

## Government reforms to Disabled Students' Allowances Update

### Summary

The DSA Task and Finish Group was convened to monitor Government's proposed changes to Disabled Students' Allowances. The group's remit is to assess implications of the changes for disabled students. Implications will be financial and legal, in relation to City's continuing commitment to support students and duty under the Equalities Act 2010. The group will provide options for how the University can best respond to the significant changes to DSAs provision that may result in 2016/17.

This paper provides a report on activity.

### Recommended action

Education & Student Committee is asked to:

- (i) **note** the update.

**Publication: Open**

## **DSA Task and Finish Group Update**

### **Purpose**

This paper provides an update from the DSAs Task and Finish Group.

### **Background**

The DSA Task and Finish Group was convened to monitor Government's proposed changes to Disabled Students' Allowances. The group's remit is to assess implications of the changes for disabled students. Implications will be financial and legal, in relation to City's continuing commitment to support students and duty under the Equalities Act 2010. The group will provide options for how the University can best respond to the significant changes to DSAs provision that may result in 2016/17.

Government proposes to narrow the types of support students can use DSAs to provide. Advice from Government has emphasised that it will fall to universities to continue to discharge their responsibilities under the Equalities Act. It is anticipated that this will result in universities meeting any cost previously covered by DSAs to which students are entitled. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) has confirmed that universities' Access Agreements may be a suitable way for costs to be covered.

### **Report of Activities August-November 2016**

The main focus of the work to date has been in response to the *BIS Consultation on targeting funding for disabled students in Higher Education from 2016/17 onwards*. The consultation launched on 1<sup>st</sup> July and closed in late September 2015.

Detailed work will not possible until BIS formally publishes proposed changes and expected accompanying OFFA guidance is available. In the interim the following work has been undertaken:

- Library Services and Learning Success staff are piloting a Bookshare scheme for the provision of electronic library books.
- Staff have been liaising with Assistive Technology professionals in other universities, including Birkbeck, University of London, to establish what actions are being taken to anticipate changes.
- As an initial step, in 2015/16 BIS withdrew £200 from DSAs equipment allowance. The group has considered how this shortfall might be offset by use of the Hardship Fund and a process has been proposed.
- Research has been done on establishing a fixed term project (potentially with temporary post support) to review current arrangements and to map anticipated changes. A draft specification for City is in development.
- Discussion has begun to consider the development of an Inclusive Learning Policy to act as a foundation for future developments.
- Monitoring of AMOSSHE (Association of Managers of Student Support in HE) and NADP (National Association of Disability Practitioners) discussion is being maintained to ensure that our response is in line with the sector.
- The University's Student Mental Health Co-ordinator, in her role as Chair of UMHAN (Universities Mental Health Advisor Network), is contributing to developments and discussions at a national level, including with BIS, in relation to the requirements of students with mental health difficulties.

### **Next Steps**

When BIS and OFFA publish guidelines a more focussed series of activities will be undertaken. At this point the Task and Finish Group may be expanded as broader implications and immediate priorities in response become clearer.

Andrea Kenneally, Head of Learning Success

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