

Disability Advisory Service Annual Report 2023/24

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1. Introduction

1.1 Service Overview

“As someone with multiple chronic health issues, the DAS and my department have been amazing to work with and I have been incredibly impressed. I feel very looked after in this regard and you’ve really set me up for success”

(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 are 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 Students’ Union and other interested student groups. We welcome student feedback, which is sought and encouraged through a range of routes, including student consultation events 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 remain high, with 7,615 students known to the Service in 2023/24. This represents 23.3% of the total Oxford student population, a small increase from 22% (7,185 disabled student registrations) in 2022/23¹.

A full-time Disability Advisor has approximately 800 students on their caseload and there were more than 3,400 Student Support Plans (SSP) in place by the end of the 2023/24 academic year (as opposed to 3,200 SSPs in place by the end of the previous year).

Significant drivers for DAS registration include access to examination adjustments and diagnostic assessments for specific learning difficulties (SpLD), such as dyslexia and dyspraxia.

¹ **Student population baseline data:** The 2023-24 SWSS annual reports are piloting a revised baseline data methodology which captures a larger number of students that have access to support services across the academic year than have previously been included. This includes, for example, students with suspension of status, those awaiting assessment or other process outcomes, and those with start dates after 1 December. The new methodology has been applied retrospectively in this year’s reports, to ensure consistency across the data. The process of reviewing the variation in status and overall flow of student numbers across the year will help to inform trend analysis and future strategic planning.

In 2023/24, a number of key service developments and institutional work were progressed, most notably the introduction of a new Student Support Plan model to enable more timely and efficient communication of support recommendations for SpLD students. The University also began to accept a wider range of disability evidence to facilitate more prompt access to commonly required reasonable adjustments in response to widespread concerns about lengthy NHS waiting lists for autism and ADHD diagnostic assessments.

2. Student Engagement and Outreach

Two full-time Assistant Disability Advisor (ADAs) facilitated prompt and proactive contact with disabled offer holders in advance of their arrival at Oxford (and in their first term on-course), providing advice on access to institutional support and adjustments, and signposting and supporting with external disability funding applications (such as for Disabled Student Allowance).

DAS continues to offer a combination of in-person and online appointments, and students can also contact the Service by email. Whilst the Service is able to respond flexibly to students' preferred methods of engagement, response timeframes can become pressured during peak periods. To address this, student drop-in sessions were offered in 2023 - 24, and this provision has since been expanded to three sessions per week in 2024/25, in response to positive feedback and uptake (71 students attended the drop-ins during 2023/24).

The Head and Deputy Head of DAS met regularly throughout the year with Student Union representatives, including sabbatical officers and members of the Oxford SU Disabilities Campaign.

DAS continued to work closely with disabled students on the [Astrophoria Foundation Year](#) programme and [Opportunity Oxford](#) programme during 2023/24 to ensure appropriate support was implemented. DAS 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 that students can gain full benefit from any relevant support. In 2023/24 regular e-bulletins were sent to all students who have a record with the Service and a termly student forum for current students was trialled (although whilst feedback from attendees was valuable, numbers were low). The approach will be reviewed for 2024/25.

DAS has an active presence at all undergraduate Open Days and a popular online 'transition event' (including a webinar and Canvas course), which was attended by 86 new disabled students prior to enrolment in September 2023.

3. Service Developments and Institutional Work

In 2024, DAS were shortlisted for a Vice-Chancellor's Award for the development of a tailored SpLD support pathway and introduction of a revised Student Support Plan model.

Some important areas of service development and institutional work were progressed in 2023/24, most notably implementing a new service model, focussing on two main areas of work:

3.1 Introduction of a tailored Student Support Plan (SSP) model

Following extensive consultation with disabled students and additional stakeholders across the collegiate university in 2022/23, a new DAS service model was formally introduced for offer holders and students from the start of 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 has enabled Disability Advisors to prioritise bespoke discussions with those with the most individualised requirements, in a more timely manner.

Additionally, a [disability inclusion statement](#), reflecting five of the most commonly recommended inclusive practices, is now applied for all disabled students registered with the DAS. Given the large numbers of students requiring these arrangements (1694 students were provided with an SSPA in 2023/24), it might be possible, desirable and most efficient for some academic departments to adopt these practices as standard in an inclusive and anticipatory fashion.

Over the summer of 2024, six student interns, employed through the Centre for Teaching and Learning's [Student Experience Internship Scheme](#)², evaluated disabled students' study experiences at Oxford. This included reviewing access to inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments recommended in Student Support Plans (SSPs). Findings revealed 74% (of the 220 students surveyed) could 'fully' or 'mostly' access their SSP adjustments and students issued SSPs under the new 2023-24 system were twice as likely (42%) to fully access adjustments compared to others (19%). Additionally, 92% of taught students reported that inclusive practices outlined in the disability inclusion statement were essential to, or improved, learning.

3.2 Disability evidence for common reasonable adjustments

In 2023/24, set against a wider context of extensive and ever-growing NHS waiting times for ADHD and autism diagnostic assessments and with the aim of further

² <https://ctl.ox.ac.uk/findings-and-recommendations-2024>

reducing administrative burdens and barriers to inclusion for disabled students, the University began 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 that 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 changes have had a positive impact on equality of opportunity for disabled students, particularly those with undiagnosed specific learning difficulties, autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, who are able to access a range of standard reasonable adjustments in a more timely and effective way (see [Table 8](#)). There is also a reduced burden on this group of disabled students in relation to the time and effort previously 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.

3.4 DAS Staff Consultation Drop-In

In 2023/24, DAS piloted weekly Staff Consultation drop-in sessions (on Tuesdays from 11 am to 12 pm). These online sessions offer colleagues the opportunity to seek advice on policy and practice issues relating to disabled student support and anticipatory inclusive practices. Due to their popularity, the sessions have been expanded in 2024/25 to run twice per week.

3.5 Assistance Animal Policy

In Trinity Term 2023, following extensive consultation, DAS published a new assistance dog policy for students. The policy sets out the way the University will respond to requests from students to bring an assistance animal to University with them. Dedicated DAS resource has been allocated by colleges to support this work and 13 assistance animal requests were received and progressed in 2023/24.

3.6 Development and issue of Anticipatory Duty guidance

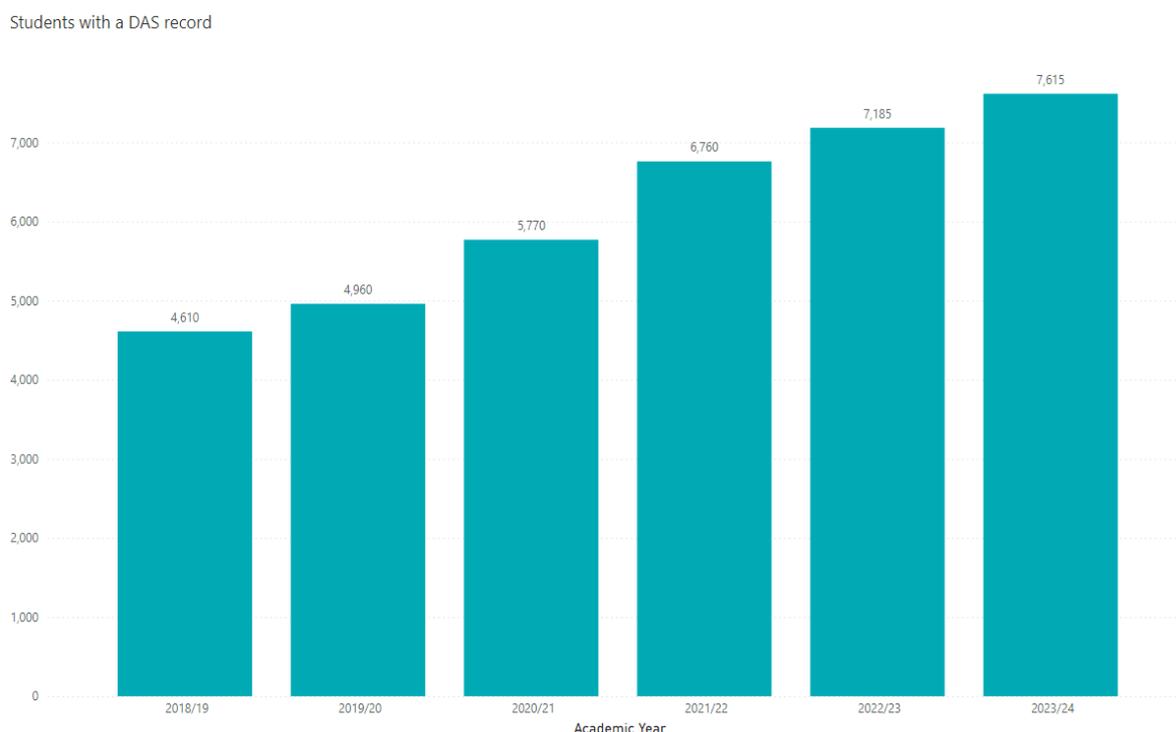
In light of a [court ruling](#) in 2024 (relating to a different Russell Group university), DAS led on the development of staff guidance to help further support implementation of reasonable adjustments and the anticipatory duty, in line with statutory obligations under the Equality Act.

4. Registrations and demographic data

DAS holds records for all the students who have declared a disability to the University in the student record system, as well as those who register directly with the Service independent of any wider University disclosure. DAS student records remain high, increasing from 7,185 student registrations in 2022/23 to 7,615 records in 2023/24 (an increase of 1.3% of the total student population registered with DAS compared to the previous year).

Demand for access to examination adjustments may be a significant driving factor for registrations.

Chart 1. Number of Students with a DAS Record

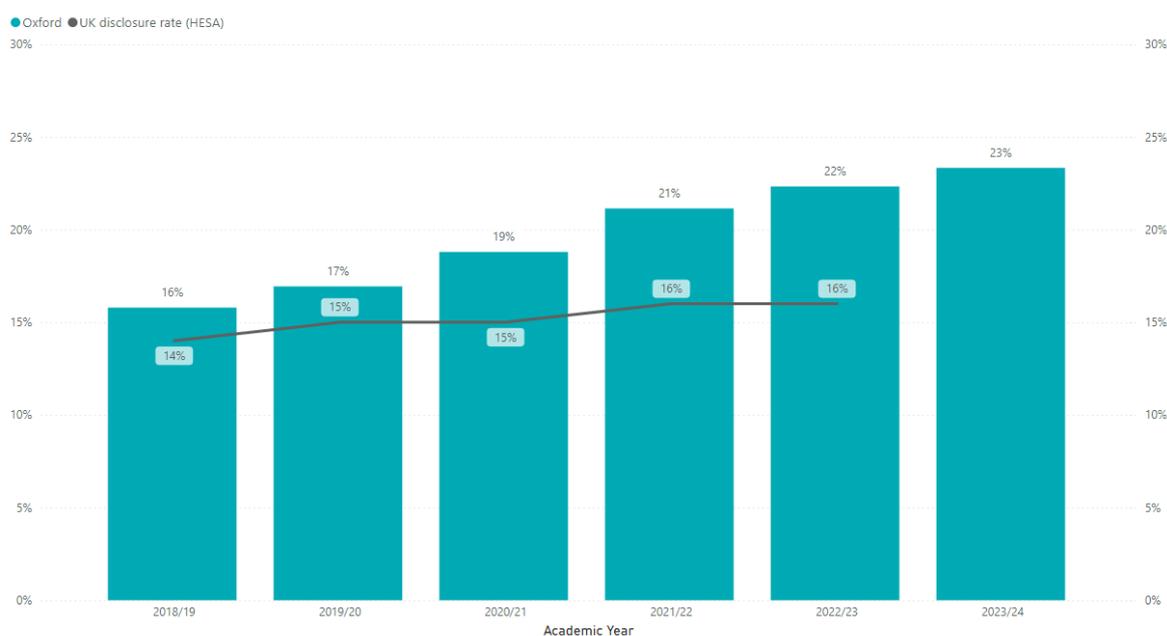


Demand for DAS provision remains above student population growth, with 23.3% of the Oxford student population registered with the Service in 2023/24, compared with the national sector average for disability declarations, which the [Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#) reported as being 16% in 2022/23³. 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 also 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 there is variability in implementation of inclusive anticipatory practices, and the emphasis on timed invigilated closed-book exams continues to drive demand for reasonable adjustments.

³ NB. new [HESA stats](#) for 2022/23 are due to be published in January 2025

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

Proportion of Oxford Student Population with a DAS Record



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 slightly risen across most disability types and the proportionate spread has remained broadly consistent with 2022/23 figures, with a slight shift meaning students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs⁴) now account for the largest group of DAS registrations (25.6%). Students with long-term mental health conditions are the next largest category (23.3% of DAS registrations).

There has been a notable 21.5% rise in autism registrations, from 255 in 2022/23, rising to 325 in 2023/24. This may be reflective of the broadened evidence thresholds adopted by the University at the start of the 2023/24 academic year, which enables more students access to support whilst awaiting an NHS diagnostic assessment.

DAS also 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 known 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.

⁴ SpLD is an umbrella term encompassing conditions such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (ADHD).

Table 1: Oxford Student Declaration Rates by Disability Type

Proportion of Oxford Student Population with a DAS Record

Disability Name	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Blind or serious visual impairment	50	45	55	65	70	85
Deaf or serious hearing impairment	55	60	60	65	75	85
Developmental condition				0	5	15
Longstanding illness or health condition	540	625	760	880	845	820
Mental health condition	1,270	1,330	1,490	1,710	1,720	1,775
Multiple disabilities	530	645	860	1,090	1,305	1,495
Physical impairment or mobility issues	140	145	145	155	170	195
Social/communication impairment	155	165	200	240	255	325
Specific learning difficulty	1,265	1,290	1,510	1,730	1,880	1,955
Other Disability / Impairment / Health Condition	415	425	430	465	460	450
No known disability	195	235	260	360	405	415
Total	4,610	4,960	5,770	6,760	7,185	7,615

Chart 3: Disability Type Trends

Chart 3: Disability Trends



4.2 Level of study

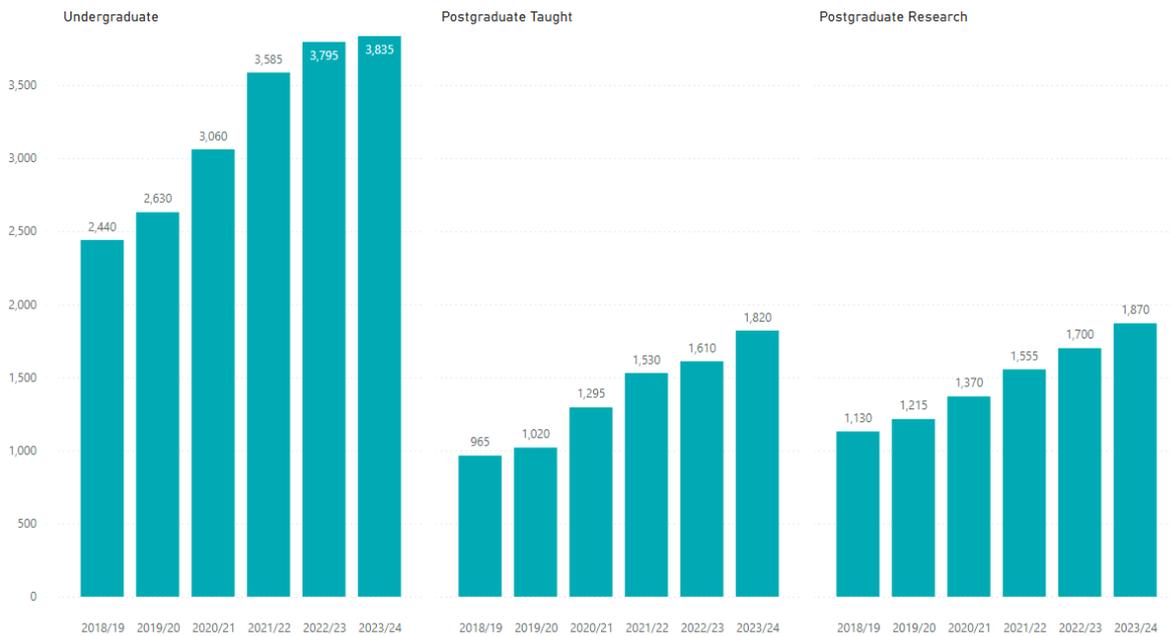
Disability declarations have been rising across all levels of study but are broadly representative of the wider Oxford student population (undergraduate DAS registrations are slightly higher (47.7%) than the general Oxford undergraduate population (37.8%), postgraduate taught registrations (23.9%) are slightly lower than

the Oxford population (29.7%) and postgraduate research registrations (24.6%) are closely aligned with wider Oxford figures (26.9%)).

Undergraduate DAS registrations (50.4%) are slightly higher than for graduates (48.5%) undertaking taught degrees (24%) or research degrees (24.6%), 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

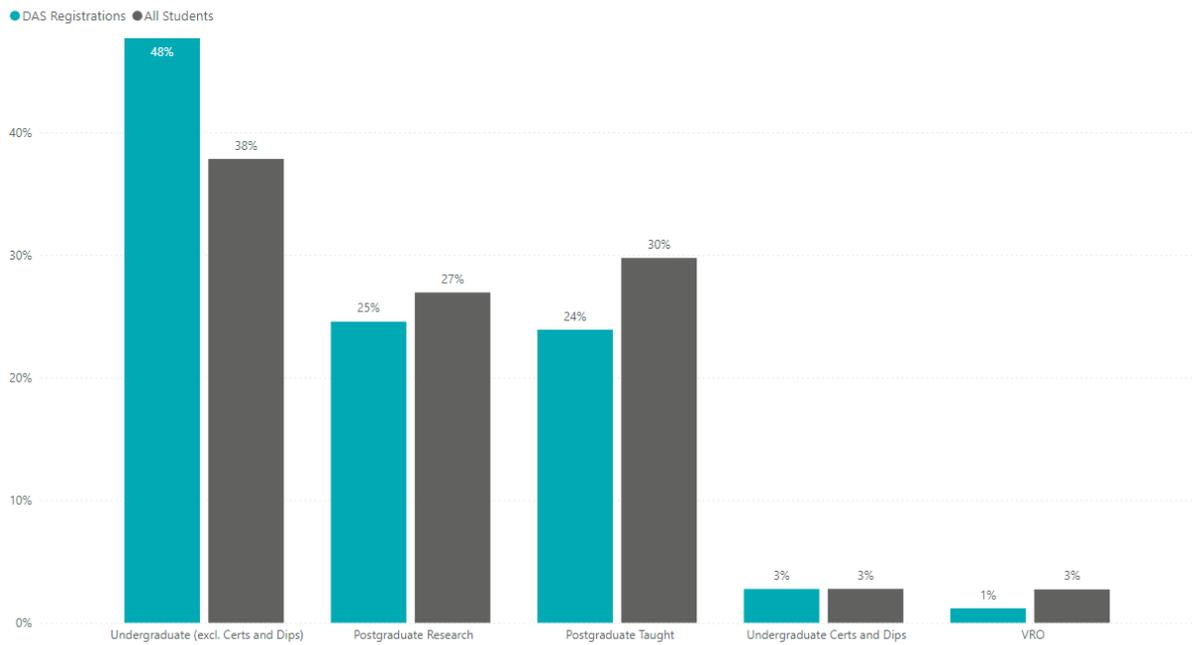
Chart 4: DAS Registrations by Level of Study



(VRO student figures excluded from Chart 4)

Chart 5: 2023/24 DAS Registrations Against Student Population by Level of Study

Chart 5: Level of Study Distribution

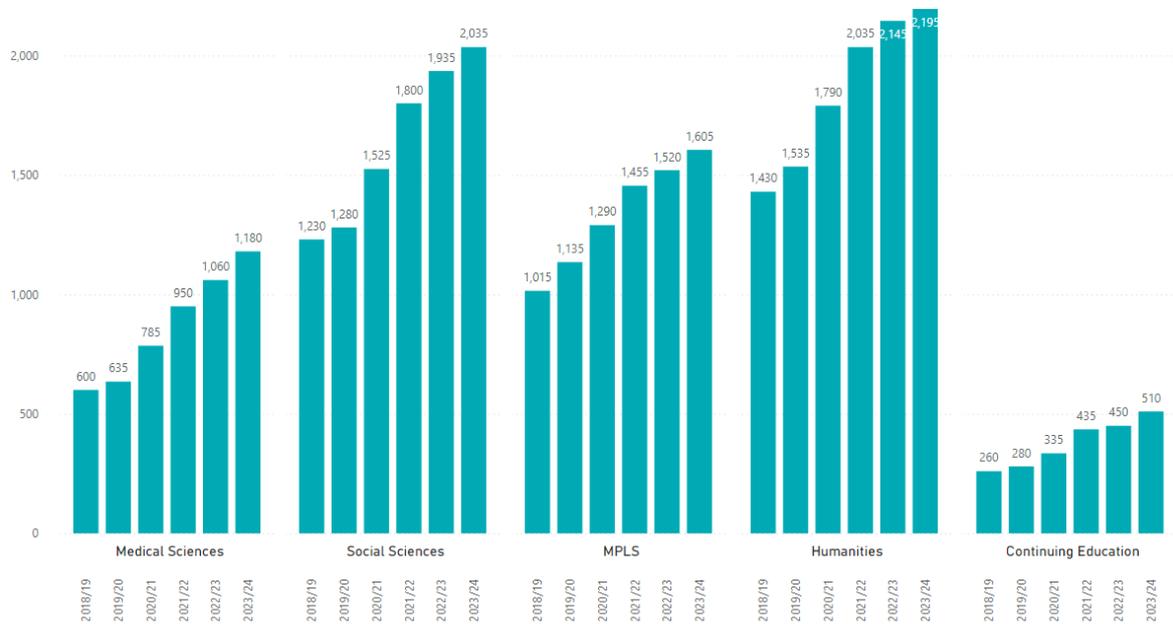


4.3 Registrations by Division

Declaration rates rose slightly across all academic divisions in 2023/24, with Humanities and Social Sciences continuing to show 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 [Legal Sex](#)).

Chart 6. DAS Registrations by Academic Division

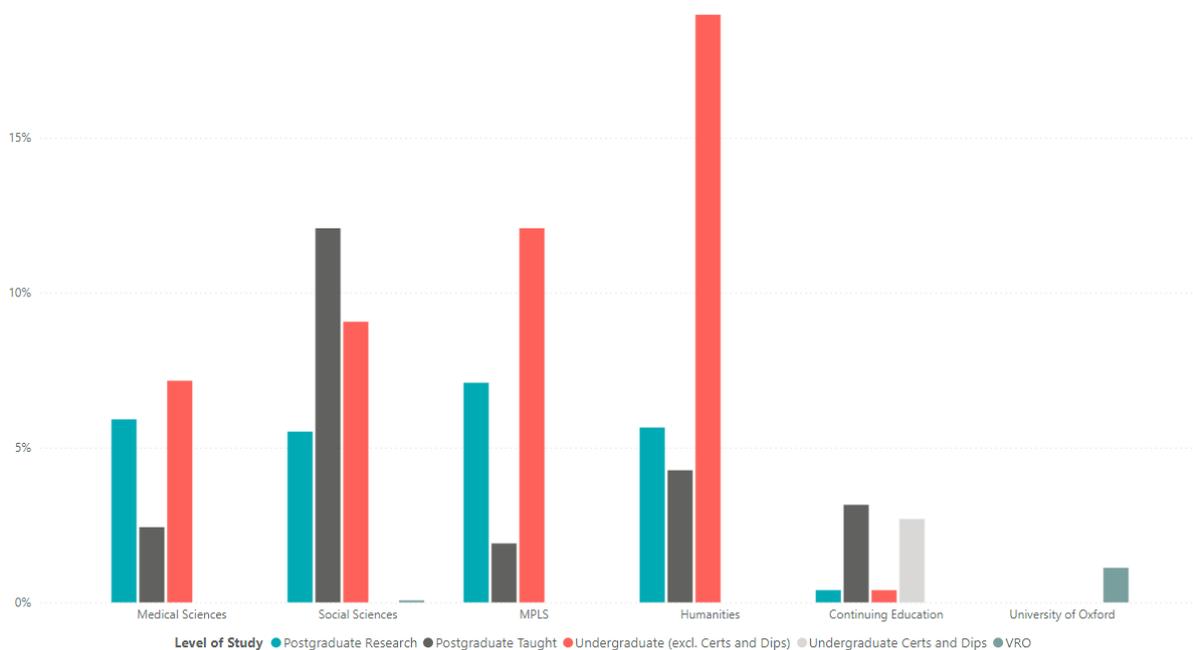
Chart 6: DAS Registrations by Academic Division



Undergraduates remain the most likely to declare a disability, with the exception of those in the Social Sciences' Division and the Department for Continuing Education (where disabled postgraduate taught students constitute the majority).

Chart 7: 2023/24 Proportion of DAS Registrations by Division and Level of Study

Chart 7: DAS Registrations by Division and Level of Study



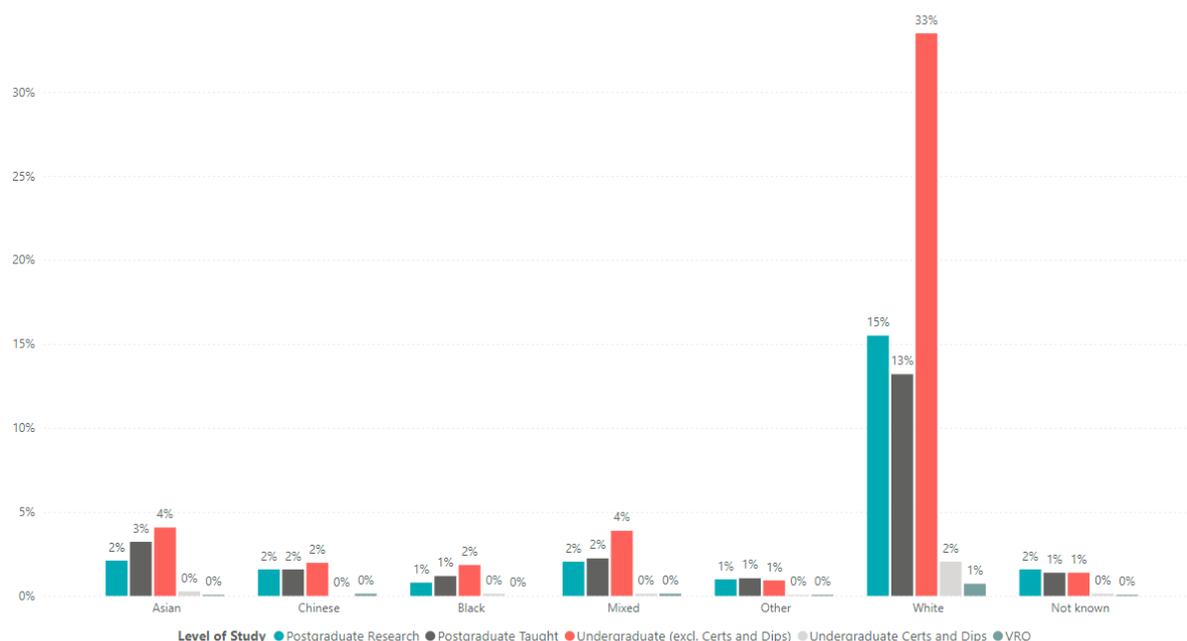
4.4 Ethnicity

White students are slightly over-represented amongst DAS users (65.3%) compared with the wider Oxford student population (54%⁵). 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 (5.3% DAS registrations compared to 12.7% of whole student population). The reasons for this are unclear but may reflect cultural differences in approaches to disability diagnosis or discussion. Student Welfare and Support Services are establishing an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) working group to explore this issue and identify potential ways to address any identified barriers to accessing the Service.

⁵ <https://www.ox.ac.uk/about/facts-and-figures/student-numbers>

Chart 8: 2023/24 DAS Registrations by Level of Study and Ethnicity

Chart 8: DAS Registrations by Division by Ethnicity



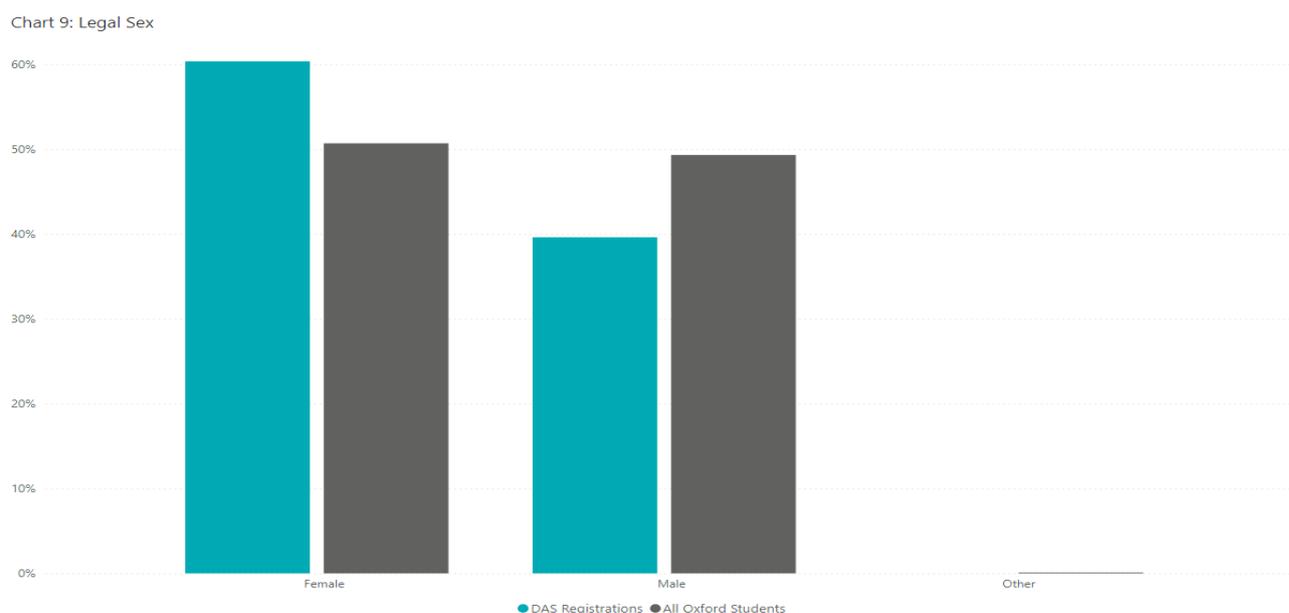
4.5 Legal Sex⁶

Female students are over-represented in DAS records in relation to the wider Oxford student population (60.3% of registered students are female, as opposed to 50.7% of the Oxford student population) and marginally higher than the national picture (57% Female compared to 43% Male according to [HESA](#)⁷ figures).

⁶ 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.

⁷ HESA data for 22/23 is expected in January of 2025.

Chart 9: 2022/23 DAS Registrations by Legal Sex



5. Student Support Plans (SSPs)

“Thank you for producing my SSP through so quickly. I have had a read through and all the recommendations and guidance look great, I am sure they will be of huge support to my studies”.

(Student feedback on their SSP)

“Heartfelt thanks to all at the DAS, our team have experienced a marked difference in the increased amount of SSPs received this year compared to previous years, and the nature of the recommendations and timeliness of the information coming through to us have are brilliant and enabled the department to ensure prompt and effective support was in place at the earliest opportunity for students”.

(Departmental Disability Coordinator feedback on the new SSP model).

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 and ensure disability-related study barriers can be proactively removed.

Further to the implementation of a [new tailored support plan model](#) at the start of the 2023/24 academic year, students registering with DAS after this point automatically had an SSPA ([disability inclusion statement](#)) applied to their student record.

Approximately two-thirds of students newly registering with DAS had SSPA applied on the same day their registration was confirmed.

While the SSPA alone sufficed for some students (approximately 16% of those registered with DAS), most students (84%) went on to additionally receive either an SSPB (specific to SpLD students, including standard tailored support recommendations) or an SSPC (a bespoke plan).

In 2023/24, a total of 3,476 individual Student Support Plans (SSPs) were in place, representing 45.6% of DAS users and 10.6% of the overall Oxford student population. This marks a slight increase of 261 plans in circulation compared to the previous year.

Table 2: Percentages of DAS users and Oxford Student Population with an SSP

	SSPs in place	% DAS users	% Oxford student population
2019/20	1,848	35%	5.6%
2020/21	2,637	43%	8.1%
2021/22* ⁸	4,535	64.7%	13.9%
2022/23	3,215	43.7%	9.8%
2023/24	3,476	45.6%	10.6%

DAS works proactively with offer holders to implement SSPs as early as possible before they enrol or during their first term, and the introduction of two Assistant Disability Advisors in 2022 has greatly aided capacity to progress support discussions promptly. However, various factors still make this difficult to achieve, including ongoing pressures on staff time and difficulties some students have with timely engagement (e.g. due to study, work or personal pressures, the nature of their disability, or the availability of suitable disability evidence). Nevertheless, 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 total number and proportion of SSPs in circulation has been steadily growing over recent years. More widely available inclusive teaching practices (such as the standard 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

⁸ *2021/22 figures were higher than the general trajectory would expect. 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.

provides equivalent support through an internal funding mechanism. This includes Specialist Non-Medical Help (see [section 7](#)) and access to assistive technology and ergonomic furniture.

At the start of 2023/24, the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed significant changes to the way DSA funded support was assessed and administered for Student Finance England (SFE) and Wales (SFW) funded students, with provision of all DSA study needs assessments, assistive technology (AT) supply and AT training being delivered by one of two large national contractors. As a result, the Oxford University Assessment Centre (OUAC) closed at the end of January 2024 (and reduced the number of assessments undertaken in the lead up to closure). OUAC assessment figures prior to closure have been excluded from this report.

Consultant Needs Assessors who previously worked for OUAC, were retained to continue providing DSA study needs assessments (via the DAS) those funded through other funding bodies not affected by the DSA changes (including Research Councils and Student Awards Agency Scotland) and for international students with complex disability support requirements. A total of 37 study needs assessments were conducted in 2023/24 for these students.

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, which 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.

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

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
UK students	1,266	1,548	1,972	1,911	1,968	1,791
International students	332	594	1,544	1,304	1,002	841

UK student figures relate only to those DAS is aware have accessed DSA funding, either as DAS has facilitated the funding application or when the University has been confirmed as a Non-Medical Help provider (NMH). The OUAC closure in January 2024 may account for the slight decrease in UK student DSA figures in 2023/24 as the new external assessment providers do not recommend the University as the provider of NMH as consistently as the in-house OUAC assessors did previously.

The decrease in the number of international students accessing the University's equivalent fund was down from 2022/23 and might reflect the greater range of [freely available assistive software and IT tools](#) that do not require disability funding, as well as enhanced efforts to integrate [academic skills](#) support into existing educational provision.

7. Non-Specialist and Specialist Non-Medical Helper (NMH) 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 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 today achieved Transfer of Status. It is not in the slightest bit an exaggeration to say that I could not have done it without the expert input of my Library Support Worker who provides me with disability support. She has helped source materials and taught me huge amounts about organising reading materials”.

(Student feedback on support from a Library Support Worker).

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

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Number of students supported	61	67	68	62	42
Proportion of overall DAS users	1.2%	1%	1%	0.8%	1%
Number of support hours delivered	2628	1701	2295	2555	2301
Additional Caption Editing		(+3660 caption editing hours)	(+2367 caption editing hours)	(+580 caption editing hours)	(+205 caption editing hours)

7.2 Specialist NMH support

“I owe much to your guidance during my DPhil, for which I am truly grateful. The major tenet of your approach, as I saw it, was to expose the core of my

emotional difficulties by first tackling those lifestyle and working habits that may be adding unnecessary fuel to the psychological fire - problems with sleep, with exercise, with the working routine, with the working space, with knowledge management, with software use – an optimising and efficiency-making approach, in effect. Not only did it make everyday life easier, but it also made dealing with psychological difficulties easier, and it separated problems created by daily inefficiency from deeper psychological problems whose true nature could then be tackled. I don't think I would have been able to achieve as much as I did without your help, thank you.”

(Student feedback on Specialist Mentoring support).

“Thank you so much for being an important enabler of my Oxford journey. Thank you very, very much for being the kindest and most gracious and patient tutor when I was facing such struggles. My words cannot properly encapsulate how much I appreciate you, but please know I am deeply grateful”.

(Student feedback on Specialist Study Skills Tuition).

Specialist NMH includes mentoring support for students with mental health disabilities or autism, and one-to-one study skills tuition for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLDs) or autism. Some universities fully outsource both types of support. At Oxford mentoring is delivered partly in-house and partly outsourced, whilst SpLD tuition is delivered primarily in-house.

Table 4. Specialist NMH provision

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Students receiving in-house mentoring	439	416	346	337	218⁹
Mentoring hours delivered	5071	5220	3883	3234	2708
Average mentoring hours per student	11.6	12.5	11.2	9.6	12
Students receiving in-house SpLD tuition	261	362	462	511	447
SpLD tuition hours delivered	1660	2713	3196	3937	3687

⁹ The OUAC closure in January 2024 may account for the slight decreases in in-house Mentoring and SpLD Tuition figures in 2023/24, as new external assessment providers do not recommend the University as the provider of NMH as consistently as the in-house OUAC assessors did previously.

Average SpLD tuition hours per student	6.4	7.5	6.9	7.7	8
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The numbers of students receiving in-house specialist mentoring has been reducing since 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 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 provision.

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. Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) Diagnostic Assessments

During 2023/24 the University broadened [specific learning difficulties \(SpLD\) evidence requirements](#) for access to institutional inclusive practices and standard reasonable adjustments. Whilst this change significantly improved and streamlined access to institutional support for SpLD students, Disabled Students' Allowance funding bodies continue to require a full diagnostic assessment report in order for students to access funded support. 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 seek DAS approval to arrange a private assessment independently and subsequently claim reimbursement up to £400.

Table 6. SpLD diagnostic assessments

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Full assessment	156	375	363	321	179
Top-up tests	4	12	4	8	0
Total	160	387	367	329	179
SpLD confirmed	92%	99%	97%	98%	97%

The significant decrease in assessment numbers since the previous academic year is a reflection of the University's change in policy on SpLD evidence, as those who do not intend to apply for Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), or international students who are not eligible to apply for DSA, can now access a range of support and reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment, without need of a full

diagnostic report. However, diagnostic assessment requests remain high. 97% of those referred for diagnostic SpLD assessment received confirmation of a diagnosis.

9. Examination Adjustments

Applications for examination adjustments for students with specific learning difficulties (SpLD), including ADHD, are initiated by DAS, with an in-house diagnostic assessor reviewing evidence and confirming the recommended arrangements.

Examination adjustment applications for students with other disabilities are started by the college, using the Student Support Plan (SSP) as supporting evidence. A new application is generated each time a student's requirements change, or if they transfer colleges or change course.

In 2023/24, DAS processed 636 applications for examination adjustments for SpLD students, a 72% increase compared to the previous year. This substantial rise is primarily due to the expanded evidence requirements introduced in 2023/24, which mean DAS can process requests and SSPs more quickly. From 2023/24, further to the University's adoption of broader evidence thresholds, the in-house diagnostic assessor also began recommending adjustments for students with a wider range of SpLD evidence. This included medically evidenced ADHD (previously applied for by colleges, using the SSP), school or university provided evidence of study support and reasonable adjustments accessed during previous studies, and GP-confirmation of referral to NHS waiting lists for ADHD or autism assessments.

Of the 636 assessment adjustment recommendations made by DAS for ADHD students in 2023/24, 95 applications (approximately 15%) were based on the expanded evidence criteria rather than the previously required full diagnostic reports. Whilst this represents a relatively small proportion of students (just 1.2% of all DAS registrations), the change constitutes important progress in reducing barriers to accessing reasonable adjustments and support for disabled students and, for the University, helps demonstrate our commitment to inclusivity and further meets our anticipatory duties under the Equality Act.

Table 7. New examination adjustment application for SpLD

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
344	361	495	473	369	636

Table 8. Breakdown of assessment adjustment applications for ADHD and autistic students in 2023/24 with evidence under new broadened evidence requirements

Evidence Type	ADHD Exam Applications (Via DAS Assessor)	Autism Exam Applications (New SSPBs from Newly Considered Evidence)
GP referral for NHS ADHD assessment	30	10
Previous school/university adjustments (e.g., JCQ Form 8)	49	1
Confirmation of previous DSA-funded support	3	0
Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP)	1	1
Total applications based on new evidence	83	12
Total 2023/24 applications (all evidence)	636	86

10. Service Evaluation

Oxford uses the Student Barometer to survey students (with certain exclusions). While this survey has historically been conducted annually, its frequency has now been reduced to every two years. The latest Barometer (in 2022) was completed by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students (full- and part-time) only (postgraduate research student 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 was 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 respondents felt the service was not applicable or relevant to them. Satisfaction with DAS services amongst users specifically was up slightly from 2021, at 78%¹⁰. 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 48 respondents to the 2023/24 survey being University of Oxford students¹¹. The survey canvassed disabled students' experiences of study, including how well supported they feel, whether recommended

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ [Access Insights Report 2024](#)

adjustments were sufficiently implemented and how inclusive they perceive the institution to be. Oxford responses were broadly in line in most areas with national averages, and with higher than average satisfaction rates around access to lecture recording and having somewhere to turn to resolve any access barriers. 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 12 Disability Advisors (9.5 FTE), of which four are Senior Disability Advisors (with some line management responsibilities in addition to student casework); two full-time Assistant Disability Advisors, five administrative support staff (4.3 FTE) including a Service Coordinator; a full-time Head of Service/Co-Director of Student Welfare and Support Services and a full-time Deputy Head of Service. In addition, two SpLD assessors and 13 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
2019/20	4960	8	620
2020/21	5769	8.4	687
2021/22	6762	8.8	768
2022/23	7189	8.8	817
2023/24	7615	9.5	802

12. Conclusions and looking ahead

DAS undertook significant development work in 2023/24 with the University's Student Systems Team, to design and implement a new [online registration](#) process to enable disabled students to register a disability and upload supporting documentation directly via the Student Self Service. The new system, launched in Michaelmas term 2024, aims to reduce administrative barriers and burdens for both students and DAS staff, facilitating quicker access to support.

Also new for the 2024/25 academic year, is the launch of the 'Do-IT Profiler', an online neurodivergence screening tool which allows students to explore their strengths and challenges across various cognitive areas. Whilst not a diagnostic tool, the profiler generates a personalised neurodiversity profile, highlighting key areas for support and providing tailored signposting to further resources and diagnostic assessment options, where applicable. For students where the Do-IT profiler indicates relevance to exploring an SpLD diagnostic assessment, DAS will then arrange and fund this. The Do-IT Profiler will be piloted and evaluated during the 2024/25 academic year.

DAS will continue to review and evaluate the impact of the changes to disability evidence, introduced in 2023/24, to enable more students timely access to some commonly recommended adjustments.

DAS will continue to consult with students and staff from across the collegiate University to tailor service offerings to best meet requirements. This includes ongoing evaluation of the effectiveness of current routes to access advice and support (including student and staff drop-in sessions and student forums) and building on any feedback received to help inform future service developments.

There is still much to accomplish, but with increasing momentum and more coordinated cross-institutional collaboration, Oxford is making significant progress in its strong commitment to fostering an inclusive learning environment where disabled students can thrive and flourish.