On Friday 6 June, NUS is coordinating a national constituency-based lobby of MPs – saying no to cuts to the DSA! Below is all relevant information to help you effectively lobby your MP.

What’s going on?

The government has announced that it plans to make changes to the Disabled Students’ Allowance (DSA) in England. They are planning on cutting DSA - gutting a support allowance vital to many students.

DSA is a vital support for many disabled students, helping many to access education. Research has shown that students receiving DSA are more likely to reach a first or upper class second honours degree than disabled students who do not receive an allowance.

The government intend to restrict those eligible to receive laptops and computers. And non-medical support like note-taking will no longer be covered under DSA, shifting greater responsibility onto institutions. While well-resourced institutions with fewer disabled students may be able to provide additional support, less well-resourced universities and colleges with higher numbers of disabled students who will struggle to provide the necessary support.

The government has already made savage cuts to disabled people’s benefits and cuts to local government funding, we cannot let this continue.

With research showing 59 per cent of disabled respondents worried about not having enough money to meet basic living expenses, we need to stand up and say no to any further swingeing cuts. If you agree, get behind the campaign and tell your MP what you think by joining the #DontCutMeOut DSA Constituency lobby day on Friday 6 June.

What can I do about it?

- Answer the survey on students’ use of computers and supportive software for their studies, the survey link is: [http://nussurveys.org.uk/Surveys/policy&delivery/computer_survey_2014.htm](http://nussurveys.org.uk/Surveys/policy&delivery/computer_survey_2014.htm)

- Join the NUS #DontCutMeOut national constituency lobby day on Friday 6 June - encourage as many
of your students as possible to take part, and register your attendance:


- Join the twitter twobby: at 12 noon on June 6th there will also be a twitter twobby. Tweet at your MP using the hashtags #DontCutMeOut and #DSADay. To find out your MP's twitter handle check out and #DSADay. To find out your MP's twitter handle check out http://tweetminster.co.uk/mps

- Whether you are an HE union or an FE union, contact other students' unions in your area and work with them to get as many people as possible lobbying their MPs on 6 June.

- Get your friends and family involved – talk to them about the campaign and get them to email/lobby/twobby their MP too!

- Spread the word - join the #DontCutMeOut Facebook event: https://www.facebook.com/events/593330940766301/?fref=ts, invite your friends and tweet up #DontCutMeOut #DSADay

We want to get as many people as possible lobbying their MPs in their constituencies on the issue of DSA cuts on Friday 6 June.

Why should I lobby my MP?

Your Member of Parliament is your representative in Westminster, where new laws are made and government policy is scrutinised. They deal with bigger issues, like national government policy on schools, hospitals and transport. It is their job to voice your concerns, as one of their constituents, in the House of Commons. Your MP can ask questions in the House of Commons for you, write to ministers (senior members of the Government) on your behalf and sponsor and vote for new legislation.

It is important that you, your colleagues, friends, neighbours and family contact your MP about your concerns regarding the proposed DSA cuts. The more people an MP has contacting them on the same issue the more likely they are to do something about it.

Every letter counts!

Not that many people write to their MP, so those that do make an impact. Your MP wants your vote – the least they'll do to try and get it is respond to you (and you don't have to tell them if you are too young to vote yet). They don't have to respond to your letter but they are shooting themselves in the foot if they don't. If they don't reply to you, write to them again, express your disappointment, and ask them for a response!

What is an MP ‘surgery’?

You can lobby your MP in your local area by arranging to go along to one of their constituency ‘surgeries’.

What is lobbying?

Lobbying is about raising issues with and seeking to influence elected representatives – councillors MPs and Lords. It can take many different forms, e.g. sending letters, signing petitions, face to face meetings, and organised protests and rallies, to name a few. It can be done by paid or professional lobbyists or by grass roots activists and members of the public. Lobbying of MPs can take place in Parliament when it is sitting, or in a MP’s constituency.
Most MPs hold surgeries – many hold them every week, some hold them once a month. The surgeries are an opportunity for MPs’ constituents to raise personal concerns and seek their MP’s help with their problems.

MPs often use local party offices, church halls or rooms in pubs or community centres as the venues, with a number of surgeries possibly being held at different venues around a constituency. They are traditionally held on weekends when MPs have returned from sittings of parliament in London. Some MP surgeries are drop-in sessions operating on a first come, first served basis, whilst others require a pre-arranged appointment. It’s therefore best to give your MP’s office a call beforehand to check whether you need to make an appointment. Call them as far in advance as possible because if an appointment is required, they tend to get booked up weeks ahead of a surgery. If it is a drop in session, turn up early to ensure you have the opportunity to see your MP and enough time to raise your concerns.

What exactly are we lobbying for?

In the name of ‘modernisation’, the Government intends to limit funding for computers and supportive software which will no longer be considered as a ‘standard provision’ for DSA receivers. However, research has shown that disabled students receiving DSA are more likely to succeed and to reach first or upper class second honours degree than disabled students who do not receive an allowance. Without this vital help, disabled students will face higher drop-out rates, dissatisfaction and lower educational attainment. For some, higher education will simply become not viable at all.

Proposed changes further involve cuts in non-medical help and specialist accommodation, and stricter criteria to be eligible for the allowance - only ‘more complex needs’ will be considered, with no specification so far regarding what a ‘complex need’ is. This redefinition risks excluding students with specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia or dyspraxia from DSA whereas they are precisely the most important group among disabled students.

The Government also wants to shift the responsibility for supporting disabled students to higher education institutions but has not announced any extra funding to enable institutions to take on this role. This might affect the recruitment of disabled students who will be an additional cost, and provoke cuts in other important services provided by HEIs who will need to readjust their budget.

These cuts are happening in a wider context of austerity that already threatens disabled students wellbeing and access to basic services. The dispositions of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 affecting disabled students involve the replacement of the Disabled Living Allowance (DLA) with the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) that will remove 600,000 disabled people from state benefit; a limited access to NHS and health provision; and the work capability assessment that might be problematic for disabled students transitioning from education to employment. This period of transition is usually longer than for non-disabled students, and there is a question regarding the kind of support available to those no longer receiving students’ allowances but not in employment yet.

Therefore we urge the Government to reconsider these cuts that jeopardize disabled people access and chances to succeed in higher education. We ask that:

Actions

Ask your MP to:

• write to Vince Cable, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills
Meeting your MP

Step 1: Find out who your MP is
If you are not sure who your MP is you can find out by:
- Checking out www.theyworkforyou.com. Simply type in your postcode and it will tell you which constituency you’re in and who the MP is.
- Calling the House of Commons Information Office on 020 7219 4272 quoting your address and postcode.

These sources will also supply you with your MP’s contact details.

Step 2: Make an appointment with your MP
The easiest way of making an appointment is simply to call up the constituency office. MPs receive piles of letters, so you may not get a timely response if you write. Simply ask to speak to the MP’s diary secretary, explain to him/her that you are a constituent and that you would like to meet with your MP, and briefly explain the reason for the meeting. Ask to make an appointment to meet them at the surgery on Friday June 6th if they have one then, or at the next available opportunity (please note that MPs are usually only around for local meetings on Monday mornings and Fridays as they need to be in Westminster the rest of the week).

If your MP is a minister, it is still best to contact them at their constituency office rather than their ministerial department.

To be super-effective, you can target the MPs who represent the constituency where your college is located, and the constituency where you live during term-time (if it’s different), and also your home constituency. This is because as a student you have a right to be registered to vote in both your college and home constituencies.

Step 3: Register your attendance at the #DontCutMeOut lobby day
When you have arranged a meeting with your MP, please register your attendance for the lobby. The reason we ask for you to register before the event is to ensure that all MPs are being targeted. We can work out where there are gaps and try to fill them prior to the lobby.


Step 4: Prepare for the meeting
Before you meet with your MP it is important that you read the arguments and have done a bit of research on your MP.

You can also investigate:
- What party is your MP a member of?
- Are they a back-bencher?
- Do they always vote with the party?
- Have they spoken up about Disability issues before?

These questions should tell you a bit about your MP and about what arguments they care about. Again, www.theyworkforyou.com is a useful website to find out all this information.

If you are seeing your MP along with other constituents, agree on roles between yourselves. You could have, for example: a facilitator who introduces everyone,
coordinates the contributions and summarises; people to introduce the various different aspects of the issue; a note-taker who listens to the MP and records the discussion, especially notable comments.

This will ensure we can gauge the views of MPs and concentrate our lobbying efforts in the future.

**Top tips**

- Don’t worry! Be confident in putting across your argument and case – remember that you are the expert as you have personal experience of the issue. MPs and other representatives have to keep up to date on a huge range of issues – chances are you will know more than them on the issue(s) that you really care about.
- Use personal stories and examples in your argument. This is likely to have more of an influence on your MP.
- Be clear about what you expect your MP to do following your meeting and that you would like a response/update from them.

**Latest information**

Keep up-to-date with the latest information:

- #DontCutMeOut lobby Day Facebook event: [https://www.facebook.com/events/593330940766301/?fref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/events/593330940766301/?fref=ts)
- Twitter – use hashtags #DontCutMeOut #DSADay
- Don’t forget to check NUS Connect Disabled Students campaign page for the latest briefings and news stories.

**Step 5: The meeting**

It is best to assume that your MP will not know too much about the issues you raise. Make sure you clearly set out who you are, identifying yourself as a constituent, and where you study. Use the tips below to get your message across in a clear, courteous and concise manner.

- Thank the MP for seeing you and establish how much time you have to talk to them
- Outline the background to the issue
- Tell your MP how and why it impacts on you – use examples if you can
- Tell your MP how it affects your area – use examples if you can
- Be specific about what your MP can do to help and what exactly you are asking them to do, e.g. to seek a parliamentary debate on the issue; to write to The Secretary of State who oversees the Business, Innovation and skills department.
- Ask your MP to keep in touch and update you on what they do following your meeting. Make sure you give your full name and address.

**After meeting your MP**

- As soon as possible after the meeting, send a letter/ email of thanks to your MP. In your letter you should also summarise what was said. This will remind them of the issues you discussed and any actions they have said they will take
- Send a copy of the above letter or email to publicaffairs@nus.org.uk along with any reply you receive.
Good luck lobbying your MP, let us know how it goes.