

Disabled Students Fund: Supporting Information

Background:

I would like to set up a disability fund and to do so effectively, I would like to request access to the additional pot of money available to the liberation campaigns. There is an additional £500 up for grabs and I would like to use a portion of it to start my fund.

I am hoping to create fund similar to the [Gender Expression fund](#) where those who identify as disabled, neuro-diverse or has access needs can apply for a voucher (of sorts) that they can use to get discounted/free equipment. However, this fund is unlikely to be able to entirely cover out of pocket services/equipment that the DSA provides as that can reach up to £200.

Why does a fund for our disabled students need to exist?

As I am sure we are all aware, living costs are only increasing. However, for our disabled peers, they are being disproportionately impacted by those rising numbers – particularly since they already face additional costs as a disabled person (such as specialist equipment, medication, ect) (Smith et al., 2004).

There is lack of research showcasing how rising living costs directly impacts students, but there are some studies which begin to shed a light onto this matter. El Dessouky & McCurdy (2023) found a clear relationship between income and disability. One of their findings was that low-income disabled people have incomes one-third lower than their non-disabled counterparts. Lower-incomed individuals are most comparable to our student population considering that many have to rely on student finance, parental support or part-time work wages meaning that they are not making a lot of income. There are, however, personal anecdotes such as Chelsea Sowden's (2022) piece on Scope which details how expensive it was for her to be a disabled student in comparison to her non-disabled friends. She ends her piece advocating for universities to create grants and funding (such as the one I'm proposing) to help mitigate these issues.

Aren't there already similar programmes/schemes in place. Why do we need our own specific one?

There are internal and external schemes in place designed to help support disabled students, but there are a lot of flaws which prevent them from helping as many people as possible.

Two popular external schemes:

DSA: Disabled Students' Allowance is a governmental support designed to cover study-related costs you have because of a mental health problem, long-term illness or any other disability (Gov.uk, n.d.) It is a particularly helpful scheme, especially as it doesn't need to be repaid, but there are still some issues. Those who don't have a formal diagnosis or aren't able to provide sufficient evidence struggle getting accepted for this support. This is a big problem as diagnosis is a privilege which takes attention, time and money. Furthermore, the issues with disabled students accessing DSA that there is another fund called Student Enablement Fund which prioritises those who were either ineligible or refused from DSA (Student Health Association, 2017).

Commented [ZA1]: For instance: there is a plethora of personal accounts and research exploring the prevalence of neurodiversity diagnosis later in life (particularly in women) (Karam et al., 2009). Students may be struggling with neurodivergent-specific symptoms and experiences, but be unable access support as they didn't receive a diagnosis during childhood. Thus preventing them from accessing disability related support despite being disabled.

Diagnosis privilege also common in other conditions. For instance: Endometriosis is a long-term condition with many symptoms such as pain, difficulty conceiving and more. On average, it takes 7.5 years from onset of symptoms (which is typically during puberty) to get a diagnosis (Endometriosis UK, 2022) . This means in this example, someone could be going through debilitating pain monthly but unable to gain any meaningful support as they haven't gotten a formal diagnosis yet.



Snowden Trust: Snowden Trust is an organisation, inspired by their founder’s lived experience, which invests in disabled students and their future. One way they do that is via grants and scholarships. They have grants of up to £5,000 available to pay for disability-related study costs (Snowden Trust, 2023). However, due to unprecedented demand they have already allocated all the funds for the 2023/24 academic year meaning that they can’t hold an additional grant plan as planned. This means that disabled students who may have been relying on that additional support have lost yet another scheme.

An internal scheme:

Bournemouth University Funding Options: The BU DSA Support fund provides support for students in financial difficulty who need: a contribution towards DSA equipment, Educational Psychologist Assessment, or an Evaluation of Needs (Bournemouth University, 2023). However, there are several issues to this scheme with the main one being their definition of “financial difficulty”. It states on their website that students will need their household income to be assessed and will need to demonstrate they have little to no funds available. This drastically reduces support available to disabled students with richer parents. There are numerous anecdotal evidence of students who do not receive parental support despite their parent’s high income. If parents aren’t adequately providing the difference for their children to live, why do you think they would supply an extra hundreds of pounds to cover things like educational assessments. Finally, this scheme (unlike the one I’m proposing) only covers educational related needs. There are other things which improve disabled student’s quality of life (thus their access to education tangentially) this wouldn’t cover – such as a £21.95 shower stool for students with conditions that makes it harder for them to stand for long periods of time (Mobility Smart, 2023).

In Summary:

This scheme is designed to provide as much support as possible to our disabled students. There is a definite need amongst our student to reduce barriers to their education and support their lives. Unlike similar schemes in place, there will not be a requirement to use it on solely education items (quality and ease of life also matters) and will not require a household income assessment. It will be structured like the gender expression fund: an application, subsequent review by the DAND Officer and Liberation and Campaigns Co-ordinator, items/gift cards will then be sent out (Student Union Bournemouth University, 2023). By approving my bid for the additional funding, I will be able to run a trial year of this scheme allowing for improvements and adjustments later in the year. This is a scheme which can support our disabled students and improve their quality of life by attempting to relive some of their financial issues.



If you want to check out my citations, here is my bibliography:

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