



Diversity & Ability's (DnA) response to David Willetts' ministerial statement regarding proposed cuts to the Disabled Students Allowance.

In light of David Willetts' [recent announcements](#), Diversity & Ability (DnA) believes that many aspects of the “modernising” cuts to DSA will have a devastating effect on the future of disabled students entering and studying in Higher Education. DnA supports the [NUS' recent press release](#) denouncing these cuts and agrees with the call for a full equality impact assessment to be carried out.

As a social enterprise, DnA has long campaigned for individualised support that focuses on enabling students to become lifelong independent learners. DnA has actively taken on a mandate to widen the participation and increase employment opportunities of disabled and SpLD learners in the delivery of AT support. Through its ethos and its training delivery, DnA has ensured that the strategies and the life experiences of marginalised learners can be celebrated and positively used to benefit and strengthen AT training delivery.

Having created a national network of peer to peer trainers and end users, many of whom have experienced positive, life changing differences through the DSA, it comes as a massive shock that this statement from Mr. Willetts has come without the inclusion of an impact equalities assessment. Indeed, it is a sad indictment on the Minister's department to have deliberately excluded the very neurodiverse and disabled voices it is supposed to protect. There was no review that allowed students to feedback what they may feel, nor were any stakeholders or the NUS consulted.

The statement is damaging and remains vague in its protective support for Disabled students in higher education and has put the hardworking contributions of many organisations within the DSA into disarray. In the age of David Cameron's “Aspiration Nation”, the intended cuts will prevent many disabled and neurodiverse learners from aspiring to achieve their full potential or indeed accessing full employment and higher education.

Whilst DnA believes universities offer many great services to disabled students, many universities cannot provide all the support and services disabled students currently need. The government's new expectation on HEIs to provide enabling support whilst arranging systematic cuts to the DSA beggars belief and will leave many HEI's unprepared to fully deliver the much needed support.

The statement's notion of ‘complex support needs’ remains ambiguous and unhelpful. If the insistence that individualised support based socio economic marginalisation and learning impact is still to be kept at the heart of accessible support and learning attainment then DnA would continue to insist that traditional

evidence of students impacted by anxiety and hidden disablement be given a platform to highlight the life changing differences that access to DSA support has had for them.

In short, DnA believes that the government, in announcing cuts before completing an equalities impact assessment, has forged a position that strongly refuses to put disabled learners at the heart of HE delivery.

As DnA's Campaigns & Equalities Director and NUS Disabled Students Officer 2008-2010 - Adam Hyland, says,

Far too often, crucial decisions are made without proper consultation with the very people it affects, disabled students. The DSA has been an essential strategy for many disabled students in becoming lifelong independent learners. Individualised support must be at the heart of this journey. This is nothing more than preventing disability oppression and respecting the agenda of 'Nothing about us without us!'

DnA will continue to celebrate neurodiversity and support students in becoming confident, independent learners. We will work with organisations and associations in the sector to ensure that disabled students will still be able to access and reach their potential in higher education.

DnA will also continue to deliver support to HEIs to ensure that they remain robust and inclusive of their shared mandate to enable diverse learners to access Higher Education and flourish in an environment that inspires and supports students and fosters individual potential.

Despite the lack of inclusion and the climate of fear that Mr. Willetts' statement has created, we are confident that the many organisations and students within the sector will unite under the Equalities Act to fight these proposed cuts. It will remain our collective responsibility to work with the government and to provide the reforms, the support and transparency for the continued protection of diverse learners in higher education.