

Support for disabled students applying for placements and employment opportunities

Employment & Paid Placements

Support in these situations is available via the Job Centre's '**Access To Work**' process.

- The student/job applicant has to make the application (<https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply>), but will have to provide contact details for the employer.
- The applicant does not have to be classified as 'disabled' under the definition of the Equality Act – a person is eligible if they are “disabled or have a physical or mental health condition that makes it hard for you to do (their) job”.
- They will need to provide medical evidence of the condition and will be given a form for the doctor to complete.
- Mental Health Support is available without having to apply for Access To Work (although it is available this way too), as long as the person meets the same qualifying criteria (see the GOV.UK website).
- Access To Work is available for apprenticeships and paid placements.
- There is also a separate application process for 'supported internships'.
- The earliest someone can apply is 6 weeks before they are due to start work. It then takes 3 weeks for an Adviser to make contact, after which an applicant will be required to get a GP to complete a medical evidence template and the Job Centre will need to contact with the employer to arrange a workplace assessment (which the student/job applicant will need to attend). I explained that I had heard that 3 months was an average length of time for the application process, but was advised that this seemed a bit long, but would depend on how quickly the applicants is able to provide the required information.
- Some government departments are not eligible for Access To Work support; large employers may be expected to contribute towards support.
- Funding for Access To Work can cover specialist support workers, specialist equipment (up to £1,000 contribution) and travel. Maximum annual award is currently £57,200 (twice the national average salary).
- Support is provided for a fixed term (possibly 2 or 3 years) after which it would need to be reviewed.
- The Access To Work staff guidelines give very detailed information about how the system works and what is available, but the document is 117 pages long!
(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772080/access-to-work-staff-guide.pdf)

Unpaid Placements

This is a lot less clear as support for placements depends on the nature of the placement.

In many cases, disabled students at university will have specialist support in place (in addition to any support or adjustments that the University may have put in place) through Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA). DSA has to be applied for via the student's funding body e.g. Student Finance England (SFE).

If a placement is unpaid, SFE DSA regulations state:

- *“Students are potentially eligible for DSAs whilst attending an overseas institution as part of their UK course, whether obligatory or optional.”*
- *“Students on part-year paid or unpaid placements where the periods of full-time study in the academic year are 10 weeks or more in aggregate are potentially eligible for DSAs.”*

Regarding full-year placements at an overseas university, the DSA Team advised: *“... this would depend on the placement itself. DSA support is available for full year placements, however it depends on if other funding is available. If a student studies abroad as part of the Erasmus+ scheme then they will be entitled to support through the UK National Agency. As such, they would not be entitled to support through DSA for this placement. If the student is not studying through Erasmus then they will not be entitled to any other funding through UK national agency and therefore will be eligible for DSA support.”*

Regarding optional, short-term unpaid placements and the DSA Adviser replied as follows: *“I believe this only applies where it is an obligatory part of the student's course for the placement. This however would be reviewed when the details were received.”*

Therefore, for optional short-term placements, the support process is less clear and it is probably best not to assume or guarantee anything, but if the student is in receipt of (or is eligible for) DSA, it would be worth checking if this support will be available during the placement before other support options are investigated. The Disability Service can advise students about DSA.

As referred to above, Erasmus+ placements have their own funding process, so support for these placements is not available through DSA. (At MMU, this involves liaison International Team who are aware of this process.)

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