

INTRODUCTION

During 2003, the Funding For Learners Division in the Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning Department in the Scottish Executive carried out a review of learner funding. The terms of reference for the review were to identify gaps and anomalies in the provision of funding to post-16 individual learners, and to recommend changes that will improve the coherence, equity, and effectiveness of overall provision. The final report of the review can be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/ETLL/FFL/review.asp>

As part of the continuous output of the review, the Disabled Students Stakeholder Group was established to bring together the range of stakeholders involved in the information, advice, guidance and delivery of student support, and to consider and address issues relating to the support available to learners with disability related additional needs in further and higher education.

One of the initial issues the stakeholder group considered was the needs assessment process, with a particular focus on higher education students applying for the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) from the Student Awards Agency for Scotland (SAAS). The group recognised that students applying for DSA often face delays in receiving a needs assessment and consequently their DSA support. The delays are caused by a backlog of applications for needs assessments, mainly due to there being only a limited number of accredited and recognised assessors whose reports are accepted in the current process. SAAS currently only accept assessment reports from a small number of sources, including the four Scottish access centres and a limited number of HEIs. However, the current list of HEIs has no obvious process or accreditation system for institutions to follow to allow them to become recognised assessors.

The Toolkit of Quality Indicators for Needs Assessments has therefore been developed to offer institutions or centres a route by which to become validated as assessors recognised by SAAS. These quality indicators are a significant step forward in improving the coherence and robustness of the assessment process, and the confidence which all stakeholders can have in it. Our aim is to establish an agreed quality assurance framework under which assessments can be carried out by a wider range of assessors, including college and university staff. The ability to undertake in-house assessments will clearly have an impact on the efficiency of the DSA process.

When making recommendations about study aids, strategies and support in needs assessment reports, assessors should consider the relationship between the student's individual support needs and the institution's responsibility to make its courses and provision as accessible as possible. An individual allowance, such as the DSA, is intended to meet those support needs that remain even after the institution has fulfilled its part. This distinction has become more apparent as a consequence of the Disability Discrimination Act Part IV and is likely to result in a gradual shift of the dividing line between what should be available or provided by the institution and what is still supplied via the individual allowance.

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The needs assessment should always take into account the aspects of support that the student's host institution will/can provide.

We do recognise that whilst many institutions will be keen to undertake their own in-house assessments as soon as possible, some may prefer to continue to make use of the access centres or other institutions' facilities, particularly for students with complex requirements and multiple disabilities.

The intention and focus of the Toolkit is very much on the assessment process for higher education students applying for DSAs. However, it is envisaged that assessors should also be able to use the Toolkit to undertake assessments for students in further education. We believe that the Toolkit will also be useful for institutions when undertaking assessments for students who are ineligible for DSA, as it will identify the support strategies and study aids which will still need to be put in place.

This Toolkit should be implemented by disability advisers and institutional staff, however it is our intention that the institutions or centres themselves, and not individual members of staff, will be registered and accredited.

In terms of the actual DSA application process there will be very little change. Students and academic staff will still have to complete the relevant parts of the yellow DSA application form, as normal, and send this to SAAS.

If an institution meets the requirements to become a recognised assessment centre, as set out in the Toolkit of Quality Indicators, then SAAS can accept their needs assessment reports. In these cases, there will be no need to direct any students to any of the access centres for further referral.

If an institution has not been accredited as an approved assessment centre then SAAS will continue to refer those students to one of the access centres for a needs assessment.

We will be piloting this Toolkit from January 2005 to January 2006, across Scotland, with some institutions registering immediately, some noting intent to register, and others not being involved at this stage.

The Toolkit consists of:

Section 1: Introduction and Flow Diagram

Section 2: The framework, which sets out the quality indicators for each element of the needs assessment process. (Good practice examples will be available for participating institutions prior to the start of the pilot phase).

Section 3: A pro-forma needs assessment report which institutions may wish to adopt or adapt for their own use.

TOOLKIT: QUALITY INDICATORS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

1. When study aids and support strategies are considered, the focus is on their appropriateness for the individual student				
Intent	Objectives	Focus	Evidence requirements	Implementation guidelines
<p><i>Recommendations regarding the need for assistive technology and other types of support are determined by the unique educational needs of each individual student and not based on diagnosis alone.</i></p> <p><i>The student must be recognised as a key source of information about how his/her situation impacts on study and learning experiences</i></p>	<p>To identify what aids and support are most likely to enable the student to achieve his/her potential and to ensure that this is reflected in the assessment recommendations.</p> <p>To take into account the student's level of confidence and/or 'readiness' to use proposed study aids and supports</p>	<p>ASSESSMENT PROCESS</p> <p>STUDENT INVOLVEMENT</p>	<p>Information relevant to the assessment (student background, history and prior experience, etc.) is sought and taken into account.</p> <p>Consultation and direct engagement with student is an integral part of the assessment.</p> <p>Knowledge and understanding of potential barriers to learning demonstrated by assessor.</p> <p>Permission granted by student for access to relevant reports/results.</p>	<p><i>Direct engagement with the student is central to the needs assessment process. Typically, this will occur through face-to-face contact. However, circumstances that would make this difficult do occasionally arise, e.g. a student is in hospital at the time of application or unable to make the journey to the assessment venue. Rarely, an assessor may travel to the student – or conduct some aspects of the assessment by other means (video-conferencing, telephone, third party assistance).</i></p> <p><i>A sample pro-forma for the gathering and reporting of information is included in section 3.</i></p>

TOOLKIT: QUALITY INDICATORS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2. The assessor has the knowledge and skills to make well-informed decisions about study aids and support strategies				
Intent	Objectives	Focus	Evidence requirements	Implementation Guidelines
<p><i>A reliable process is in place to confirm that all assessors are impartial and have the skills to identify the study aids and strategies needed to remove barriers to student performance.</i></p> <p><i>When a student presents with issues that are beyond the knowledge and scope of the assessor, additional advice from other sources can be sought.</i></p>	<p>Every person involved in undertaking needs assessments (or contributing to one or more aspect of the same) is appropriately qualified and experienced.</p> <p>Assessors have regular opportunities to update their knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Communication between assessors is encouraged and access to specialist expertise is facilitated by appropriate networking.</p>	<p>QUALIFICATIONS OF ASSESSORS</p> <p>RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER SERVICES</p> <p>LINKS BETWEEN ASSESSORS</p> <p>CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</p>	<p>Assessors have relevant qualifications and experience.</p> <p>All assessors are authorised/registered to provide assessment services and do so under the auspices of a recognised institution or agency.</p> <p>Assessors, and their employers (or contractors) demonstrate an active commitment to continuing personal and professional development.</p>	<p><i>It is crucial to the credibility of the needs assessment process that assessors' judgements are well informed – and not perceived to be influenced by material gain for their institution or themselves. Registration of centres as approved providers of needs assessments should increase confidence in the process. The registration process will include the following elements:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>1. Application <u>by institution or centre</u> to become an assessment provider.</i> <i>2. Approval of application <u>by audit panel</u>.</i> <i>3. Entry on list of approved providers of assessment – held by SAAS</i> <i>4. Ongoing quality assurance and monitoring.</i>

TOOLKIT: QUALITY INDICATORS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

3. Tasks the student will be expected to perform and the learning environment(s) in which the student will be operating, are always taken into account

Intent	Objectives	Focus	Evidence requirements	Implementation Guidelines
<p><i>Decisions about the most appropriate study aids and strategies for the individual student are always made in context and with reference to the host institution.</i></p> <p><i>The host institution fulfils its legal responsibilities and moral obligations to the student.</i></p>	<p>Students are supported on an ongoing basis in their use of recommended study aids and support strategies.</p> <p>Support needs are reviewed and updated as required to accommodate changing needs.</p> <p>Compatibility is achieved between assistive aids and other forms of support - and provision made by (or arranged through) the institution is included.</p>	<p>CONTEXT</p> <p>RELEVANCE OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENT</p> <p>KNOWLEDGE OF COURSE DEMANDS</p> <p>CLARITY OF ROLES</p>	<p>Student's permission to consult appropriately and to share information is always sought.</p> <p>Information about the student's course [mode(s) of delivery; demands; content] is gathered and used to inform assessment recommendations.</p> <p>Feasibility of implementing assessment recommendations is confirmed and documented.</p> <p>Roles and responsibilities, including those of the student and the host institution, are explicitly stated in the assessment report.</p>	<p><i>When making an assessment of need, it is important to establish the nature and extent of support already being received on course, if any.</i></p> <p><i>Assessors should be mindful that recommendations should not be solely or primarily resource driven. Study aids and support strategies should be recommended because they best meet the identified needs. This will not always equate with what is 'easiest to provide'.</i></p> <p><i>NB. The student reserves the right to withhold information about his/her disability from the host institution but should be made aware of the possible implications of non-disclosure.</i></p>

TOOLKIT: QUALITY INDICATORS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

4. A continuum of study aids and strategies is explored				
Intent	Objectives	Focus	Evidence requirements	Implementation Guidelines
<p><i>The assessor considers a range of tools and strategies – including no tech, low tech and high tech – to meet the needs of the student.</i></p> <p><i>There is not an automatic assumption that assistive technology will always have a role in the support plan – or that having a disability necessarily equates with having additional support needs.</i></p> <p><i>Opportunities exist for updating of study aids and strategies as needs change.</i></p>	<p>The assessment process provides opportunities to explore a range of support strategies.</p> <p>A good match is achieved between the need/desire for assistive technology and support and the provisions made as a result of the assessment.</p> <p>Where possible, study aids and strategies should facilitate the same range of options and curricular choices for the user as is available to his/her peers on course.</p>	<p>RANGE OF AIDS & STRATEGIES</p> <p>ASSESSMENT FACILITIES</p>	<p>Facilities for assessment comply with, or exceed, minimum standards.</p> <p>Assessment report shows evidence that the pros and cons of a variety of aids and strategies have been explained, demonstrated and, if appropriate, tried out.</p> <p>With complex or unfamiliar aids and strategies, students are given the opportunity to trial the equipment before assessment recommendations are finalised. This may involve the loan of equipment from a third party.</p>	<p><i>General information about the range of resources one might expect to find in a typical assessment facility will be made available.</i></p> <p><i>It is acknowledged that some students will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>a) benefit from more time to try out equipment than the assessment itself allows, or</i> <i>b) be assessed as needing access to bespoke or highly specialised aids.</i> <p><i>Assessors may defer final recommendations until after this has occurred.</i></p> <p><i>Facilities for borrowing equipment from a centralised loan bank are available to FE colleges through the BRITE Initiative. Consideration is being given to the establishment of a similar facility for HE.</i></p>

TOOLKIT: QUALITY INDICATORS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

5. Decisions regarding the support needs of the student are made in a timely manner and communicated to relevant stakeholders				
Intent	Objectives	Focus	Evidence requirements	Implementation Guidelines
<p><i>The purpose, process and relevance of the needs assessment are understood by all concerned.</i></p> <p><i>Decisions and recommendations are agreed with the student, documented in accordance with relevant legislation and clearly communicated.</i></p> <p><i>Stakeholders have confidence in all aspects of the service.</i></p>	<p>To provide an assessment service which is efficient and effective from the perspective of all stakeholders.</p> <p>To avoid undue delays at any stage in the process.</p>	<p>STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF OUTCOMES</p> <p>DOCUMENTATION</p> <p>EFFICIENCY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES</p>	<p>Literature about purpose and process of needs assessment is readily available and clear/easy to understand.</p> <p>Applications for support are processed and acknowledged promptly. Assessment referrals are made without delay.</p> <p>Service providers aim to offer an assessment appointment within an agreed period (on receipt of completed documentation from student) - or to give a legitimate explanation for delay.</p> <p>Information about waiting times for assessment appointments is made available by service providers on request.</p> <p>Confidentiality is respected at all times and data storage and management complies with relevant legislation.</p>	<p><i>It is important to provide ongoing and realistic information about waiting times for service users and stakeholders.</i></p> <p><i>The length of time from application to assessment can vary according to the time of year and the number of other students waiting to be assessed (and sometimes the nature of the student's needs – if more complex or requiring specialised assessment).</i></p>

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6. The needs assessment process is adequately resourced				
Intent	Objectives	Focus	Evidence requirements	Implementation Guidelines
<p><i>Service providers acknowledge the importance of consistency and quality in the needs assessment process and this is reflected in the resources allocated to its operation.</i></p> <p><i>Students who believe that their experience of the assessment process has been less than satisfactory have a means by which to seek appropriate recourse.</i></p>	<p>Assessment activities, and assessors, are adequately supported by the institution with which they are associated.</p> <p>The issue of professional liability is addressed, with appropriate protection being given to all parties.</p> <p>Students can expect that legitimate complaints about any aspect of the process will be handled promptly, courteously and effectively.</p>	<p>STAKEHOLDER AND INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT</p> <p>COMPLAINTS HANDLING</p> <p>LIABILITY</p>	<p>The time and resources allocated for the conduct of assessments (plus associated preparation and follow-up) are both adequate* - and reflect the level of responsibility and complexity of the task.</p> <p>Students receive information about their rights and responsibilities in connection with the application for support.</p>	<p><i>* Judgements about 'adequacy' of provision are entrusted to institutions. Institutions must be satisfied that the provision for assessment is adequately resourced before making an application to become an approved provider.</i></p> <p><i>General guidelines on person and service specifications (for needs assessors and assessment centres) will be made available as part of the good practice guide.</i></p>

TOOLKIT: QUALITY INDICATORS FOR NEEDS ASSESSMENT

7. Service providers undertake regular monitoring activity and conduct an annual internal review				
Intent	Objectives	Focus	Evidence requirements	Implementation Guidelines
<p><i>Assessment services, study aids and support strategies are effective and fit for purpose and value for money is assured.</i></p>	<p>Recommended study aids and strategies lead to the levelling of the educational playing field for recipients, without creating (or being perceived to create) unfair or material advantage.</p> <p>Only suppliers of aids and services who adhere to agreed standards of provision are identified in the assessment report.</p> <p>Feedback from stakeholders (sponsors, students, assessors and institutions) is gathered and used to inform service development and encourage continuous improvement.</p>	<p>EVALUATION</p> <p>CLIENT SATISFACTION</p> <p>SHARING OF GOOD PRACTICE</p>	<p>Results from student surveys and from surveys conducted by other stakeholders - to gauge satisfaction and degree of success with recommended study aids and strategies.</p> <p>Assessors/centres liaise regularly with suppliers of equipment and services and required standards are explicit.</p>	<p>This Framework is intended for use by service providers and by those involved in assuring the quality of the needs assessment process at all stages.</p>

PROFORMA ASSESSMENT REPORT

DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCE

STUDY AIDS AND STUDY STRATEGIES ASSESSMENT REPORT

Student Name

Institution

Student Term Address

Postcode:	
Tel:	
Email:	

Student Home Address

Postcode:	
Tel:	
Email:	

Date of Birth

Student Number

Full/Part time

Post/Undergraduate

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Course of Study/Individual Course Numbers

Length of Course

Year of Course

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Institution Address

Postcode:	
Tel:	
Email:	

Funding Authority Address

Postcode:	
Tel:	
Email:	

Institution Contact Name

Funding Authority Contact Name

Assessor(s):

Assessment Date

Report Date

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PROFORMA ASSESSMENT REPORT

A. STUDENT BACKGROUND

Disability:

Previous Education/Employment Details:

Course Content and Study Requirements:

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B. EFFECTS OF DISABILITY ON STUDY

1. Travel to institution and access to buildings/classes:

2. Reading printed material:

3. Producing written work (e.g. course assignments, examination answers):

4. Notetaking (e.g. in tutorials, lectures, residential schools, work placements):

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5. Concentration and memory:

6. Using audio-visual materials (e.g.TV, tapes, minidisks, video):

7. Speaking (e.g. in groups, face to face, telephone):

8. Hearing (e.g. in groups, face to face, telephone):

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9. Vision (e.g. for reading, mobility, practical work):

10. Undertaking practical work (e.g. lab experiments, field trips):

11. Using a library:

12. Operating a conventional desktop computer:

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13. Using specified course software or multimedia material:

14. Using networked ICT (e.g. First Class, WebCt, Internet and Intranet):

15. Undertaking examinations and assessments:

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16. Participating in residential schools, work placements, field trips:

17. Organising workload and managing time:

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C. EQUIPMENT AND SUPPORT PREVIOUSLY USED

Equipment (e.g. PC, assistive hardware or software):

Personal Human Support (e.g. sign language interpreter, reader):

Study Strategies:

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Examinations:

Other (e.g. family/peer support):

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D. EVALUATION OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF ASSESSMENT

Equipment: (final choices in **bold**)

Equipment Training:

Personal Human Support:

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Consumables and Accessories (e.g. photocopying):

Travel Requirements:

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E. INSTITUTIONAL AND OTHER SUPPORT

Teaching and Learning Support:

Assessment and Examinations:

Other Support (e.g. relevant outside organisations):

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F. FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Please note that the costs quoted below are accurate at time of writing but may change due to fluctuations in computer technology pricing. Please also note that the suppliers listed below are provided for information only. The student is not restricted to using these suppliers when purchasing equipment.

1. Equipment Allowance

Item	Supplier	Cost (exc VAT)	Cost (inc VAT)
Total Delivery Charges			
	Total Cost		

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2. Non-Medical Helper's Allowance

Amount and period of support	Support provider (i.e. name and contact details if known)	Cost
	Total	

3. Basic/General Allowance (including insurance, training and Access Centre fee):

Note for SAAS funded students: the Access Centre fee will be paid directly by SAAS and not deducted from the DSA. It is listed below for information only.

Item	Supplier	Cost
ACCESS Centre fee: A standard fee of £375 will be payable, exceptions will apply. Guidance being developed.		
	Total	

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4. Extra Travel Costs

Estimated extra travel costs of attendance at essential or desirable course activities (i.e. where 'extra' is the difference between what a non-disabled student would pay and what the disabled student pays because of their disability).

Travel method and number of return journeys	Course activity and location	Extra Cost
	Total	

Signature of Assessor:

Date:

Copies of this report to be sent to:

- (student)
- (SAAS/LEA)
- (student's institution) (with student's consent)
- FILE

