

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

RT HON GREG CLARK, MINISTER OF STATE FOR UNIVERSITIES, SCIENCE AND CITIES; DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

STUDENT SUPPORT

12 SEPTEMBER 2014

In a Written Ministerial Statement on 7 April 2014 the then Minister for Universities and Science announced proposed changes to Disabled Students' Allowances which are available to Higher Education students from England.

Disabled Students' Allowances are non-repayable grants that assist with the additional costs incurred by disabled students in relation to their study in higher education. Disabled Students' Allowances finance a range of support, including the purchase of computers and specialised equipment, assistance with travel costs and the provision of support workers where necessary. In 2011/12 Disabled Students' Allowances provided support of over £144 million to 61,000 students, funded from the Higher Education Budget. Disabled Students' Allowance continues to be available to support disabled students studying in higher education.

During the Summer I and the Minister of State for Disabled People have listened carefully to suggestions from representatives of disabled students. I have also listened to the views and concerns of representatives across the higher education and disability sectors, as well as receiving representations from Honourable Members.

We are determined to ensure that disabled students should be able to make use of and develop their talents through higher education and that there should be no cap on their aspirations.

There was widespread agreement that universities should discharge their duties under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled students, as other organisations do. However, concern was conveyed that some universities may not be able to meet their obligations in full by the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year, given their need to invest in additional support for their students.

With students applying now for places at the beginning of that year it is important that any disabled student should be confident that an institution to which they are considering applying will be able to meet their needs satisfactorily.

Accordingly we have agreed to give Higher Education Institutions until the beginning of the 2016/17 academic year to develop appropriate mechanisms to fully deliver their statutory duty to provide reasonable adjustments, in particular non-medical

help, and to improve the processes by which disabled students can appeal against a Higher Education Institution's decision that an adjustment would not be reasonable. We will explore how this might be supported in institutions' Access Agreements with the Office for Fair Access for 2016/17.

For the academic year 2015/16, we will continue to provide Disabled Students' Allowance funding to help with the additional cost of a computer and assistive software if needed solely because of the student's impairment. This will be subject to the student contributing the first £200 of the computer's cost – broadly equivalent to the cost of a basic computer. For future academic years we will explore a bulk purchasing scheme for such computers to keep costs down.

Additional items such as printers and consumables will not be automatically provided, with alternative provision in the form of university provided services such as printing services and books and journals in electronic format to be considered as alternatives.

Funding will remain available towards the additional costs of specialised accommodation for disabled students, other than where the accommodation is provided by the institution or an agent of the institution.

A number of commentators made proposals to streamline the assessment process for Disabled Students' Allowance to reduce the burden for students, universities and the taxpayer. The Minister of State for Disabled People and I will invite representatives to consider how that might be achieved.

The changes summarised in this Statement other than non-medical help changes will apply to all full-time, full-time distance learning, part-time and postgraduate students applying for Disabled Students' Allowances for the first time in respect of an academic year beginning on or after 1 September 2015. This provides sufficient time for us to work with institutions and stakeholders to ensure the changes are introduced effectively. All changes are subject to the ongoing Equality Analysis.

Continuing students already claiming Disabled Students' Allowances and students claiming for 2014/15 entry will remain on the current system of support for 2015/16.

We are grateful to universities, students and their representative bodies for their assistance in informing these changes.