

# News story: Call for universities to improve support for disabled students

Universities are being urged to boost the number of students with disabilities going into higher education and do more to help them succeed, as the Universities Minister calls for greater action today (Thursday 17 January).

Figures published today show that the numbers going to university from this underrepresented group has increased to a record amount. There were 94,120 new students with a disability that started university in England in 2017/18. Representing 13% of entrants this is still below the proportion of working-age adults with a disability, and the minister wants universities to review their offer and provision for disabled students.

To build on the encouraging figures out today and to drive forward his ambition for even greater participation of disabled students in higher education, the Universities Minister will call for a roundtable of key stakeholders to discuss how the higher education sector can continue to break down barriers and secure improvements for students with disabilities.

Mr Skidmore has also highlighted the financial help at hand to all prospective students with a disability through the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). Previous [figures](#) show that students in receipt of the DSA are more likely to continue on their course (91 per cent) than not only disabled students not receiving the allowance, but also more likely to than students without a disability (90 per cent).

Universities Minister Chris Skidmore said:

No-one's background or circumstances should hold them back from the opportunity of a university education and there is no reason why disability should be a barrier to fulfilling someone's potential.

I am encouraged by the figures out today showing record numbers of students with a disability going to university – but there is more work to be done, and I want to see the access and participation plans that universities are beginning to produce increase the ways they can support this group.

Institutions such as Brunel University, with their award-winning Disability and Dyslexia Service, and the University of Worcester, who have built their entire campus with accessibility in mind, are leading the way – there is no reason why other universities can't follow suit and match their provision. Working with key stakeholders and disabled students, I believe that we can do more to break down access and participation barriers in higher education by focusing on spreading good practice and listening to disabled

students about their needs.

We have a collective responsibility to make that happen and I am calling on universities to consider the barriers that disabled students experience and the support on offer to them so we can help them succeed in higher education.

The figures from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) out today show that in 2017/18 there were 26,100 more new students with a disability at English universities than in 2013/14 – an increase of 38% per cent.

Alongside these figures, the Department for Education has published research today showing that the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) has helped to break down barriers that can exist for disabled students at university. The research shows results from a survey of disabled students, which found that 69 per cent felt confident about completing their course and 68 per cent felt confident about passing their course.

In addition, more than half (59 per cent) of students who receive the DSA said they would not feel confident about passing their course without receiving the allowance.

As part of the Government's ambition for everyone to have the opportunity to benefit from higher education, whatever their background, universities that charge fees above the basic level must draw up an access and participation plan agreed by the Office for Students.

The Universities Minister expects the plans to be ambitious in driving increased numbers of students from underrepresented groups and for their use of DSAs. Higher education providers have legal responsibilities to support disabled students under the Equality Act 2010, and the Minister wants access and participation plans to meet these obligations in order to support those with disabilities thrive in higher education.

A National Association of Disability Practitioners spokesperson said:

The National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP) welcome the findings from this research, which evidences the current experience of disabled students' in accessing DSA. DSA continues to provide valued support to disabled students, and ensuring students have timely awareness of the DSA and the application process in advance of starting university remains a vital and clear ongoing priority for the sector.

Effective DSA support along with ongoing developments in inclusive and accessible teaching and learning will enable future generations of disabled people to participate successfully in higher education.

In 2018/19 higher education providers plan to spend £860m on measures to improve access and successful outcomes for students from disadvantaged

backgrounds and under-represented groups, including students with disabilities.

Last year saw a record proportion of English 18-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university, but more is still more to do to ensure all young people have the opportunity to succeed in higher education and break down any barriers they encounter.