



DISABILITY ADVISORY SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

2016-2017

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Introduction

Highlights

3,369 students were known to the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) in 2016-17, representing an increase of 16.2% over the previous year. The DAS has continued to work proactively to encourage prospective applicants, offer holders and enrolled students to disclose and register with the DAS as early as possible so they might access any necessary support and resources; including the facilitation of pre-application visits, a presence at Open Days and UNIQ summer schools, and assertive contact with offer holders. The annual pre-matriculation transition event continues to be positively received, with participants unanimously agreeing they would recommend the event to others.

The service contributed to a programme supporting medieval and modern languages students with preparing for a year abroad, delivered seminars on exam techniques and revision strategies for students with specific learning difficulties (subsequently made available online), and collaborated with IT Services to run a series of successful workshops on the use of assistive technology to support learning and improve personal productivity. Furthermore, the DAS undertook a feasibility study to explore the potential benefits of offering a dedicated induction event for students with autism spectrum conditions, resulting in a commitment to run a pilot for incoming students in the 2018-19 academic year.

The DAS has continued to advise and support staff across the collegiate University in their work with disabled students; providing bespoke staff training in supporting students with visual and hearing impairments, and producing a series of online advice pages to assist staff in their work supporting disabled students. New regulations on reasonable adjustments to the doctoral viva were approved and published, and the inclusive practice research project and accessible residential accommodation audit were finalised; the recommendations within the respective reports are being considered.

Additionally, the DAS was audited by the external regulator of Disabled Students' Allowances and became accredited as a supplier of specialist non-medical helper support.

Risks and Challenges

The service remains under pressure as the numbers of students declaring a disability continues to rise; meeting increasing operational demands whilst continuing to offer a high quality and timely service to all remains both a challenge and an area of risk. This has been further compounded by the imposition of new regulations on specialist non-medical help which bring a substantially increased administrative and operating burden.

Consequently, some activities to assist staff in their work with disabled students have been scaled back or deferred; including a disability co-ordinator training programme, development of the Common Framework Handbook for Supporting Disabled Students, and, to some extent, the disability professionals' forum.


Looking Ahead

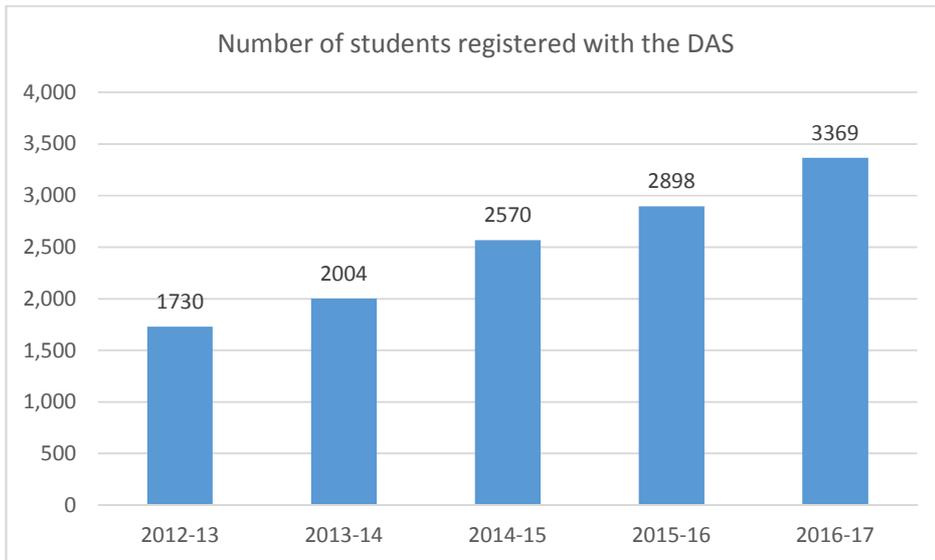
The service continues to review its forward vision and evaluate effective service models in the context of rising numbers of students declaring a disability, changes in their presenting profile, changes to the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) and regulations around support provision, and the recommendations of the inclusive teaching research project.

Kathy Noren-Curtis
Head of the Disability Advisory Service (DAS)

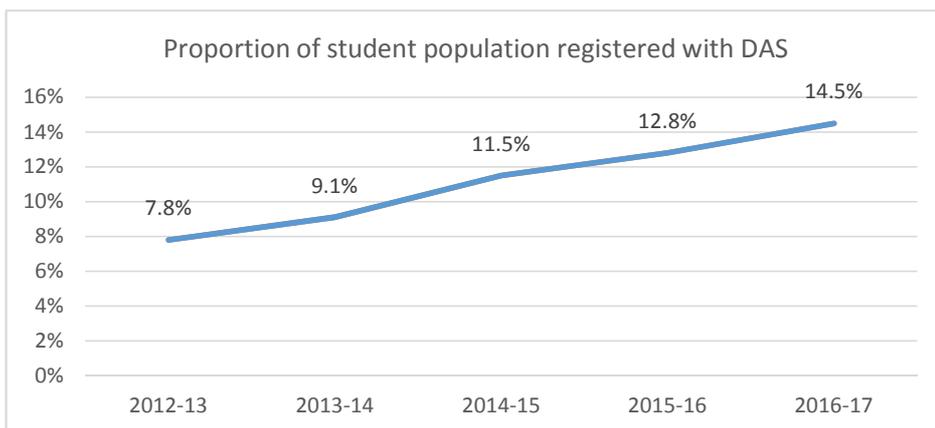
Student Information

Registrations

The number of students registered with the DAS has continued to steadily increase, with a total of 3,369 registrations in 2016-17. This represents a 94.7% increase in registrations over five years.



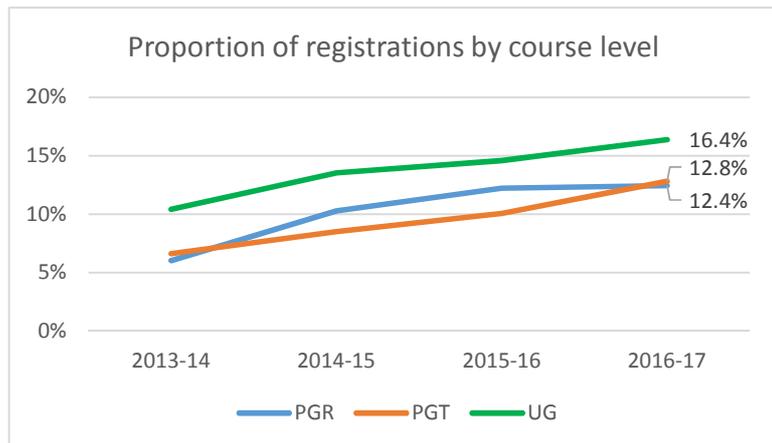
The number of students registered with the DAS corresponds to an increasing proportion of the total student body, with 14.5% of all students registering in 2016-17.



Students registering with the DAS by course level

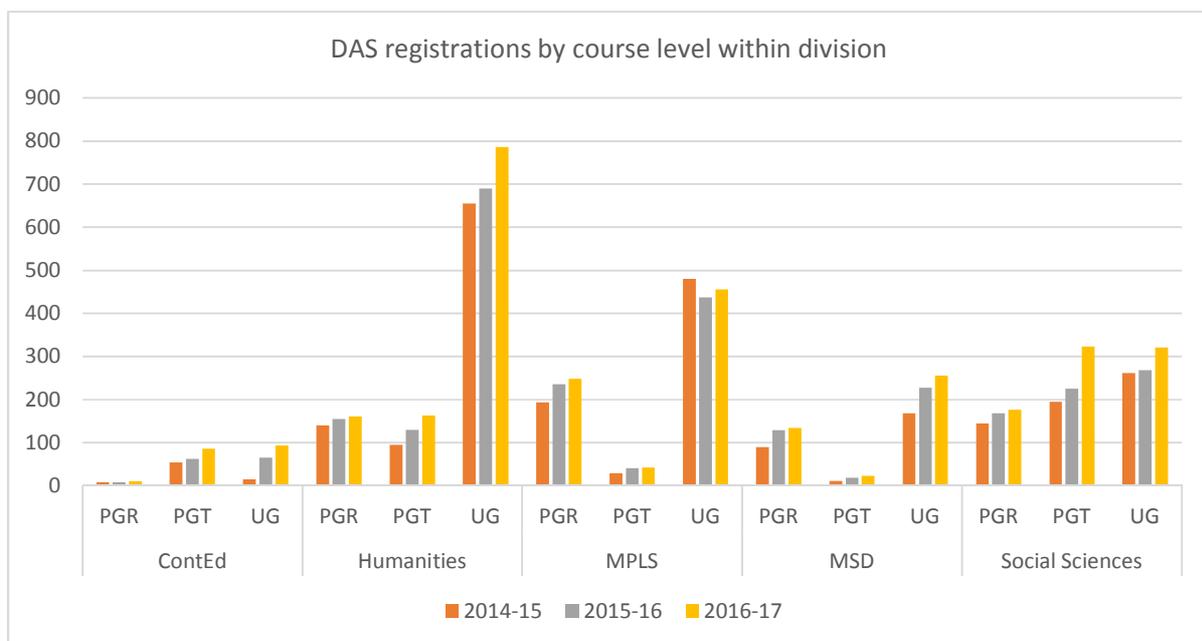
The number of students has been rising across all course levels, but undergraduate students continue to represent the majority of students registered with the DAS. Registrations amongst UG and PGT students has continued to rise strongly, whereas the proportion of PGR students has levelled off.

Overall, undergraduates represent a greater share of the DAS registrations compared to the overall university population. This may be due to the greater proportion of undergraduates being home students and awareness of the support available.

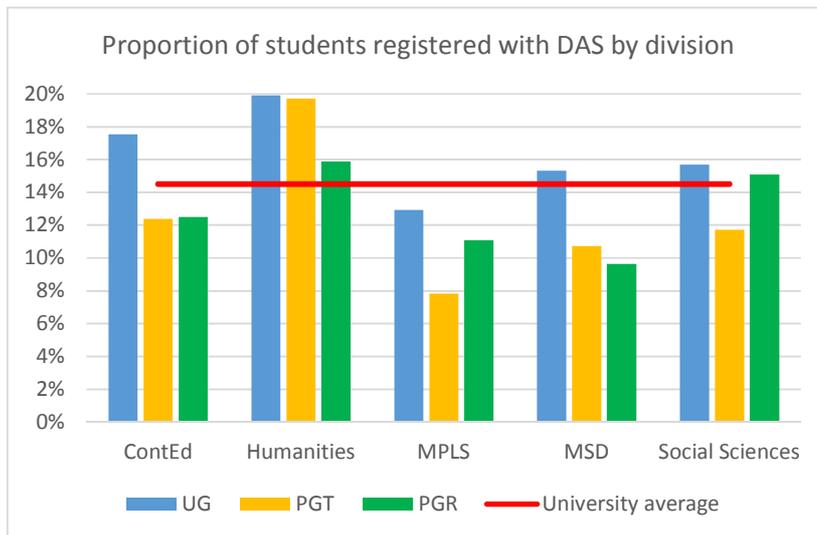


Students registering with the DAS by division

The divisional level breakdown and trend is presented below. This show that UGs in the Humanities represent the highest number of students registering with the DAS, followed by MPLS. Whilst there is an increase in numbers across the board, there is a notable spike in PGT registrations within Social Sciences.



Whilst the absolute numbers of registrations show one picture, the proportion of registrations to the students population present a different picture. Compared to the university average, Humanities have a greater proportion of registrations, with 1 in 5 undergraduates registered with the service. Whilst MPLS has the second largest number of undergraduate registrations, it has the lowest proportion. This data also shows that MPLS and MSD have notably lower proportions of postgraduate students registering with the service.



Disabled Student Allowance (DSA)

The proportion of students who receive the Disabled Student Allowance has increased in 2016-17:

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Students claiming DSA to fund support	762	813	939	765	1,029
Students with non-DSA funded support	122	143	169	166	223

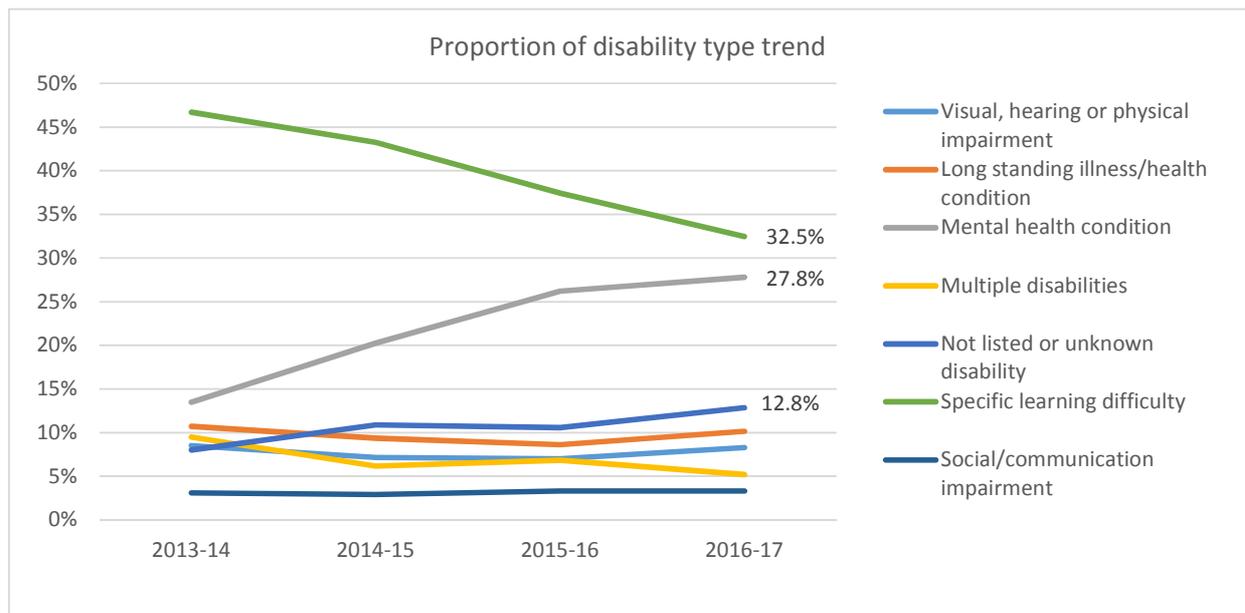
This is set against a drop in the previous year, which may have been caused by a range of factors including a reduction in the supportive resources being funded, and uncertainty around the future of DSA. Whilst the overall numbers of students claiming DSA may be up the overall spend is down, perhaps due to the increased interrogation of medical evidence by Student Finance England (SFE).

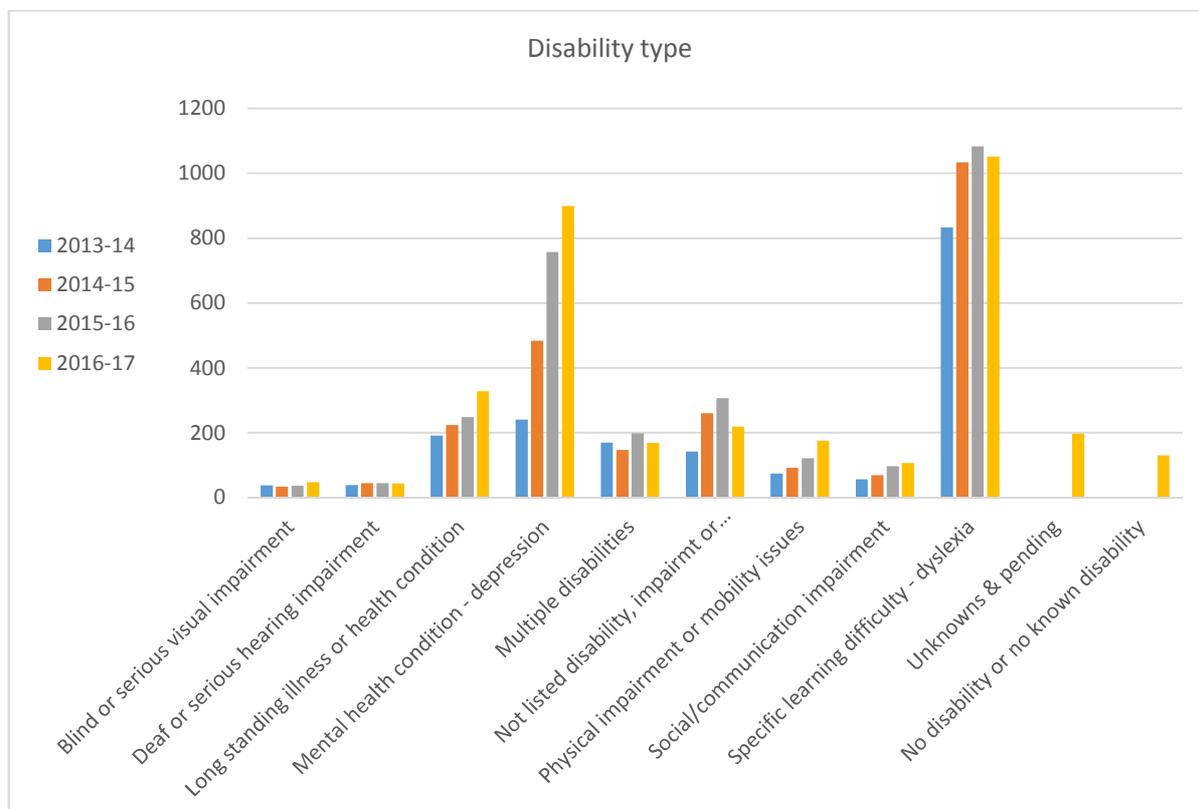
Where non-UK students are ineligible for DSA support, the University provides support to these students through internal funding. This includes non-medical help and access to a loan pool of assistive technology. We are able to offer greater flexibility in the support provided to students and substantially reduce the administrative burden as we are free of the restrictions imposed by external funding bodies' processes.

Disability type

The split for disability type has continued to change, with the number of mental health disability declarations increasing, and those declaring a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) levelling off. Proportionally, SpLDs now account for a third of all cases, with mental health conditions declared by over 1 in 4 service users. Interpreting the nature of the difficulties facing those who self-declare a mental health condition is problematic because the range of diagnoses which fall into this category is broad, the degree of impact can vary substantially and the detail included in medical evidence is varied. The data also shows notable increases in declarations of long standing illness and physical impairment, although there is a broad increase in all types in line with overall service user increases.

Data for 2016-17 has included the categories of unknown, pending, and no disability for the completeness of data, but also to highlight the difficulties of categorisation. DAS support students with a hugely broad range of complex needs, and these do not fit naturally into neat categories for reporting purposes.





	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Blind or serious visual impairment	38	34	37	48
Deaf or serious hearing impairment	39	45	45	44
Long standing illness or health condition	191	224	249	328
Mental health condition - depression	240	484	758	900
Multiple disabilities	169	147	198	168
Not listed disability, impairment or medical condition	142	260	306	219
Physical impairment or mobility issues	74	92	121	176
Social/communication impairment	56	70	96	107
Specific learning difficulty - dyslexia	833	1034	1084	1052
Unknowns & Pending	-	-	-	197
No disability	-	-	-	130

Assessments

Diagnostic Assessment Service for Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD)

Students can be screened by a disability advisor if they wish. If sufficient supporting evidence exists then they are referred for a full educational psychological assessment.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Students with existing history of SpLD	69	41	23	39	36
No previous history of SpLD	136	196	183	173	192
Total	205	223	206	212	228
SpLD confirmed	94%	94%	94%	88%	98%

Study Needs Assessment

The Oxford University Assessment Centre (OUAC) provides the study needs assessments required to access the DSA. OUAC is open to Oxford students and those from other HEIs.

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
UK Oxford students	258	242	333	257	248
Non-UK Oxford students	43	70	78	63	33
Other HEI students	225	255	306	341	298
Total	526	567	639	661	579

Non-medical help allocation and management (NMH)

Non-specialist non-medical help refers to the human support provided to students; it encompasses roles such as note-taking, library support work, laboratory assistance and examination scribes. However, an important change took place in September 2016 as the government no longer covered these services through the DSA and the University was therefore expected to provide these NMH services or make appropriate alternative provision. These services are one element of support which is particularly sensitive to individual student need, and is therefore subject to significant demand variation.

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Students receiving non-specialist NMH	115	139	105	101
Students receiving mentoring	205	199	288	359

There has been a notable increase in the number of students receiving mentoring in 2016-17. This reflects the rising numbers of student mental health disclosures in recent years, and could also indicate a growing awareness amongst students that Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding can provide access to longer term one-to-one support than is typically available through other routes.

Common Framework

The Common Framework for Supporting Disabled Students was adopted by the collegiate University in Trinity term 2014. The Conference of Colleges facilitates the monitoring of colleges' contributions to the Common Framework, through a brief annual survey of Disability Leads in Trinity term. The content and results of the survey are overseen by Conference Steering Committee. The Student Wellbeing Subcommittee oversees the monitoring of University departments and faculties, the DAS and other student services, with the annual monitoring report presented at the Hilary term meeting of Subcommittee.

Due to increased service demands and limited resources during 2016/17 within the DAS, progress on Framework projects has been limited. In order to progress the development of the online handbook the service has sought support through the Napier Fund to provide a project officer to have a sole focus on this. Funds have been awarded from the Diversity Fund to appoint a project officer with the Examinations team to develop work on using assistive software in exams, a key development in supporting disabled students. With a new service head in post from 1 February 2018 and funding in place for key projects it is anticipated that progress will be made over 2017-18.

Staffing

The DAS is staffed by disability advisors (5.2 FTE), administrative support (2.9 FTE) and those running the Assessment Centre. Each disability advisor is allocated to be a link advisor with a group of colleges.

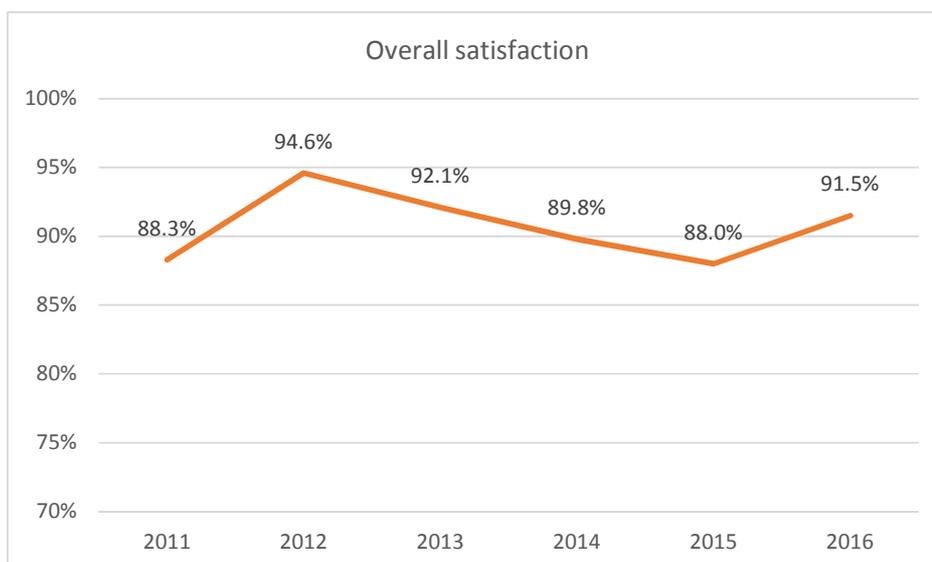
Year	Students	Advisor FTE	Caseload: FTE Advisor*
2016-17	3,369	5.2	648
2015-16	2,876	4.8	599
2014-15	2,302	4.8	479
2013-14	2,004	4.4	455
2012-13	1,730	4.4	393
2011-12	1,587	4.4	360

The caseload figure reflects the FTE available each year. As highlighted in previous reports the DAS has one of the highest student to advisor ratios across the sector, and this is a position that is expected to remain.

Student Evaluations

Student Barometer Survey

Oxford uses the Student Barometer in late November each year to survey PT and FT students with some exclusions.¹ In 2016, approximately 42% of students responded. The following data covers the % satisfied for the Disability Advisory Service. Note that the data may be skewed by the fact that students with no-declared disability may responded to questions related to the DAS, even if they had never utilised the service.



Overall satisfaction has shown an improvement in 2016, and the DAS remains one of the highest performing support services that are assessed as part of the Student Barometer. Whilst a breakdown of this data is available by gender, course level, and fee status the trend is largely identical and the validity of the data lower due to smaller sample sizes.

There is an awareness that the use of the Student Barometer as the only measure of evaluation is not ideal, particularly as elements of the service provided through Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA) are delivered by external agencies. The Oxford data from the National Student Survey (NSS) was not released due to a sub-50% response rate, driven by the student boycott of the survey. Work is being undertaken to identify alternative evaluation methods that will provide useful data to inform service development.

¹ Undergraduates in their final year – these students are surveyed in the National Student Survey.

- b) Students of the Doctor of Clinical Psychology – these students are surveyed separately.
- c) Students in years 2 and 4 of the undergraduate medical course – to prevent over-surveying.
- d) Part-time students on non-matriculated courses (these students are surveyed through a tailored form of the Barometer but the resultant data is reported separately).

Update on Current Work

Service Development

The DAS was audited by the external regulator of Disabled Students' Allowances in March 2016 and became accredited as an approved supplier of specialist non-medical helper support. The regulatory framework is continually evolving and requires significant staff resource to ensure ongoing compliance. The next audit is scheduled for March 2018.

The DAS, in collaboration with the Examinations and Assessments team has been awarded funding by the van Houten fund to undertake research on the use of assistive software in examinations. This six month project will report on its findings in Hilary term 2019.

Management data

The SWSS Executive Officer will be undertaking a project with the DAS service head and deputy head to review the data specification of the service's monthly reports, in order to inform management decisions and better understand the service user and level of need, which in turn will inform future service direction.

Policy

A piece of work with Student Registry was undertaken last year and a new set of disability codes were launched in Michaelmas term 2017 to improve the specificity of disability-related student data. The recommendations in the inclusive practice research project are being considered. There are plans to develop the study skills resources available to students by piloting the expansion of the workshops the DAS currently offers to students with specific learning difficulties. Further additional resource will be required to substantially develop materials for the Common Framework Handbook.

Student Outreach

The DAS is continuing to collaborate with IT Services to deliver a series of one-hour taster sessions throughout the year. These popular workshops introduce low-cost/free assistive technology and apps to help with work and study. Sessions are free and open to all students, but were designed to be particularly beneficial for students with disabilities, including students with specific learning difficulties and mental health conditions. For disabled students registered with the DAS, a follow-up 1:1 session can be arranged to help students get set up with the software.

With funding from MPLS, the DAS undertook a feasibility study to explore the potential benefits of offering a dedicated induction event for students with autism spectrum conditions, resulting in a commitment to run a pilot for incoming students in the 2018-19 academic year.

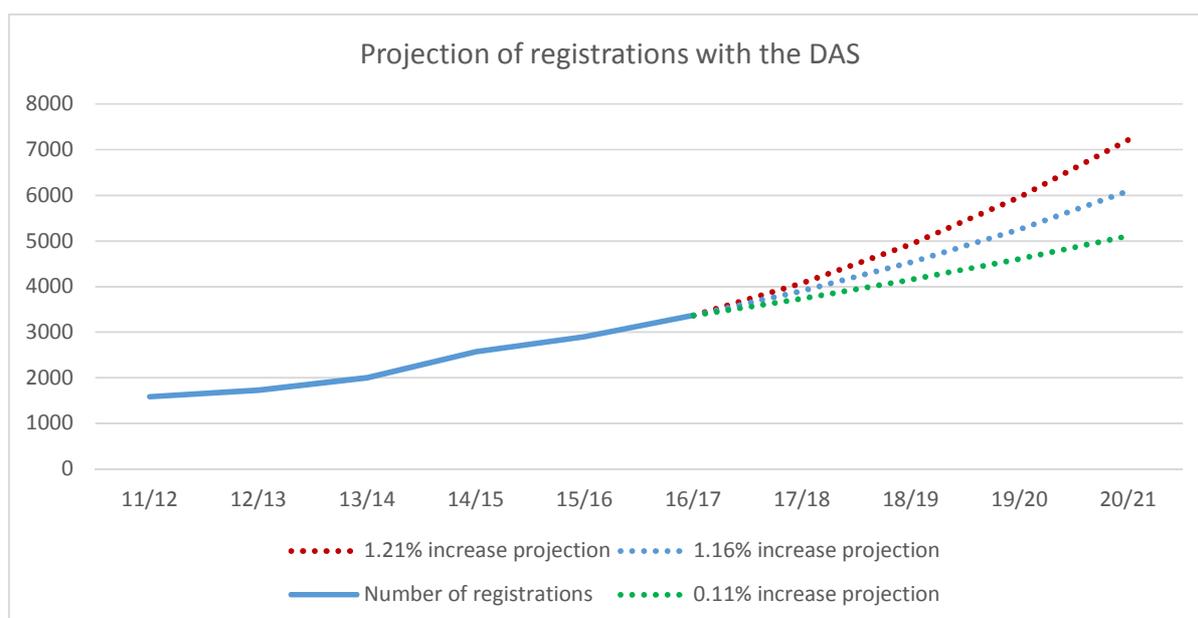
Forward View

Projected service user trends

3,369 students were known to the Disability Advisory Service (DAS) in 2016-17, representing an increase of 16.2% over the previous year. There has been a particular increase in declarations of mental health disabilities in recent years, with a notable increase in the number of students receiving specialist mentoring. This picture is consistent with sector wide trends and it is anticipated numbers will continue to rise.

The chart below shows a projection of registrations through to 2020-21 based the average increase in service users over the past 5 year (1.16%), with a 0.05 percentage point variance either side of this.

Based on the projections, in 5 years (2021/22) the increase in demand for the service could be in the range of 28% - 101% higher than current, supporting 13.5 - 21.3% of the student population.



Emerging issues and risks, with mitigations

Feedback from students indicates an ongoing concern with the ability of DAS staff to respond to their queries in a timely way. One response has been to trial a new student drop-in with a view to providing students with more flexible options for addressing quick queries. However, continually increasing numbers of student declarations are placing the service under ongoing pressure in relation to its ability to offer a high quality and timely service to students, and to support important activities to assist staff in their work with disabled students.



Some additional resource has been secured to allow the service to take initial steps in evolving to meet the increasing demands and challenges; interim arrangements are in place for the 2017-18 academic year whilst effective service models are fully evaluated.

Awareness that Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding can provide access to longer term one-to-one specialist support than is typically available through other routes is likely to be driving up demand; if this continues to increase at the current rate there will be an impact on waiting times, the level of support that can be offered, and on student satisfaction in relation to expectation of provision.

Furthermore, ensuring compliance with the new external regulations on the delivery of specialist non-medical helper support carries a significant administrative and operating burden. The DAS plans to undertake a cost-benefit analysis of continuing to engage with the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) for the provision of specialist mentoring and study skills tuition so the University can consider whether this support would be best delivered with institutional funding.