Disability Advisory Service Annual Report 2022/23

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Service Overview

"My Disability Advisor's understanding of the mental effort I require to actively listen and communicate throughout the day given my disability (hearing impairment) was heart-warming, for once I felt understood. I was offered tools and devices to simplify my life…. My experience with the DAS team and Oxford community was excellent and made me cherish this […] institution evermore''.

Student feedback on DAS and Oxford University Assessment Centre.

"I am lucky to have benefited from the support of the Disability Advisory Service from the outset of my course in Oxford. The service is truly first-class, always positive and friendly, and without their help I doubt I would have been able to reach my current stage. I am very thankful and reassured by the knowledge that I have a great team behind me who are determined to help me, in my difficult circumstances, to fulfil my potential and gain the best degree that I can."

Student feedback on DAS

The Disability Advisory Service (DAS) works with offer-holders and on-course students of the University. Students registered with the service will be allocated a designated Disability Advisor or Assistant Disability Advisor who will work with them and co-ordinate any necessary support.

The over-arching goal of DAS is to provide advice and guidance to disabled students about study related support and to make recommendations of support, individual reasonable adjustments and wider inclusive practices to reduce and remove barriers to learning and create accessible and inclusive learning environments for students.

In addition, Disability Advisors provide guidance and information to staff working with individual disabled students. DAS also engages with the student voice through liaison with the Student Union and other interested student groups. We welcome student feedback, which is sought and encouraged through a range of routes, including student consultation events, feedback surveys and drop-in sessions. Feedback is used to inform future service developments and communications, and a number of DAS developments referenced in this annual report have been influenced by disabled students' feedback.

1.2 Executive summary

Disability Advisory Service (DAS) records continue to rise, with 7350 students known to the Service in 2022/23. This represents 27.7% of the total Oxford student population and is up 4.9% from 7008 disabled student registrations (and 26.5% of the total Oxford student population) in 2021/22.

A full-time disability advisor has approximately 835 students on their caseload and there were in excess of 3,200 Student Support Plans (SSP) in place by the end of the 2022/23 academic year.

Significant drivers for DAS registration include access to examination adjustments and diagnostic assessments for specific learning difficulties (SpLD), such as dyslexia and dyspraxia. There has also been a notable increase in requests for educational assessments due to attention difficulties in the last three years.

During the 2022/23 academic year, DAS has continued to actively develop and consult on a new service model, to ensure more timely and efficient dissemination of Student Support Plans (SSPs) and implementation of support arrangements in the context of ongoing high demand.

Oxford continues to record higher than sector-average disability disclosure rates[1], providing support for the University continuing to embed inclusive teaching and assessment practices that proactively remove disability-related study barriers and reduce the need for students to register with DAS.

2. Student Engagement and Outreach

Two full-time Assistant Disability Advisor (ADAs), initially recruited in 2021/22, were further embedded during the 2022/23 academic year. The ADAs have been able to offer prompt and proactive contact to disabled offer holders in advance of arrival at Oxford and once on course, advising on access institutional support and adjustments

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[1] NB. new HESA stats for 2022/23 are due to be published in January 2024

and signposting and supporting with external support disability funding applications (such as for Disabled Student Allowance).

DAS continues to offer a combination of in-person and remote appointments (commonly via Teams video or audio calls) for students. Students can also email a designated Disability Advisor or contact the administration team in the service, via a general inbox email address or by phone.

Whilst the Service is able to respond flexibly to students' preferred method of engagement, it is recognised that response timeframes can become pressured during periods of peak demand when it can sometimes take a few weeks to process some requests and replies.

The Head of DAS has met regularly throughout the year with Student Union representatives, including the VP for Welfare and members of the Oxford SU Disabilities Campaign.

In 2022/23 the Astrophoria Foundation Year programme was introduced at Oxford and DAS worked closely with disabled students on the programme to ensure appropriate support. DAS has also provided advice and guidance to colleagues delivering Uniq+ Graduate Internships, and disabled students undertaking these internships, to ensure inclusive practices, relevant reasonable adjustments and support were in place.

Beyond its core student work, DAS undertakes a range of outreach activities with prospective applicants, offer holders and matriculated students to encourage early registration so they can gain full benefit from any relevant support. This includes an active presence at all undergraduate Open Days, regular e-bulletins to all students who have a record with the Service, and a popular online 'transition event' (including a Webinar and Canvas course) for new disabled students prior to enrolment each September.

DAS's capacity to maintain or develop its profile of outreach work is limited within the current service model due to high levels of demand and casework volumes. Nevertheless, DAS continues to work closely with other key stakeholders in central services to ensure messaging (e.g., in web content, application materials and Student Self Service) promotes awareness of the Service and encourages disabled students to discuss support for their studies with us.

3. Service Developments and Institutional Work

Some important areas of service development and institutional work were progressed in 2022/23, most notably continued consultation, on, and development of, a new service model, focussing on two main areas of work:

3.1 A tailored Student Support Plan (SSP) model

A new service model, informed by extensive consultation with disabled students and additional stakeholders across the collegiate university, was finalised at the end of the 2022/23 academic year and will be incrementally rolled out for offer holders and students into the 2023/24 academic year. The model enables students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) to access a range of standard reasonable adjustment recommendations in a more timely and efficient way, with Assistant Disability Advisors utilising templated SSPs which have been tailored to students' disability and level of study and discipline, where appropriate. This will enable Disability

Advisors to prioritise bespoke discussions with those with the most individualised requirements, in a timelier manner.

Additionally, a disability inclusion statement, reflecting five of the most commonly recommended inclusive practices, will now be applied for all disabled students registered with the DAS. Given the numbers of students requiring these arrangements, it might be possible, desirable and most efficient for some academic departments to adopt these practices as standard in an inclusive and anticipatory fashion.

3.2 Disability evidence for common reasonable adjustments

In 2022/23, set against a wider context of extensive and ever-growing waiting times for ADHD and autism diagnostic assessments and with the aim of further reducing administrative burdens and barriers to inclusion for disabled students, the University agreed to accept a wider range of disability evidence to enable more students timely and essential access to common institutional reasonable adjustments (including up to 25% additional time and/or a computer in examinations where relevant).

Supporting documentation which can now be used to register with DAS and access certain support and adjustments, includes (but is not limited to): GP confirmation of a referral to an NHS autism or ADHD assessment service; Confirmation of examination adjustments at a previous educational institution (for example a 'Form 8' that documents provision under JCQ regulations for access arrangements); a support plan or Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) from another university, school or college.

The proposed changes are expected to have a positive impact on equality of opportunity for disabled students, particularly those with undiagnosed specific learning difficulties, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (more than 100 individuals each year), who will be able to access reasonable adjustments in a more timely and effective way. There will also be a reduced burden on this group of disabled students in relation to the time and effort currently associated with completing DAS registration.

3.3 Disability Professionals' Forum

DAS has continued to run a popular 'Disability Professionals' Forum', attended, on average, by over 100 college and departmental Disability Coordinators and Leads each term. The Forum provides a space for staff to be briefed on important service updates and provides opportunities for training, networking and practice sharing.

4. Registrations and demographic data

DAS holds records for all the students who have declared a disability in Student Self Service as well as those who register directly with the Service independent of any wider University disclosure. DAS student records continue to rise, increasing by 4.9% in 2021/22 (7008 student registrations) to 7,350 records in 2022/23. Demand for access to examination adjustments may be a significant driving factor for registrations.

Chart 1. Number of Students with a DAS Record
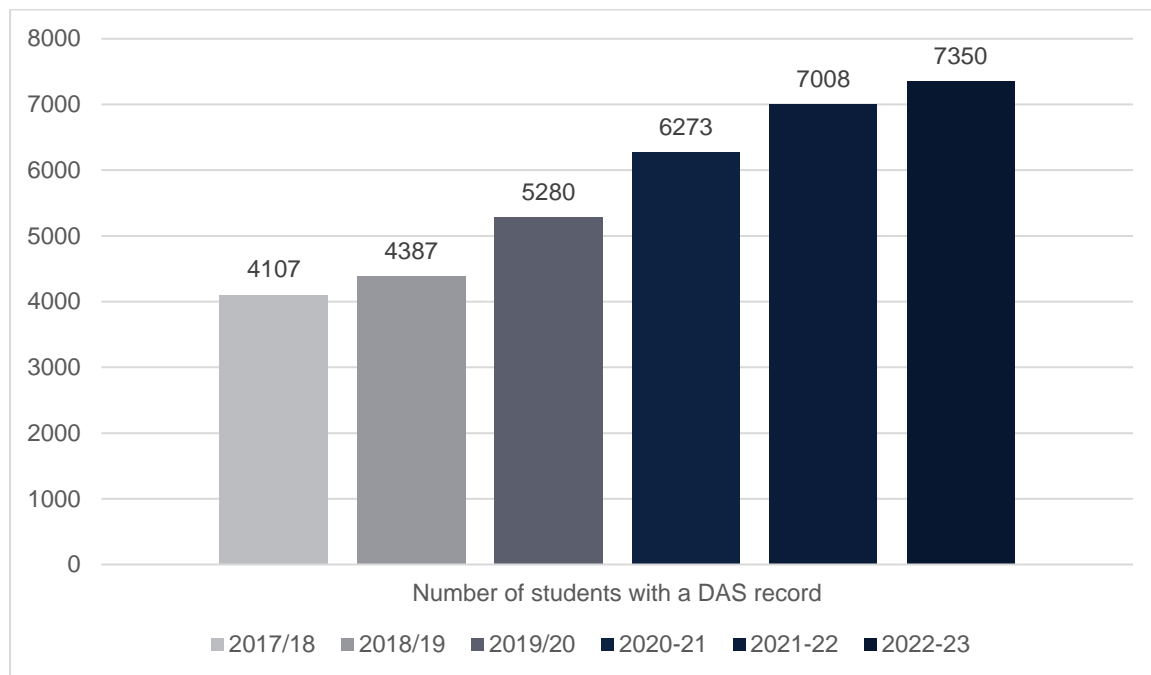
Demand for DAS provision remains above student population growth, with 27.7% of the Oxford student population registered with DAS in 2022/23, compared with the national sector average for disability declarations, which the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reported as being 15.8% in 2021/22[2]. Some caution should be applied when interpreting this finding because the Oxford figures reported here may include wider reporting parameters than used by HESA. However, above average disclosure rates may reflect the particular nature of the teaching and assessment context at Oxford; the tutorial system confers excellent benefits in enabling highly bespoke practice that can adapt to and accommodate individual needs, but educational recordings are not routinely available at cohort level without a DAS recommendation, and reasonable adjustments are commonly required for timed, invigilated assessments.

Chart 2. Proportion of Oxford Student Population with a DAS Record Against Sector Average Disclosure Rates

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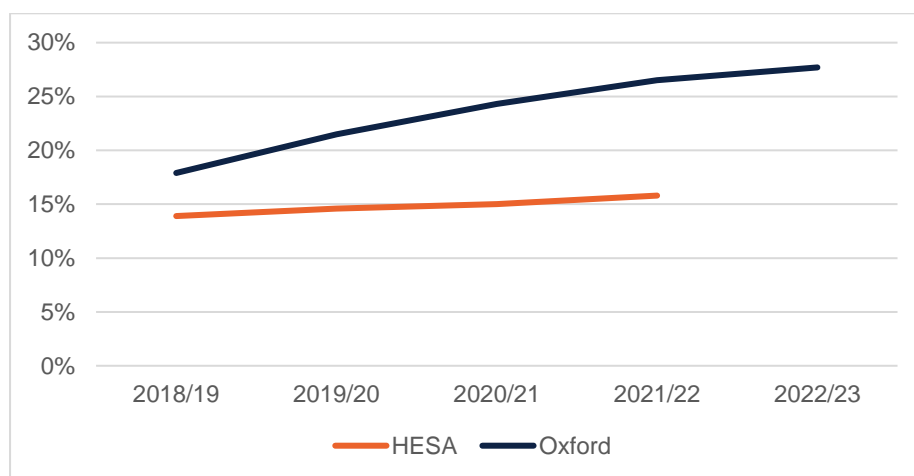
[2] NB. new HESA stats for 2022/23 are due to be published in January 2024

Further increases in demand and student growth (in line with the University's Strategic Plan) will have continued implications for DAS's service provision.

4.1 Disability Type

Disability declarations have been slightly rising across most disability types, although DAS supports students with a broad range of complex needs who do not always fit neatly into categories for reporting purposes (e.g., those declaring multiple disabilities).

'No disability' can indicate a partial registration or that the student is in the process of obtaining disability evidence, and is not necessarily reflective of the level of individual casework undertaken.

Students with long-term mental health conditions remain the highest proportion of DAS users, accounting for 26.6% of all students known to DAS.

Students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) are the second largest group, making up 26.3% of all DAS registrations. SpLD is an umbrella term that includes dyslexia and dyspraxia, as well as attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADHD).

Table 1: Oxford Student Declaration Rates by Disability Type

Disability	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	**2022/23**
Mental health condition	1161	1263	1547	1765	1940	**1,960**
Blind or serious visual impairment	52	53	62	62	68	**75**
Deaf or serious hearing impairment	53	54	64	66	69	**80**
Long standing illness or health condition	514	531	699	843	959	**905**
Multiple disabilities	327	356	480	670	744	**975**
No disability or no known disability	234	240	312	441	539	**470**
Not listed disability, impairment or medical condition	403	418	456	464	496	**485**
Physical impairment or mobility issues	131	140	162	162	183	**190**
Social/communication impairment	141	149	174	215	248	**265**
Specific learning difficulty	1091	1185	1336	1585	1758	**1,935**
Developmental condition[3]						**10**

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[3] Developmental condition was introduced in 22/23 as a new category of HESA data reporting. As such, it is not included in the Trends chart ('Chart 3: Disability Type Trends) and there is no previous comparative data at this time.

Chart 3: Disability Type Trends

Chart 3: Disability Type Trends. Line chart showing disability type trends from 2018/19 to 2022-23. Y-axis labelled "Axis Title" ranging from 0 to 2500. Legend: Mental health condition, Blind or serious visual impairment, Deaf or serious hearing impairment, Long standing illness or health condition, Multiple disabilities, Not listed disability, impairment or medical condition, Physical impairment or mobility issues, Social/communication impairment, Specific learning difficulty.

4.2 Level of study

Disability declarations have been rising across the board, but overall DAS registrations are broadly representative of students studying at all levels. Undergraduate DAS registrations (50.8%) are slightly higher than for graduates (46.1%) undertaking taught degrees (22.7%) or research degrees (23.3%), and this might be attributable to the nature of teaching and assessment which often confers an increased likelihood for reasonable adjustments to be required.

Chart 4: Disability Registrations by Level of Study
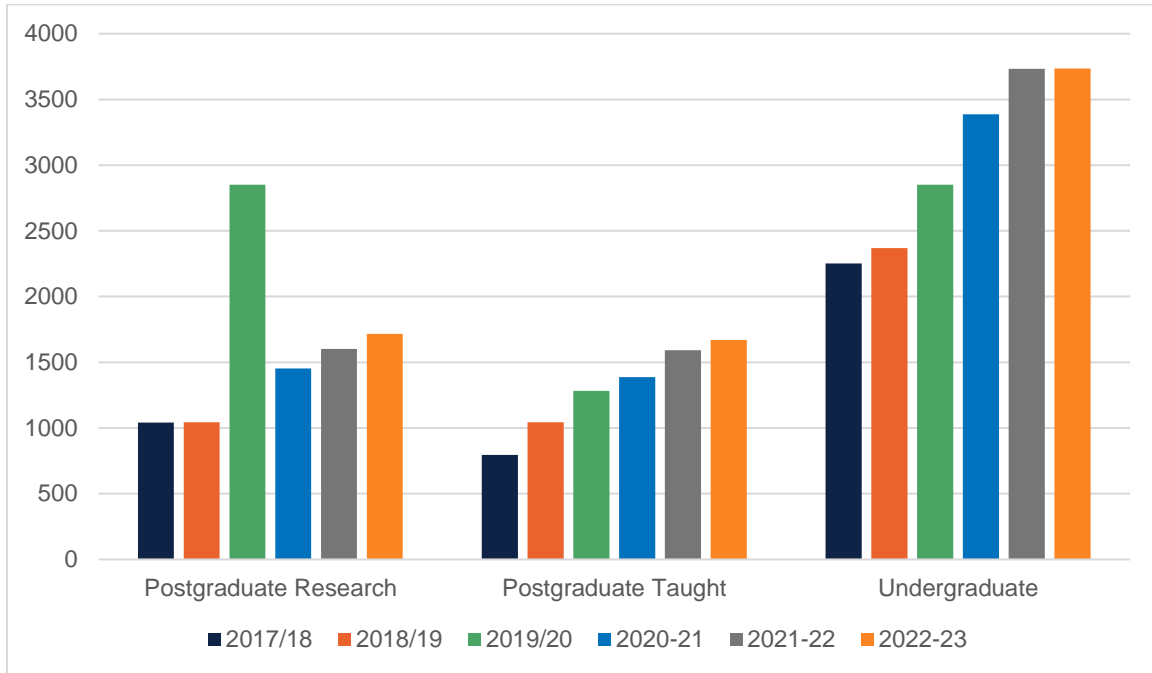
Chart 5: 2022/23 DAS Registrations Against Student Population by Level of Study

2022/23 Registrations against student population
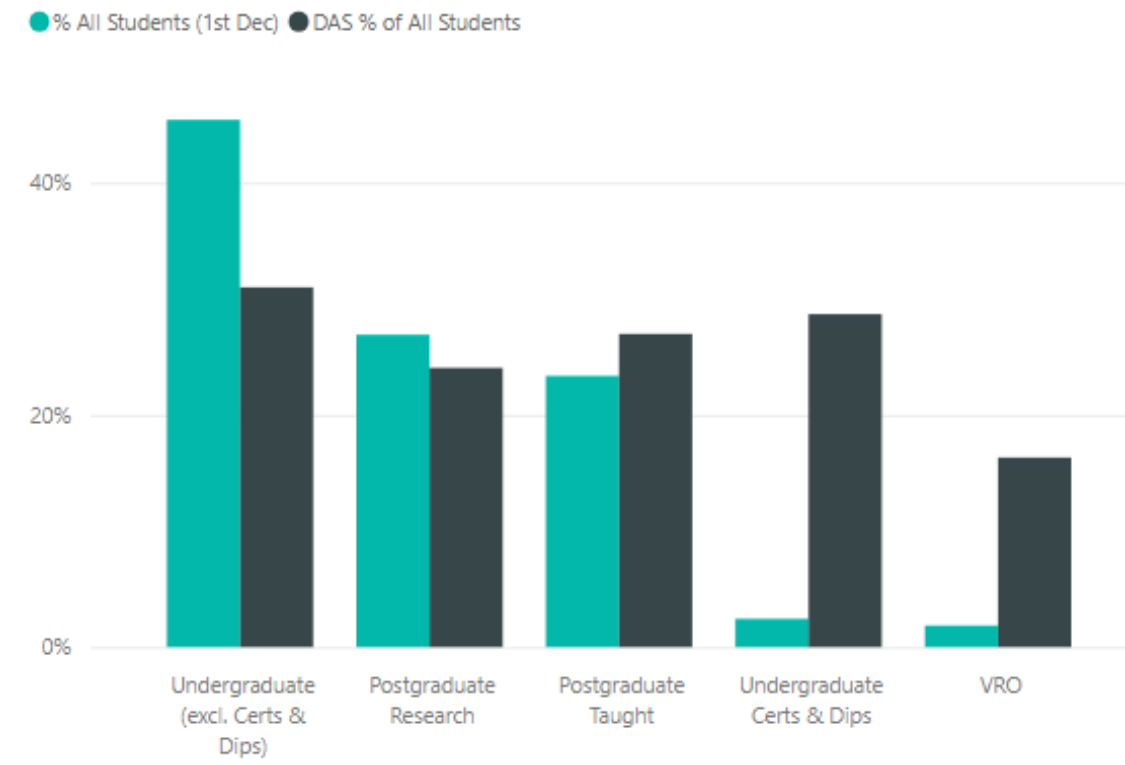
4.3 Registrations by Division

Declaration rates rose slightly across all academic divisions in 2022/23 with Humanities and Social Sciences containing the largest numbers of disabled students. This may be reflective of differences in gender representation across the divisions, with higher numbers of female students in Humanities and Social Sciences and noting higher disability declaration rates amongst female students (see 4.5 Gender).

Chart 6. DAS Registrations by Academic Division
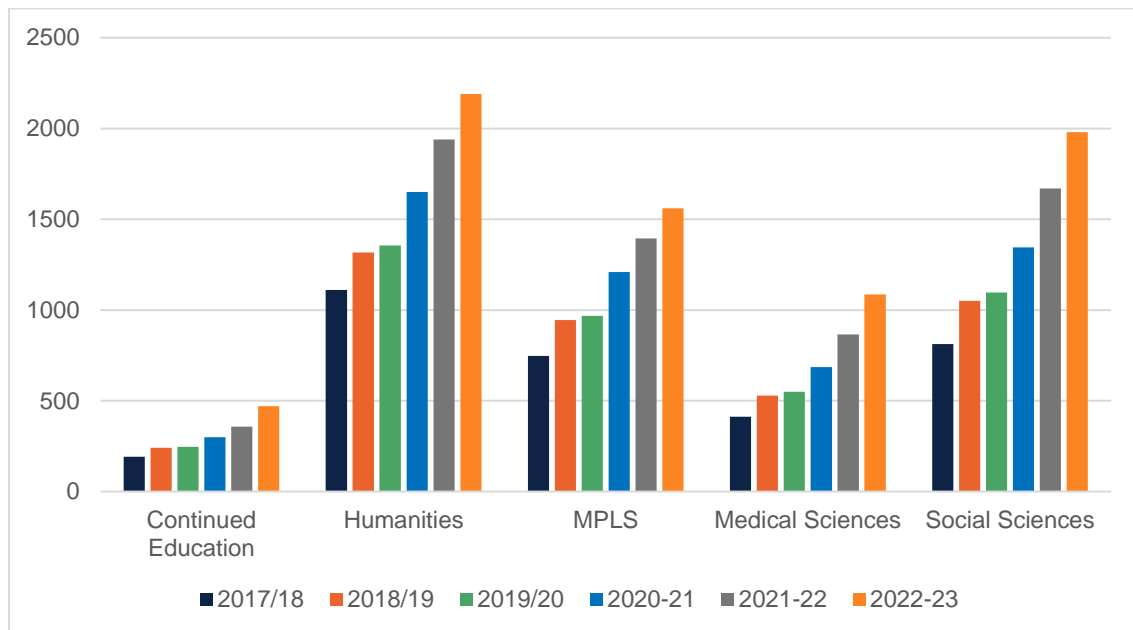
It remains the case that, except in the Social Sciences, undergraduates are most likely to declare a disability.

Chart 7: 2022/23 Proportion of DAS Registrations by Division and Level of Study
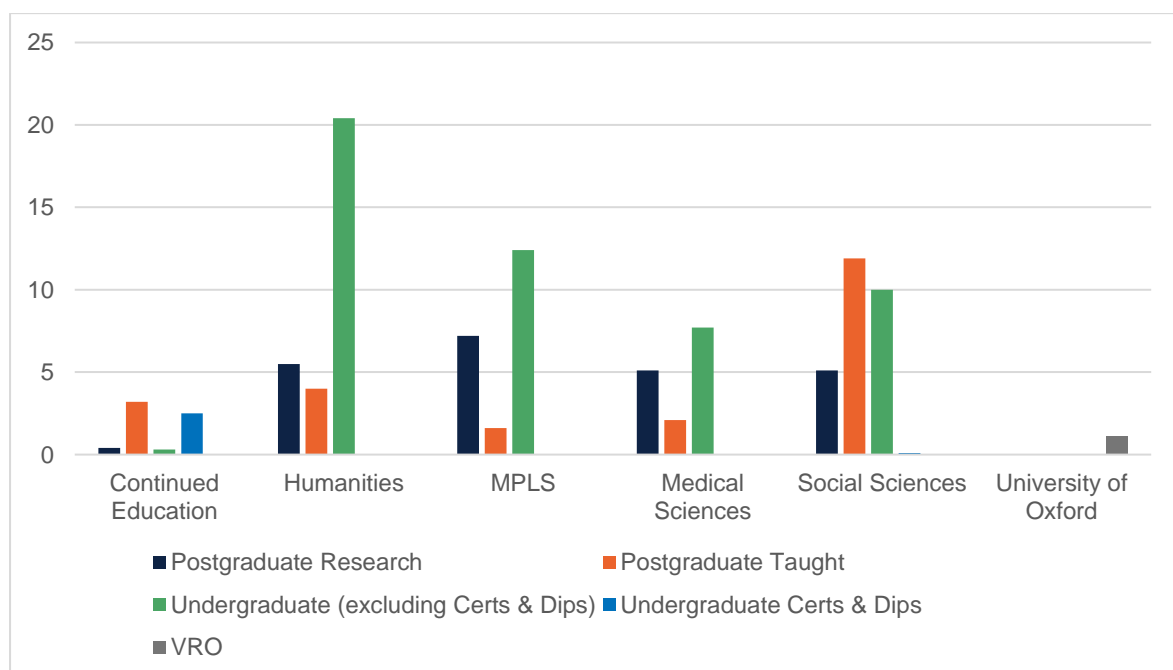
4.4 Ethnicity

White students are slightly over-represented amongst DAS users (67%) compared with the wider student population (59%). Disability declaration rates for students who identify as 'Black', 'Mixed' or 'Other' are broadly in proportion to student representation within the wider Oxford student population. However, Students who declare their ethnicity as 'Chinese' at registration remain relatively under-represented amongst DAS users (4.6% DAS registrations compared to 11.5% of whole student population). It is unclear why this is, but it may be reflective of potential cultural differences in approaches to diagnosing or discussing disability.

Chart 8: 2022/23 DAS Registrations by Ethnicity
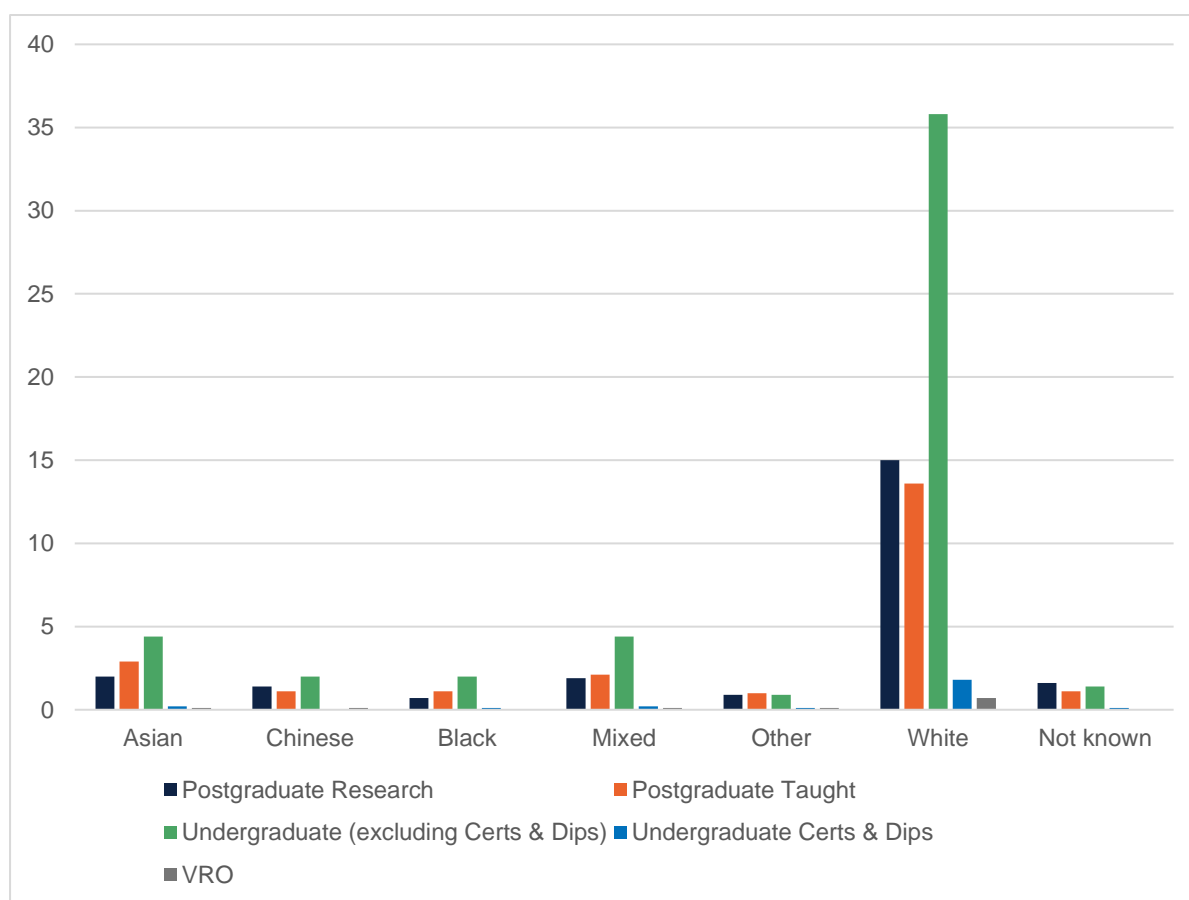
4.5 Gender

Female students are over-represented in DAS records, with differences in representation marginally more pronounced compared to the national picture (57% Female, 43% Male according to HESA[4]).

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[4] HESA data for 22/23 is expected in January of 2024.

Chart 9: 2022/23 DAS Registrations by Legal Sex[5]

DAS Registrations by Legal Sex %

39.7%

60.3%

Sex ● Female ● Male
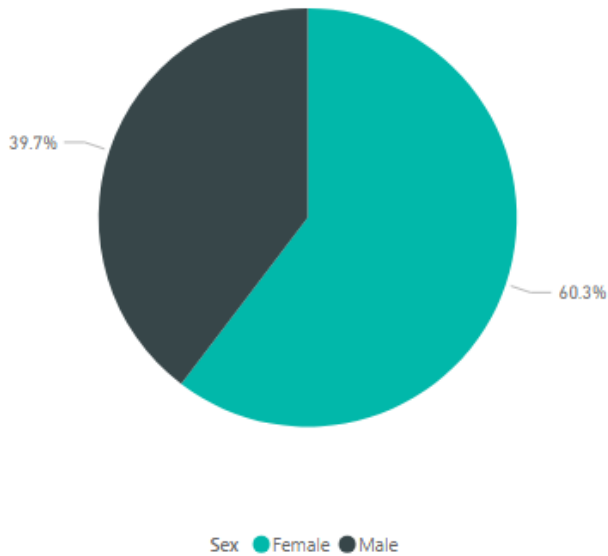
Student Population by Legal Sex %

49.1%

50.9%

Sex ● Female ● Male

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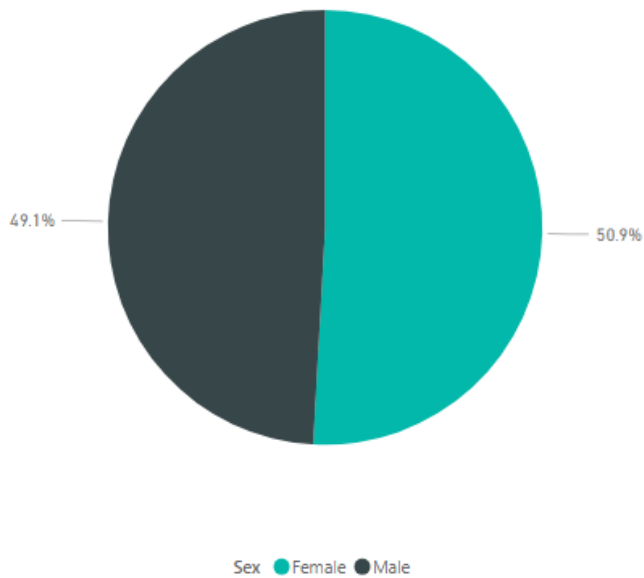
[5] Please note that these figures are based on students' legal sex as declared to the university. Few countries allow for a non-binary legal sex (e.g. UK passports offer only male and female options), and therefore the figures will not reflect true numbers of transgender, non-binary and gender questioning students.

5. Student Support Plans

"I just… to say thank you for the support plan you put together for me, I can't overstate what a difference the recommendations have made for me this term!"

Student feedback.

Student Support Plans (SSPs) provide a formal mechanism for communicating to the wider collegiate University that a student has provided evidence of a disability and what institutional adjustments are necessary. The SSP is a summary document that outlines the impact of a student's disability on a range of study activities and alerts staff in colleges and departments to other areas that they might need to consider to ensure disability-related study barriers can be proactively removed.

At the end of 2022/23 there were 3,215 individual SSPs in place. This constitutes 43.7% of DAS users and 12.1% of the total Oxford student population. Whilst the number of SSPs in circulation in 2022/23 were less than in the previous academic year, the figure still represents an upward trajectory from the 2019/20 and 2020/21 years previously.

Greater institutional embedding of certain inclusive practices and institutional adoption of the educational recording policy might have negated the need for some students to request an SSP. It is also possible that figures from 2021/22 were disproportionately higher as a result of changes to teaching and assessment practices coming out of COVID-19 pandemic arrangements.

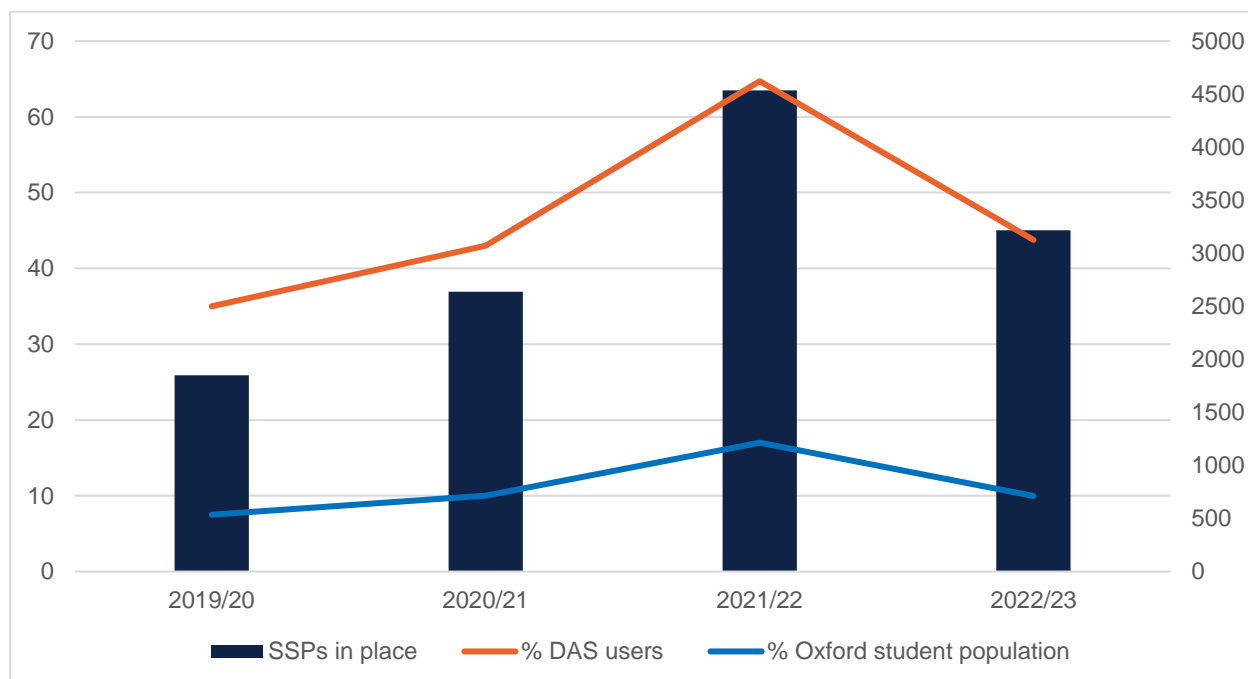## Chart 10. Number of Student Support Plans (SSP) in place

Legend: ■ SSPs in place — % DAS users — % Oxford student population

Table 8: Percentages of DAS users and Oxford Student Population with an SSP

	SSPs in place	% DAS users	% Oxford student population
2019/20	1848	35	7.5
2020/21	2637	43	10
2021/22	4535	64.7	17
2022/23	3215	43.74	12.1

DAS works proactively with offer holders to implement SSPs as early as possible before they enrol or during their first term, but various factors make this difficult to achieve, including growing pressures on staff time and difficulties some students have with timely engagement (e.g. due to study, work or personal pressures, or the nature of their disability). However, it should be noted that there can be some value in waiting until a student has arrived and had some on-course experience before assessing what reasonable adjustments will be required in the Oxford context.

Not every disabled student wants to register with DAS or to have an SSP, but the proportion of SSPs in circulation has been steadily growing over recent years. More widely available inclusive teaching practices (such as the provision of educational recordings) may reduce the need for students to register with DAS for the purposes of accessing commonly required teaching adjustments that can benefit all students.

6. Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA)

Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) are government funds that can be used to contribute to the costs of disability-related study aids and support strategies. International (matriculated) students are ineligible for DSAs so the University provides broadly equivalent support through an internal funding mechanism. This includes Specialist Non-Medical Help (see section 7) and access to assistive technology and ergonomic furniture.

The proportion of students in receipt of DSA from their UK funding body marginally increased in 2022/23. The number of international students accessing the University's equivalent fund was down slightly, and might reflect the greater range of freely available assistive software and IT tools that do not require disability funding.

Table 9. Numbers of students claiming Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) to fund support

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
UK students	1,096	1,266	1,548	1,972	1,911	1,968
International students	304	332	594	1,544	1,304	1,002

The externally imposed regulatory framework for UK students does not apply to international students, allowing DAS greater flexibility in how it delivers this equivalent support funding and significantly accelerates the speed with which support can be delivered. However, there is an increased burden on DAS staff who undertake more of the work that is otherwise outsourced to assessment centres for UK students. This involves longer appointments, more in-depth assessment work,

report writing, generation of equipment quotes, etc, and impacts on wider response times.

7. Non-Specialist and Specialist Non-Medical Helper provision

The term non-medical helper (NMH) refers to specialist and non-specialist human support workers. These services are sensitive to individual student need and therefore subject to unpredictable demand and supply variation.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for universities to recruit to a range of NMH roles, particularly for in-person provision, due to employment terms and conditions (including rates of pay) which are constrained by an external regulatory framework.

7.1 Non-specialist NMH support

"I am delighted to say that I have achieved my Transfer of Status. It is not in the slightest an exaggeration to say that I could not have done it without the input of my NMH support worker. She has completely transformed my approach to work and taught me huge amounts about organising, planning and focussing. Thank you as a department for your ongoing, amazing support''

Student feedback

"I find the note-taking work I perform as an NMH really rewarding. It is flexible enough that it is easy to fit around my other commitments and it truly does feel like I am making a positive difference for someone, even if in only a small way. I've also enjoyed the opportunity to learn the lecture content myself, as I have been taking notes for a discipline related to my own research. The change of approach the work requires compared to my day-to-day research also means that it provides some welcome relief when I need a break."

Support Worker (Notetaker) feedback on their role.

Non-specialist NMH roles include notetakers, library support workers, laboratory assistants, autism study support workers, sighted-guides, caption editors, and examination readers and scribes. These posts are typically filled by graduate students who are employed by DAS via the University's Temporary Staffing Service.

Universities are expected to provide and fund most non-specialist NMH or make appropriate alternative provision, for example, lecture recordings in place of notetakers, or access to assistive technology in examinations instead of a scribe, where appropriate.

Table 3. Non-specialist NMH provision

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of students supported	53	61	67	68	62
Proportion of overall DAS users	1.2%	1.2%	1%	1%	0.8%
Number of support hours delivered	2664	2628	1,701 (+ 3,660 caption editing hours)	2,295 (+ 2,367 caption editing hours)	2555 (+580 caption editing hours[6])

7.2 Specialist NMH support

'' I have found our work together very productive, and it has resulted in significant academic improvement. You have helped me develop a confidence when navigating academia as a disabled student. I found your approach helpful when planning and completing written work, and the revision schedule was also really useful when preparing for exams. I have really appreciated our work together and feel that your mentorship has been indispensable!''

Student Feedback on Specialist Mentoring support.

'' I am exceedingly satisfied with the mentoring you have provided to me. The combination of efficiency, expertise, and compassion made a profound impact on my academic journey, and I am immensely grateful for your unwavering support and guidance''.

Student feedback on Specialist Mentoring support.

''I want to thank you very much for all your help throughout my course. I was struggling hugely when you were assigned and would have continued to struggle without the study skills support. However, I am grateful that instead I am thanking you for that help and for your role in enabling me to perform to my full potential''.

Student feedback on Specialist Study Skills Tuition.

'' My Study Skills Tutor was great. It was good to have someone I could be accountable to, had some useful tips, and I benefited from explaining my work to her in a more over-arching format''.

Student feedback on Specialist Study Skills Tuition.

Specialist NMH includes mentoring support for students with mental health disabilities or autism spectrum conditions, and one-to-one study skills tuition for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs). Some universities fully outsource

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[6] Reduction in caption editing hours reflects move back to in person teaching, enhanced accuracy of machine generated captions and increased institutional adoption of the University's Educational Recording Policy

both types of support. At Oxford mentoring is delivered partly in-house and partly out sourced, whilst SpLD tuition is delivered primarily in-house.

Table 4. Specialist NMH provision

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Students receiving in-house mentoring	**434**	**439**	**416**	**346**	**337**
Mentoring hours delivered	4445	5071	5220	3883	3234
Average mentoring hours per student	*10.2*	*11.6*	*12.5*	*11.2*	*9.6*
Students receiving in-house SpLD tuition	**260**	**261**	**362**	**462**	**511**
SpLD tuition hours delivered	1308	1660	2713	3196	3937
Average SpLD tuition hours per student	*5*	*6.4*	*7.5*	*6.9*	*7.7*

The numbers of students receiving in-house specialist mentoring has reduced slightly in 2022/23 due to staffing and recruitment challenges associated with the current funding model and external regulatory framework. DAS has continued to partially outsource some of its mentoring work (since Hilary Term 2020) to external third-party providers to ensure students who need support do not have to wait if there is no capacity to provide a timely in-house service.

Conversely, there has been an increase in the number of students accessing in-house SpLD study skills tuition over the last two years. To date DAS has been able to meet the demand by increasing its pool of freelance tutors.

8. Assessments

8.1 DSA Study Needs Assessments

"I am very grateful for the many different pieces of software and hardware which have been provided for me through my Study Needs Assessment. All of them have been helpful and are frequently used''.

Student feedback on Oxford University Assessment Centre.

"I would very much recommend the study needs assessment centre. I had an issue with the license key for one software and the speed at which the centre dealt with it and the way they took over from me to make it stress-free was incredible''

Student feedback on Oxford University Assessment Centre.

The Oxford University Assessment Centre (OUAC) is accredited by the Department for Education (DfE) to provide the study needs assessments required to access Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding. Assessment costs are reclaimed from the relevant funding body (e.g. Student Finance England/ Student Finance Wales/ Student Award Agency for Scotland/ UKRI). The Centre is open to any UK or Research Council funded student who is eligible for DSA funding. As such the centre provides study needs assessments for students both at Oxford and studying at other universities across the UK.

Overall OUAC's study needs assessment numbers were steadily dropping before the pandemic. The move to online provision enabled OUAC to undertake more assessments in 2020/21 because it became more accessible to students who would have otherwise needed to attend a centre more local to their home residence during the vacation periods. However, numbers were down again to 439 in 2021/22 (compared to 558 the previous year) and this might be due to increased competition from other newly established centres (locally and nationally).

Table 5. Study Needs Assessments completed

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
UK Oxford students	248	317	249	338	353	292
Oxford international students	11	9	3	3	5	9
Students from other UK universities	297	174	212	217	81	74
Total	**556**	**500**	**464**	**558**	**439**	**375**

The number of Oxford-funded international students assessed by OUAC remains low following a change in process in 2017. In most instances Disability Advisors can now directly recommend study aids which reduces the need for the University to administer (and fund) an additional assessment with OUAC, and expedites the provision of support for this group of students. International students referred for a full OUAC assessment tend to be those with complex disability impact requiring enhanced specialist knowledge of assistive solutions (commonly this might be students with a visual, hearing or dual sensory loss).

More broadly OUAC has continued to operate in a climate of uncertainty and the Department for Education (DfE) tendered in 2022/23 for a new model of study needs assessment provision. This has already led to the closure of many DSA needs assessment centres across the country and the OUAC will be closing at the end of January 2024. Subsequently, from February 2024, DSA funded students affected by the DfE tendering will be assessed by one of two national assessment and assistive technology providers.

8.2 Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) Diagnostic Assessments

During 2022/23 the University required students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) such as dyslexia and dyspraxia to provide evidence that that aligns with criteria agreed by the Department for Education (DfE) and the SpLD Assessment Standards Committee (SASC)[7]. Since there is no NHS pathway to obtaining an SpLD diagnosis in adulthood, the University contributes up to £400 for an assessment where it has established evidence of sufficient indicators and clear benefit to the student in facilitating reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment.

Following a preliminary screening process, disability advisors may refer students for an assessment which can be organised in-house. Alternatively, students may arrange a private assessment independently and subsequently claim reimbursement up to £400.

If a student has an existing diagnostic report that only partially meets the University's SpLD assessment criteria, wherever possible DAS will undertake relevant top-up tests rather than organising a new full assessment. Since 2019 fewer top-up tests have been necessary because the University altered its SpLD diagnostic report criteria in line with new DfE regulations, which removed the requirement for assessments to be undertaken post-16 years of age. This has also accelerated the examination adjustment application process for a proportion of students.

Table 6. SpLD diagnostic assessments

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Full assessment	224	236	156	375	363	321
Top-up tests	39	32	4	12	4	8
Total	263	268	160	387	367	329
SpLD confirmed	97%	95%	92%	99%	97%	98%

Although there has been a slight decrease in assessment numbers since the previous academic year, requests for diagnostic SpLD assessments remain high, with a substantial rise in students seeking an educational assessment due to concerns about attentional deficits. In 2022/23 more than 31% of the assessments funded by DAS confirmed an SpLD profile of ADHD or other attentional deficits'[8]. This equates to 101 students. It is likely a driver to requests is the current substantial waiting times for medical ADHD assessments via the NHS (in excess of two years).

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[7] https://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/1863/spld-diagnostic-assessment_march-2021-ssin.pdf

[8] Attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental condition that can only be diagnosed by a suitably qualified medical practitioner or clinical psychologist. DAS does not fund medical assessments and NHS pathways for adult ADHD assessments are limited. An educational assessment may enable a student to access Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding and institutional reasonable adjustments, but a medical diagnosis is necessary to access ADHD treatment such as prescription medication. Current disability data categories do not allow us to accurately report at a more granular level on the true number of ADHD diagnoses or SpLDs with attentional deficits.

9. Examination Adjustments

Applications for examination adjustments for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) are initiated by DAS, with an in-house diagnostic assessor reviewing and confirming the recommended arrangements from analysis of the individual's cognitive profile. Examination adjustment applications for students with other disabilities are started by the college with the Student Support Plan (SSP) used as supporting evidence. A new application is generated each time a student has a new diagnosis, a change in requirements, or if they transfer colleges or change course.

Table 7. New examination adjustment application for SpLD

2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
332	344	361	495	473	369

Applications for examination adjustments are increasing overall and a growing proportion of these students are known to DAS. To date DAS have been considered an appropriate body to determine what assessment adjustments would be reasonable to accommodate the impact of a given disability. However, the increased volume of casework is challenging DAS's ability to produce timely and bespoke recommendations.

10. Service Evaluation

DAS conducts an annual student survey and in 2022/23 more than 5,000 students were invited to respond. Whilst response rates year on year have not been high enough to make generalisations from the feedback, 85% of respondents had a student support plan in place and 81% reported support arrangements implemented were helpful. The majority of respondents (42%) were equally happy with remote or in-person appointments, with the remainder directly split between those with preference for in-person appointments (29%) and those with a preference for remote appointments (also 29%).

Oxford uses the Student Barometer to survey students (with some exclusions) each year. The 2022 Student Barometer was completed by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students (full- and part-time) only (postgraduate research students were invited to complete the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey instead). The overall response rate was 10%, in line with the 2021 survey. Overall satisfaction with their Oxford experience amongst these students is high at 91% - up from 83% in 2021 and 75% in 2020 (both years significantly impacted by Covid). Of those who responded to questions regarding DAS specifically, 44% were aware of the service, with only 14% having used it. Half of all responders felt the service was not applicable or relevant to them. Satisfaction with DAS services amongst users

specifically was up slightly from 2021, at 78%[9]. Around 16% of those who responded to being users of the service have no recorded disability on SITS.

Disabled Student UK (DSUK) conduct an annual survey of disabled students in higher education nationally, with 86 respondents to the 2022/23 survey being University of Oxford students[10]. The survey canvassed disabled students' experiences of study, including how well supported they feel, whether recommended adjustments were sufficiently implemented and how inclusive they perceive an institution to be. Oxford responses were broadly in line in most areas with national averages, and with slightly higher than average satisfaction rates around the implementation of agreed support and adjustments and student satisfaction at feeling part of a community. However, the survey data suggests there remains work to be done, by all institutions, to improve disabled students' experiences.

11. Staffing and Caseloads

DAS is staffed by ten Disability Advisors (8.6FTE); two Assistant Disability Advisors seven administrative support staff (6.3FTE) including a Service Coordinator and two Oxford University Assessment Centre (OUAC) office staff; a Deputy Head of Service who is also Head of OUAC; a Head of Service. The Deputy and Head of Service carries a small student caseload. In addition, two SpLD assessors and twelve SpLD tutors work for DAS, and a 0.5FTE Mentor Manager oversees the work of 19 Specialist Mentors.

Table 9. DAS staffing and student ratios

Year	Students	Advisor FTE carrying casework	Caseload per 1.0 FTE Advisor
2022/23	7,350	8.8	835
2021/22	7,008	8.8	796
2020/21	6,273	8.4	747
2019/20	5,280	8.0	660
2018/19	4,387	8.0	548
2017/18	4,107	6.4	641

12. Conclusions and looking ahead

From the start of the 2023/24 academic year, DAS will begin to move incrementally to a new service model which has been under extensive consultation and planning over the past two years, and will help to address rising student registrations and operational pressures. New support pathways for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD) will be tailored towards a more streamlined and generalised approach for the majority of students who typically require broadly similar, core

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[9] *It should be noted that the number of (claimed) service users who responded to the survey is small for 2022, at 211. In prior years (which included PGRs) this average around 500. This will affect statistical significance.*

[10] Access Insights 2023 Report • Disabled Students UK

teaching and assessment adjustments. This will increase the Service's capacity to undertake more in-depth bespoke work with students who experience the highest degree of impact/impairment. The overall effect will be more timely and efficient services for all DAS users.

In conjunction, a new set of Student Support Plans (SSP) will be implemented from the end of Trinity Term 2023 with changes to the format, content, and production processes, enabling DAS to adapt its provision more effectively according to level of need.

Following a trial period in 2023/24 DAS will evaluate the new service and SSP models to determine whether they could be rolled out to other disability types.

Further planned work in 23/24 includes the introduction of a new assistance dog policy for students following a period of consultation. DAS will also continue to actively contribute to relevant areas of work being undertaken by key partners in other central services, such as the review of the new Educational Recording Policy and the University's assessment processes.

In April 2023, the Disabled Students' Commission (DSC),[1] published its Disabled students' commitment. The commitment is designed as a self-regulatory tool for HEIs. DSC calls on Higher Education providers to adopt the commitment, which establishes 43 separate undertakings under 5 areas. The commitment calls on HEIs to ensure that 'support requirements are in place on day one of their course in line with an agreed support plan' (item 5) and to 'ensure that inclusive practice is embedded into curriculum design. DAS plans to convene a working group of relevant stakeholders across the collegiate institution to map what work we currently do, what innovative practice can be share, and how we can implement change to improve the disabled student experience.

DAS will review and evaluate the impact of the changes to disability evidence to enable more students access to some commonly recommended adjustments, which is being introduced in Michaelmas Term 2023/24 (see section 3).

There is much to achieve but with a growing sense of momentum and more joined up cross-institutional working, Oxford continues to make important strides in respect of its firm commitment to providing an inclusive learning environment where disabled students thrive and flourish.