

THE  
SNOWDON  
AWARD SCHEME

*Helping students with physical disabilities  
in further and higher education or training*

The  
Snowdon  
Survey  
2006

**Executive summary**

## **Background**

When The Snowdon Award Scheme was established in 1981, Lord Snowdon expressed a hope that, by the millennium, the need for such charitable support would be obsolete.

The scheme's trustees would be the first to acknowledge the vast improvements that have been put in place for disabled students since 1981. Indeed, some of the more recent changes were made following the 1998 Snowdon Survey which, together with other contemporary reports presented to the Government, argued a cogent case for more equality of access for disabled students.

The majority of disabled students do now receive the additional funding and support that they need. However each year the scheme continues to receive far more applications for support than it can satisfy.

Clearly, some awkward questions remain.

- **Who are the students that are missing out and why?**
- **Why are disabled students failing to receive good information and guidance about the statutory funding and support available to them?**

And, most importantly,

- **What should be done about it?**

## **The Snowdon Survey 2006**

In this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the charity, it seemed appropriate to take a fresh look at the current issues. Our 2006 research has included:

- a review of available statistics from various sources
- analysis of Snowdon Award applications
- questionnaires to disability officers at universities and to recent Snowdon awardees
- anecdotal feedback received alongside the quantitative findings of our surveys and when handling recent student applications.

## **The key issues**

### **1. Students with severe visual, hearing or mobility impairments often have to simply 'make do' with far less support than they need.**

- Students with visual, hearing and mobility impairments make up just 10% of all disabled students applying for higher education (HE) courses, yet they account for over 80% of applications for Snowdon Awards.
- Of university disability officers surveyed, 75% highlighted hearing and visually impaired students as those with the most difficult funding problems.
- The maximum DSA non-medical helpers allowance is insufficient for the needs of students who require expensive human support in the form of non-medical personal carers, sign language interpreters and note takers. (The shortfall is even worse for students studying a course which has high taught-hours content.)
- The maximum DSA equipment allowance can fail totally blind students who are Braille users.

***'It is the support funding for those with profound sensory impairments who frequently find that the DSA just doesn't stretch far enough. Large numbers of hours of support workers (readers, interpreters) rapidly eat up the annual limits.'*** – university disability officer.

**2. Disabled postgraduate students in England and Wales lose out even more.**

- Postgraduates make up around 20% of all HE students, but they account for over 50% of the HE students applying for Snowdon Awards.
- In England and Wales the maximum postgraduate DSA is less than one third of the maximum undergraduate award. This clearly prevents many disabled students from pursuing a postgraduate qualification.
- Postgraduate DSA has only recently been introduced in Scotland, but it is now set at the same level as for undergraduates.
- The fall in the percentage of postgraduate disabled students compared with undergraduates suggests that more than a sixth (or around 17%) of capable students who could go on to postgraduate studies, fail to do so.

**3. Students studying less than 50% of full time hours get no DSA support.**

- The Snowdon Award Scheme regularly receives applications from students whose disabilities mean they are simply unable to maintain study at 50% + of full time hours.
- The fall in the percentage of part-time disabled students compared with full-timers suggests that some disabled students are being discouraged from part-time study by the DSA restriction.

**4. The DSA process can be highly stressful for disabled students and their families.**

- The process of going away to university can be stressful enough for any young adult. For students with a disability, there is even more to worry about. The DSA process and timing (with students having to attend an assessment and often not knowing until the last minute what additional support and funding they will receive) can add huge anxiety.
- Too many disabled students and their families have to struggle to obtain the support that they are entitled to.

***'I think all tend to have difficulties with the cumbersome and time consuming DSA process.'*** – university disability officer.

**5. Disabled students in further education (FE) lose out too.**

- FE students under 19 do not generally pay fees, but from age 19 there is no statutory fee provision. This can disadvantage disabled students who may have had their learning disrupted or who simply need to work at a slower pace.
- While funding for learning support staff in FE is generally much better than in HE (up to £19,000 pa per student - considerably more than the DSA non-medical helpers allowance of £12,135); funding for equipment and capital items is often far less forthcoming since equipment costs cannot be reclaimed in the same way.
- Over 50% of Snowdon FE student applications over the past 3 years were for equipment. Only 1% was for assistance with non-medical helpers.

## 6. Across both HE and FE there is huge variation in the quality of support services, information and funding provided to disabled students.

The following key issues have arisen from the anecdotal feedback received from numerous sources.

- Some universities and colleges provide excellent support, others are not fully embracing their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) for provision of accessible materials and providing an inclusive learning experience as part of “reasonable adjustment”.
- Information provided to students and their families on sources of funding and support available varies widely. There are wonderful examples of students who have been fully briefed and supported with their DSA assessment. But in the worst cases, students come to the Scheme without knowing that statutory funding ought to be available to them.
- There is huge variation in the fees levied by universities for their costs in supporting a disabled student. The sum charged by the university as an administration fee can vary from nothing, to up to 25% of the DSA awarded.

***‘Unfortunately, so much seems to depend on where you live, where you are studying and the people with whom you are dealing.’*** – Snowdon Award Scheme administrator.

### Recommendations:

As a result of these findings, the following recommendations are being made:

1. Students must be given clear information and advice on DSA availability, process and timescales and should be fully supported through the application and assessment process.
2. The DSA for both undergraduates and postgraduates should cover **all** the student’s assessed additional disability-related costs. To deliver true equality for all students, there should be no arbitrary upper financial limit.
3. The requirement to study at least 50% of full time hours to qualify for DSA should be reviewed.
4. Provision of equipment to support disabled students in FE must be improved and its funding should be reviewed.
5. Students whose circumstances have forced them to undertake FE at a later stage in their lives should not be penalised with course fees.
6. Process must be put in place to ensure greater consistency of quality advice and support services, from colleges, universities and other agencies. This should include regular reviews, evaluation and sharing of best practices.

As noted in the postscript of this report, any action taken in respect of the final recommendation above should recognise broader disability issues, in addition to those of funding and access. Ideally, they should take into account the whole learning experience and participation of students with impairments and should encompass areas such as attitudes of staff and other students towards disability