

NOTES FOR THE DISABLED STUDENTS' ALLOWANCE (DSA) APPLICATION SESSION 2015-2016

If you would prefer, we can give you a version of these notes, as well as the DSA application forms, in the following formats:

- Braille
- Large print
- Audio

Student Awards Agency for Scotland
Saughton House
Broomhouse
Edinburgh
EH11 3UT

Disclaimer: *The information in this guide offers general guidance only and is not legally binding, nor does it constitute any right of eligibility for, or entitlement to, funding. We will assess each student's applicant on his or her individual circumstances in accordance with the information provided with his or her completed application form/s*

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Section 1 – about the Disabled Students' Allowance

Introduction

The Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) is a non-income assessed allowance to cover any extra costs or expenses you might have while studying, which arise because of your disability. You do not need to be claiming tuition fees and/or living-costs funding from us in order to claim DSA.

We have divided these notes into three sections. Section one gives you more information about what you can claim under DSA, section two explains how to apply for DSA and section three contains FAQs, contact details and other sources of helpful information.

Eligibility

To be eligible for DSA you must meet our eligibility criteria. More information about this is on pages 3 and 4.

Residence eligibility

Our residence eligibility conditions are set out in the Students' Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2007 (as amended).

To meet our residence conditions, you must have been ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man for the three years immediately before the first day of the first academic year of your course (the relevant date) and ordinarily resident in Scotland on the relevant date. For the majority of students who start their course in the autumn term, the relevant date is 1 August. You must also be settled in the UK within the meaning of the Immigration Act 1971 on the relevant date.

If you do not meet the residence conditions set out above, you may still be eligible for support in certain circumstances. Residency can be complicated; if you have any doubts about your eligibility, you should phone our helpline on 0300 555 0505 for advice. You can find further information about residency on our website at www.saas.gov.uk

Course eligibility

If you are on one of the following courses, providing you meet our residence eligibility conditions, you can apply for DSA:

- HNC
- HND
- Degree or equivalent level courses
- Foundation year of a degree course, providing you have enrolled for the whole course and not just the foundation year and the foundation year is a necessary and compulsory part of the course
- Diploma or degree in nursing or midwifery
- Full-time post graduate courses including PhDs (providing you are not eligible to receive DSA or equivalent support from another source)

- Part-time post graduate courses including PhDs (providing you are undertaking at least 50% of the length of the full-time course, and you are not eligible to receive DSA or equivalent support from another source)
- Part-time undergraduate courses at HNC level or above (providing you are undertaking at least 50% of the length of the full-time course)
- Distance learning courses (providing you are undertaking at least 50% of the length of a full-time course)
- Open University courses (providing you are studying at least 60 credits in a year)

If you meet one or more of the following, you will **not be entitled** to claim DSA funding:

- You are an EU student receiving a tuition fees only award
- Studying for less than 50% of the length of a full-time course
- On an Open University course and undertaking less than 60 credits
- Undertaking a course below HNC level
- Receiving funding from your Local Education Authority, Student Finance England, Student Finance Wales or Student Finance Northern Ireland
- You are receiving funding from a Research Council, the Social Work Department or any other UK publicly funded award-making body
- On a work-based learning course
- On an access course
- On an HNC, HND or degree level courses that we have not designated as eligible for funding
- Do not meet the residence requirements, as detailed above

If you are not entitled to funding from the DSA, you might still be eligible for funding from your college or university. You should speak to your Disability Advisor for advice.

The allowances

The DSA is in 3 parts:



1. The basic allowance



2. The large items allowance



3. The Non-Medical Personal Help allowance (NMPH)

1. Allowances – basic allowance

Basic allowance	
What is it for?	<p>This is a yearly allowance for consumable items such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excess photocopying or printing costs • Braille or Livescribe paper • Ink cartridges • Internet access
What is it not for?	<p>We do not pay for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptations to course hand outs • General stationery items, for example, pens and folders. • Phone line installation or rental
How much can I get?	<p>The rate for session 2015-2016 for full-time students is £1,725. For part-time students, the allowance is pro rata, for example, if you are studying for 50% of the length of a full-time course, you will be entitled to £863 (50% of the basic allowance).</p>

2. Allowances – large items allowance

Large items allowance	
What is it for?	<p>This allowance is available to all eligible students and covers the whole programme of your study. It can include the hire or purchase of items such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disability related software (for example, dragon voice recognition software) • Other appropriate software (for example, Microsoft word) • Printers • Scanners • PCs or laptops • CCTV
What is it not for?	<p>We do not normally pay for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equipment that is not recommended by a validated needs assessor and approved by us. • Phone line installation or rental • Any equipment that your college or university should be reasonably expected to provide • Equipment that all students on your course require, for example, cameras for students on photography courses or DVD players required by Open University students • Wheelchairs or mobility vehicles, such as scooters
How much can I get?	<p>The rate for session 2015-2016 is £5,160. We do not scale down this allowance for part-time students.</p>

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3. Allowances – Non-Medical Personal Help (NMPH)

Non-Medical Personal Help (NMPH)	
What is it for?	<p>This is a yearly allowance for personal support such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Readers • Sign Language Interpreters (SLI) • Note takers (including text help operators) • IT training • Study skills support • Mentors • Proof readers
What is it not for?	<p>We do not pay for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject specific tuition • Personal help that you require outside class time, for example, help with getting dressed in the morning • Any support that Social Services would normally provide • Any services such as counselling or study support that your college or university makes available to all its students • Disability related treatments, for example, Asfedic Tuning • NMPH during exams – your college or university will meet these costs
How much can I get?	<p>In 2015-2016, the rate for full-time students is £20,520. For part-time students, the allowance is pro rata, for example, if you are studying for 50% of the length of a full time course you will be entitled to £10,260 (50% of the NMPH allowance).</p>

More information about using a non-medical personal helper is available in our booklet DSA NMPH allowance guide. You can download a copy of this from our website at www.saas.gov.uk

Travel

Only students who have extra travel costs because of their disability are eligible to apply for travel expenses.

If, as a result of your disability, you are not able to use any kind of public transport (including buses, coaches and trains), for example, if you have visual or mobility difficulties, we can consider paying a reasonable cost of travel by private car or taxi. We will need clear medical evidence confirming that your disability means that you are not able to use any kind of public transport before we can pay this.

If you apply for help with your travel costs and you travel by private car, you must give us: a detailed breakdown showing the number of miles you travel each day; the cost each mile; and the number of days each week that you travel.

If you are travelling by taxi, you must give us quotes from two different taxi companies estimating the cost of your journey each day.

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We will normally only pay for one single return journey each day, between your home and college or university, during term time. However, we may pay for travel that is outwith term time in certain circumstances, for example:

- If a you have to attend your college or university to re-sit an exam
- If a you have to come in to your college or university to meet with your course tutor

If this is the case, we need your Disability Advisor to confirm that you were required to attend your college or university outwith term time.

Reasonable adjustments

The purpose of the DSA is to remove any disadvantages you may have when doing your course because of your disability. In other words, the DSA is there to help address any needs you have which arise from the inaccessible elements of your course, by providing specialist equipment and NMPH, where appropriate.

The Disability Equality Duty (DED), which came into force in December 2006, places a specific duty on colleges and universities to develop and implement a Disability Equality Scheme. The purpose of this scheme is to narrow the gap between the outcomes and experiences of disabled and non-disabled people. A college or university scheme should include an action plan, arrangements for monitoring progress and an impact assessment. Colleges and universities will have a duty to report each year on the scheme's progress and to review it every three years. The process requires active engagement with and involvement of disabled people in its development and review.

Colleges and universities should continually anticipate the general requirements of disabled people with a wide range of impairments and health conditions rather than simply waiting until a disabled person requests an adjustment.

If we feel that any part of a DSA claim is something that we should consider as a 'reasonable adjustment' for a college or university, we may refuse that element of support. For example, if you need to use a specially adapted desk or chair while at college or university or you need course hand outs in a non-standard format.

Section 2 – how to apply for DSA

Introduction

Applications will be available to download from our website www.saas.gov.uk in April. Or, you can collect one from your college or university. To make sure your funding is available for you on the first day of your first term, you should apply as soon as possible, preferably before you course starts. **The closing date for applications is 31 March 2016.** Please make sure you apply before this date as we will not accept late applications.

What evidence do we need?

We will need the following four documents if you are applying for DSA:

- A DSA application form
- Evidence of your disability

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- A needs assessment report
- A main student funding application (unless you are applying for DSA only) - apply online at www.saas.gov.uk

More information about each of these is on pages 7 – 9.

Filling in the DSA form

You should read the following carefully. If you need advice about applying or you are not sure what form to fill in, you should contact us or the Disability Advisor at your college or university for advice. Our contact details are on page 16. If you find it difficult to fill in your form, someone else may fill it in for you, if they have your authority to do so.

We have two different DSA application forms.

- One DSA form is for full-time students who are applying to us for tuition fees, bursary, loan or living-costs grants.
- One DSA form is for students who are part-time, distance learning or are studying full-time but are not applying to us for tuition fees, bursary, loan and living-costs grants.

You should fill in all sections of the form and your Disability Advisor should fill in the support details section.

When filling in the form you should make sure that:

- you fill in the form in CAPITAL letters using **black** ink
- **you give us details of a valid bank or building society account. You must give us your bank details even if you have already given them to us on your application for your main funding – We cannot process your DSA award without them**
- you sign and date the form and read the student consent section
- your assessor or Disability Advisor signs the form
- you send clear **photocopies** (please do not send originals) of important documents, such as your educational psychologist report
- if you are a part-time or distance-learning student, your college or university fills in the certificate of endorsement on page 6

If you do not do all of the above, it could delay processing your application.

DO NOT:

- Use highlighter pens as this shows up as blank text on our system
- Send original copies of documents such as your educational psychologists report. We destroy all documents after 30 days
- Use coloured ink as it does not always show up clearly on our system

Remember:

- Your application is only valid for one academic year of study. You must apply for DSA in each year of your course.
- Tell us if there is any change in your circumstances that might affect any award due to you. For example, if you decide to change your course or leave your course before you have finished it.

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Diagnosis/medical evidence

In the first year that you apply for DSA, you must give us supporting documents to confirm your disability or learning difficulty (please send us photocopies and not originals). If your disability changes during your course and you need additional support as a result, you must also send us medical evidence. The type of evidence we require is below:

For dyslexia or specific learning difficulties, a statement or report from one of the following:

- An educational psychologist or appropriately qualified professional
- A letter from a previous educational establishment that you attended, such as a school or college, confirming that you have been diagnosed with dyslexia or a specific learning difficulty by an educational psychologist or appropriately qualified professional.

For other medical conditions, evidence in the form of a diagnosis from a qualified professional including:

- GP
- Nurse/psychiatric nurse
- Occupational therapist
- Physiotherapist
- Audiologist

Other forms of evidence:

- We can also accept evidence that you are in receipt of disability support or benefits from another agency such as the Department of Work and Pensions (providing you were required by them to undertake a diagnosis of your disability). For us to accept these documents as proof of your disability, they must state the nature of your disability and the date the original diagnosis was undertaken. A letter simply stating that you are in receipt of DLA or another disability related benefit is not sufficient.

The above is not a complete list. If you have evidence from a professional that we have not listed above or you are not sure if we will accept the evidence you have, you should contact us to check before you apply (see our contact details on page 16). It is not always necessary for the evidence you give us to be recent if the nature of your condition will not change. However, we reserve the right to ask you for evidence which confirms the current status of your condition if we feel this is necessary.

If you are applying for help with travel costs, you must also give us a letter from you doctor confirming that your disability does not allow you to use any kind of public transport.

Please note, if you need to have a needs assessment done, your assessor may ask you to give them additional evidence before they can do this. They will discuss this with you before your assessment.

Payment of diagnosis

We cannot pay for the cost of any diagnosis (including doctors' letters and educational psychologists' reports). However, your college or university may be able to help you meet the cost of such from their Discretionary Funds. You should contact them for advice.

Assessment of needs

A needs assessment is a report carried out by a qualified individual who lets us know the type of support and equipment you need to undertake your course.

All students applying for the DSA for the first time must have a needs assessment. Your institution may also request that a new needs assessment is necessary if:

- a significant period of time has passed since your original assessment took place;
- your disability or medical condition has changed
- you change course, or start a new course, and your needs change as a result of this.

It is not always necessary for a new assessment in the circumstances above and we may not agree to pay for a further assessment if we believe that an existing report is valid.

Many colleges and universities have trained staff who can carry out needs assessments on behalf of their own students. However, if there is no one at your college or university who can do this, we can refer you to an Access Centre near where you live or study.

We will pay for the cost of your needs assessment. We will not take this amount from your DSA allowance. If you have to travel for an assessment, you will have to pay such costs yourself. A list of all of the colleges, universities and Access Centres in Scotland that are validated to carry out needs assessments for the purposes of DSA is available on our website at www.saas.gov.uk.

Please note that Access Centres will not normally give you an appointment for a needs assessment unless we have referred you to them.

If we need to refer you for a needs assessment, we will do so within three working days of receiving your application. The Access Centre will then contact you to arrange an appointment.

Your Access Centre or assessor will let you know if they need more information to carry out your needs assessment, for example, more detailed medical evidence.

Main funding application

If you are applying to us for tuition fee and/or living cost support, you must submit an application for your main student funding before or at the same time as you apply for DSA. We will not be able to process your DSA application until we have processed your application for your main funding.

You can fill out an application on-line at www.saas.gov.uk from April 2015. To make sure your Living-costs funding is available for you on the first day of your first term, you should apply as soon as possible, but no later than the 30th June 2015. The closing date for applications is 31 March 2016. Please make sure that you apply before this date, as we will not accept late applications.

You do not need to submit a main student funding application if you are applying for DSA only.

How we use the information that you give us

We are governed by the Data Protection Act 1998.

We will use the information you give us on your form to process your application for the DSA. We have a duty to protect the public funds we handle and we may use the information you have given on this form to prevent and detect fraud. We may also share this information for the same purpose with other organisations that handle public funds.

We need the information you give us to work out whether you are eligible for funding and we are the data controller for that information. We will assess your entitlement and send you a letter to tell you how much funding you will get from us. We keep your personal information so we can audit our assessment of student funding.

Where necessary, we will pass the information you give us on your DSA application form (and any other evidence you give us) to an Access Centre or to your college or university if they are approved to carry out needs assessments. They will use this to work out what equipment or help you need to do your course. They will send us a full report detailing your needs and how much it will cost.

Paying DSA

We will pay your main DSA award straight into your bank or building society. You must give us valid bank or building society details on your DSA application form, even if you have already given us bank details on your application for your main funding. We cannot make DSA payments by cash or cheque.

If you employ your own support worker, on receipt of a valid DSA claim for the support you received, we will pay you in arrears. You are responsible for then paying your helper. If you use a helper that your college, university or an agency provides, we will pay the helper direct. More information about how we pay for NMPH is available in our booklet DSA NMPH allowance guide. If your needs assessment recommends that you receive NMPH, we will send a copy of this booklet to you when we process your application for DSA. You can also download one from our website www.saas.gov.uk.

Fraud

You must send us copies of receipts for **all** items you purchase under the DSA. If you don't give us receipts or the amount on your receipts is less than the amount we awarded you, we will ask you to pay back the amount of money we gave you that is more than you are entitled to.

You must send us receipts for any items you purchase, using the large items allowance, within 6 weeks of making the purchase. You can send us receipts for any consumable items over the course of the year as you use it, or altogether at the end of the session.

If you have employed your helper direct, both you and your helper must sign all NMPH invoices. Again, if we pay you more than the NMPH award you are entitled to, we will ask you to pay this back.

If you apply for DSA in a subsequent year and you have not given us all of the receipts for your previous DSA award, we may withhold any further awards of DSA until we receive your receipts.

We take all aspects of fraud seriously and have a dedicated fraud team to deal with any cases that arise. We will aim to recover any money we pay, that we later find out, we have paid as the result of a fraudulent claim. We will prosecute anybody who makes a fraudulent claim for funding.

Processing times

We have the following response times and processing targets:

DSA forms

- Process all fully filled in DSA application forms within 21 calendar days
- Process all fully filled in needs assessment reports within 21 days

Written correspondence and emails

- Respond to all DSA written correspondence within 21 days
- Respond to all emails within 21 days
- Pay all invoices for NMPH within 21 days

Other

- Deal with any requests under Freedom of Information (FOI) within 20 working days
- Respond to all correspondence clearly marked 'complaint' within 14 days
- Respond to all correspondence clearly marked 'appeal' within 14 days

If you do not receive a reply from us within 28 calendar days, you should contact us to make sure we have received your application form or correspondence.

Our appeals and complaints procedures

How to make an appeal

An appeal is a formal request to review a decision we have made on your entitlement to financial funding and/or our assessment of how much you should get. An appeal must claim an error on our part and we will only consider such if it is based on us having made an incorrect assessment of your factual circumstances and/or wrong interpretation of the law. To allow us to fully consider your case, you must give us all the documentary evidence you have to support your appeal.

You can make a formal appeal by writing to tell us why you think our decision or assessment is wrong. Clearly mark your letter "Formal Appeal" and write your SAAS reference number on it. Please send this, along with all the relevant documentary evidence to support your appeal, to the address below, and mark the envelope 'SAAS Appeals'.

How to make a complaint

We are committed to providing high-quality customer services and we would like to hear from you if something goes wrong or you are not satisfied with any aspect of our service.

You can complain about things like:

- delays in responding to your enquiries and requests;
- failure to provide a service;
- a request for a service or information that we have not actioned;
- our standard of service;
- our policy;
- treatment by or attitude of a member of staff; and
- our failure to follow proper administrative process.

However, there are some things we can't deal with through our complaints handling procedure. These include:

- a routine first-time request for a service;
- requests for information or an explanation of policy or practice;
- disagreement with a decision where a right of appeal exists;
- Freedom of Information or Data Protection request decisions; and
- legal proceedings or judgements.

The [SAAS complaints information leaflet](#) describes our complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. It also tells you about our service standards and what you can expect from us.

Stage one - frontline resolution

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and whenever possible within the area that provided the service. This could mean an on-the-spot apology and explanation if something has clearly gone wrong and immediate action to resolve the problem.

We will give you our decision at stage one in five working days or less, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

If we can't resolve your complaint at this stage, we will explain why and tell you what you can do next. We might suggest that you take your complaint to stage two.

Stage two - investigation

Stage two deals with two types of complaint: those that we have not resolved at stage one and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.

When using stage two we will:

1. acknowledge receipt of your complaint within three working days
2. where appropriate, discuss your complaint with you to understand why you are not satisfied and what outcome you are looking for
3. give you a full response to the complaint as soon as possible and within 20 working days

We will tell you if our investigation will take longer than 20 working days and agree revised time limits and keep you updated on progress.

Recording, monitoring and reviewing complaints

We have structured systems for recording complaints, their outcomes and any resulting action. These allow us to identify opportunities to improve our services.

Our Management Board reviews the complaints we have dealt with every 3 months to assess whether there are any patterns or trends that suggest we ought to change our procedures. We publish details in our annual reports.

Appealing the recommendations in your needs assessment

If you wish to appeal the recommendations in your needs assessment, you should contact the college, university or Access Centre that did your assessment. They will be able to give you a copy of their appeals process. If you are not happy with their response, we can appoint an Independent Arbitrator to look at your assessment, but only once you have exhausted your appeal with your college, university or Access Centre.

Section 3 – FAQs and contact details

FAQs

How do I find out what equipment or other help I need?

We cannot offer advice about equipment or other types of help. If you need advice you should first contact the Disability Advisor at your college or university.

What happens once you have approved my claim for DSA?

We will send you a letter letting you know what we have agreed to pay for. We will also send a copy of this letter to the disability advisor at your institution and/or the Access Centre who carried out your assessment (provided you have given us your consent to do this on your application form).

Can I still apply for DSA even if I am near the end of my course?

Providing you apply before the application closing date, we will be able to consider your claim for DSA. However, the funding that we are able to offer you may be limited, for example we will not approve the hire or purchase of any equipment if you are able to borrow the items you need from your college or university. Also, we may not pay for any recommended equipment until the start of the next academic year.

Can I buy different items/equipment to the ones that you have approved?

No, you must buy the items/equipment exactly as your assessor recommends. If you are not happy with the equipment that they recommend for you, you should contact them to discuss this before you purchase any other items/equipment.

Can I buy equipment before my course begins?

Once we have dealt with your application, we will tell you what equipment we have approved. We may give you the money to buy your equipment shortly before the start of your course. We will only do this in certain cases. If you do not start/continue on your course, we will ask you to pay this money back to us.

We will not pay you for any equipment which you purchased prior to your needs assessment taking place. If you purchase any items which your assessor has recommended, but which we do not approve, you will have to pay for such items yourself.

What happens to the equipment when I finish my course?

All the equipment you buy with the DSA is and will stay your property. When you have finished with your equipment, you may decide to offer it to your college, university or a charity for other students to use, but you do not have to do so.

If we have paid for you to hire equipment, you will have to return this to the provider once the hire period is over.

Will I have to repay my DSA if I leave my course early?

Possibly. We may recover some or all of your DSA if you withdraw from your course. It will depend when you withdraw and whether we have given you money for support that you have not yet bought or received.

What do I do once I have bought all of my equipment?

You must send us receipts for any items of equipment we approve under the large items allowance within 6 weeks of purchasing them. If this is going to take you longer than 6 weeks,

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you must contact us to explain why. You can send us receipts for your consumable items, such as ink cartridges, printer paper or photocopying credit throughout the academic session, or all together at the end of the academic session.

If the equipment you purchase costs less than the amount we have given you, you must send us a cheque or postal order made out to “Student Awards Agency for Scotland” for the amount you have not spent. **You cannot purchase items at a lower price and use the money you save to upgrade to another item**

If the price of your equipment changes after your assessment has taken place, please contact your disability advisor.

Please send us photocopies only of your receipts as you will need to keep the originals for warranty purposes.

If you apply for DSA in a subsequent year and you still have not given us all of the receipts for your previous DSA award, we may withhold any future award for DSA until we have received your receipts.

What happens if the amount of NMPH I need changes during the year?

You must contact your Disability Advisor as soon as possible to discuss this. Your Disability Advisor must tell us in writing of any possible changes. If we approve the changes, we will write to you to tell you.

We will not pay for more NMPH than the amount your Disability Advisor recommends. If you send us an invoice for more hours than were originally recommended for you, we will restrict the amount we pay to the number of hours that your Disability Advisor originally approved for you.

Who do I contact if I have any problems with my DSA?

If you have a problem with your assessment or the contents of your assessment report, you must contact the person who did your assessment.

If you have issues with your equipment or software, for example, your equipment brakes down or does not work correctly, you must contact your supplier direct. If you have a problem with your non-medical helper, for example, your helper always turns up late, if you employ them yourself, you must speak to them direct. If your agency or college or university provides your helper, you must speak to them.

If you have a problem with your DSA payments or you have any questions about the DSA scheme in general, you should contact us using the contact details on the next page.

Contact us

Telephone: 0300 555 0505
Address: The Student Awards Agency for Scotland
DSA Team
Saughton House
Broomhouse
Edinburgh
EH11 3UT

Email: saas_4@scotland.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.saas.gov.uk

Other useful contacts

Lead Scotland: Information and advice for disabled learners and carers

Princes House
5, Shandwick Place
Edinburgh
EH2 4RG

Tel: 0800 999 2568
Email: info@lead.org.uk
Website: www.lead.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

58 Robertson Street
Glasgow
G2 8DU

Tel: 0845 604 5510
Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

National Union of Students Scotland

1 Papermill Wynd
McDonald Road
Edinburgh
EH7 4QL

Tel: 0131 556 6598
Email: mail@nus-Scotland.org.uk
Website: www.nus.org.uk