Specialist Mentor – Mental Health** support.
- **Administrative Tasks:** They **will not** perform administrative tasks for the student, such as emailing lecturers on their behalf (unless it is to agree on support arrangements), booking rooms or applying for extensions.

- **Non-Disclosure of Boundaries:** They are expected to maintain **professional boundaries** and confidentiality, which means they will not provide recommendations or advice on non-DSA-funded topics during funded time.

## DSA Specialist one-to-one Study Skills and Strategy Support (SpLD)

A DSA Specialist 1:1 Study Skills and Strategy Support, SpLD (Specific Learning Differences) tutor offers **non-subject-specific** support to help neurodivergent students (like those with dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, or dyscalculia) develop **independent learning strategies** for higher education.

The support is tailored to the individual's needs, focusing on the challenges associated with acquiring, processing and recalling information. The primary goal is to empower the student to manage their workload and promote autonomy.

Study Skills support can focus on:

- **Time Management and Organisation:** Helping students plan their workload, structure assignments, manage deadlines and create effective study schedules.
- **Reading Strategies:** Teaching efficient techniques for reading academic texts, improving comprehension and developing critical thinking.
- **Note-Taking and Note-Making:** Introducing and practising various methods (e.g., Cornell method, mind mapping) to capture, organise and retain information from lectures and texts.
- **Assignment Planning and Writing:** Guiding students on how understand assignment and exam questions, break down tasks, plan the structure of essays and reports and use module briefs.
- **Memory and Revision Strategies:** Teaching techniques to aid information recall, retention and preparation for exams and tests.
- **Proofreading Strategies:** Developing effective self-correction skills for spelling, grammar, punctuation and editing to improve the overall quality of written work.
- **Assistive Technology (AT):** Introducing and helping the student integrate relevant digital tools (like text-to-speech software, dictation software or organisational apps) into their study routine.
- **Self-Awareness:** Helping students identify and utilise their personal learning styles and strengths and manage the impact of their SpLD.
- **Research skills:** They can show the student how to find relevant and reliable academic sources and information for coursework and assignments.
- **Mind mapping and planning techniques:** They can teach the student how to create visual diagrams to organise thoughts and plan workload.
- **Proofreading strategies:** They can teach the student how to proofread their work effectively and improve writing skills.

- **Approaching written assignments:** They can help the student understand assignment requirements and guide them through the process of writing a good assignment.
- **Memory techniques and strategies:** They can teach different memory techniques to help the student remember information more easily.
- **Revision methods:** They can teach the student how to revise effectively and prepare for exams and tests.
- **Analysing exam/essay questions:** They can help the student understand the question and guide them through the process of answering it.

**Support Not Offered by a SpLD Specialist Tutor**

The specialist's role has clear professional boundaries to avoid duplicating the academic duties of a university or acting as a personal assistant or counsellor.

- **Subject-Specific Tutoring or Teaching:** They **will not** teach course content, explain lectures, or help with the academic substance of assignments (this is the role of the student's lecturers/tutors or the university's academic skills support).
- **Proofreading or Editing Work:** They **will not** check, correct, or rewrite a student's assignments to ensure a better grade. The support is focused on teaching **the student** effective proofreading and writing strategies to become independent.
- **Counselling or Mental Health Mentoring:** While they may address challenges related to attention, organisation, or anxiety that affect studies, they **are not** a substitute for specialist mental health support or counselling. Students with primary mental health needs are typically recommended for **Specialist Mentor – Mental Health** support.
- **Administrative Tasks:** They **will not** perform administrative tasks for the student, such as emailing lecturers on their behalf (unless it's to agree on support arrangements), booking rooms, or applying for extensions.
- **Non-Disclosure of Boundaries:** They are expected to maintain **professional boundaries** and confidentiality, which means they will not provide recommendations or advice on non-DSA-funded topics during funded time.

## DSA funded support – What is it and how to apply?

You can apply for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) if you live in England and Wales and have a disability that affects your ability to study, such as a:

- learning difficulty, for example dyslexia or ADHD
- mental health condition like anxiety or depression
- physical disability, for example if you are partially sighted or have to use crutches
- long-term health condition, such as cancer, chronic heart disease or HIV

You must also:

- be an undergraduate or postgraduate student (including Open University or distance learning)
- qualify for student finance from Student Finance England
- be studying on a course that lasts at least a year

**Courses that can be funded by DSA**

Your course must be in the UK and one of the following:

- a first degree, for example BA, BSc or BEd
- a Foundation Degree
- a Certificate of Higher Education
- a Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)
- a Higher National Certificate (HNC)
- a Higher National Diploma (HND)
- a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE)
- a postgraduate course
- Initial Teacher Training (ITT)

**How to apply?**

You will need to apply for DSA via Student Finance England or Student Finance Wales. You do not have to have a confirmed place at a university before you apply for your DSA. We recommend you apply early, so the support is in place before your course starts, but you can also apply at any point during your studies.

Website: gov.uk: how-to-claim a DSA