



Guidance on NMH supplier selection for framework suppliers

Student Finance Wales customers

This guidance on Non-Medical Help (NMH) supplier selection is for framework suppliers providing study needs assessment and support recommendations for students funded by Student Finance Wales (SFW).

This guidance is relevant for any SFW funded student, irrespective of where their assessment has taken place, i.e., applies outside Wales.

Background

1. NMH is the human support provided to students to enable them to access their studies. A full description of the various NMH roles is available in the Annexes section of the DSA Guidance Chapter which can be located at [Policy guidance chapters | Student Finance Wales](#). Note that DSA guidance is updated and published every academic year so you must refer to the relevant version. From 2024/2025, the SFW DSA guidance will provide an indication of the acceptable cost bands associated with each role. These cost bands are to be used as an indication of acceptable price, higher costs can be considered by exception and rationale must be provided in the needs assessment report at the time of recommendation.
2. DfE currently operates a register of NMH suppliers who can provide DSA-fundable support to students funded by Student Finance England. This register can be used as a source to identify suitable NMH suppliers for SFW students, however, it is important to consider if the student has an existing NMH supplier or has a preferred supplier. There are a number of experienced NMH suppliers in Wales who may not be on the DfE register due to the minimum qualification requirements or the nature of the support they provide. Where a student requests to use a supplier that is not on the register of NMH suppliers, it is the responsibility of the needs assessor to ensure that the supplier is suitable and has appropriate experience and skills to provide the support being recommended in accordance with the role and the DSA guidance.
3. Where a needs assessor makes a recommendation for support from a NMH supplier not listed on the register, rationale must be provided in the needs assessment report alongside the suitability and experience of the supplier being recommended.
4. If you determine as part of a needs assessment that a student requires one or more DSA-fundable NMH roles to access their studies, you should make a recommendation to SLC for the relevant role or role(s). Alongside this recommendation you will need to provide **two quotes** from NMH suppliers. If a second quote is unobtainable, for example for highly specialist services, suppliers must ensure they provide an explanation in the needs assessment report. Unless agreed by exception, including student choice, SLC will choose the best value supplier that can meet the student's needs and write to the student advising them to contact that supplier to arrange their support.
5. This document sets out guidance on how to select quotes from two NMH suppliers for inclusion in the report to SLC. Please refer to your contact within our Outsource Supplier Management team if you have any queries about this guidance.

Guidance on selecting quotes

6. While it is not a requirement for Welsh students to secure their NMH support from a known supplier, to aid recommendations, needs assessors can use the NMH supplier list to view and obtain existing supplier contact details in order to provide NMH quotes. The NMH supplier list can be found here; [Guidance for assessment centres, for student finance practitioners | Student Finance Wales](#).

Note that suppliers who are at capacity are expected to ask SLC to be removed temporarily from the public register until they have availability again, so this register will not include all NMH suppliers currently operating).

7. Where a recommended supplier is not on the register, you must ensure that the supplier being recommended is suitable and can meet the needs of the student. You must ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the student and the supplier, and that, where a student requests a specific supplier, this is not as a result of unacceptable practice or behaviour. More information regarding conflict of interest can be found in the DSA Guidance Chapter. You must provide this justification in the assessment report for SLC to consider.
8. You should ensure that all NMH suppliers selected to provide quotes offer the relevant role in the relevant region. The regions given on the register are fairly broad, so you will need to contact each NMH supplier that you are considering for selection to ensure that they are able to provide the role in the student's specific location so that the student can have face-to-face support if they wish. Note that even if the student expresses a preference at the needs assessment for remote NMH support, the NMH supplier must also be able to provide face-to-face NMH support in the student's location should they wish to have face-to-face support at a later date.
9. You must request a quote from each of the NMH suppliers that you are considering for the work. Quotes should be given as an hourly rate. Note that there are cost bands associated with each role, as set out in the DSA Guidance Chapter, to act as a guide. Unless agreed by exception, quotes provided must be at or below the maximum of the range for the role or the NAR will be rejected by SLC. Rates will be selected on their ex-VAT value where applicable. Where a quote is received above the maximum of the range, and without an exception being agreed by SLC, the assessment report will be returned to the needs assessor. It is important to note that this will impact the time within which support can be awarded to the student and will be monitored through contact KPIs.
10. You will need to provide **two** quotes in total in the NAR for each DSA NMH role recommended. There may be rare cases in which it is not possible to provide two quotes, for example where a student requires a less common role in an isolated location and there are not two suppliers available. In these instances, you should include one quote and provide an explanation to SLC in the NAR. If there is no face to face support available at all in the student's region (likely to be a very rare scenario), you should provide two quotes from NMH suppliers who are able to provide remote support for the student, as it is better for the student to be offered remote support than no support at all.
11. If the student expresses a preference for a specific NMH supplier based on previous experience of support from that supplier, you should include that NMH supplier as one of the two quotes on the report and make a note of that student preference in the NAR with the reason for it. You will still need to confirm that the NMH supplier is able to provide that support to the student. Note that if a student expresses a clear preference for a specific NMH supplier for any other reason than previous experience of support from that supplier, this will be classified as an exception and a case will need to be made to SLC. It is expected that these exceptions will be rare (for example, if a student has very complex needs that a specific NMH supplier is best placed to address).
12. Where a student's HEP is an NMH supplier, you should consider whether it would be beneficial to include the HEP as one of the two quotes. As above, you will still need to confirm that the HEP is able to provide that NMH support to the student.

13. You should note that the following are specifically prohibited in all circumstances:

- DSA funding is not available to any company, partnership or other organisation that is owned or controlled by the student being supported, or in which the student has a financial interest or personal investment. Where a potential conflict of interest exists, Welsh Ministers may consider each case on the information available to them.
- Students are not permitted to deliver DSA-funded support to friends or family members due to the potential conflict of interest and the difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries.
- Students are not permitted to receive DSA-funded support from friends and family members due to the potential conflict of interest and the difficulty in maintaining professional boundaries. Where, in the unlikely event of an exception request, Welsh Ministers may consider each case on the information available to them.
- Students, not considered family or friends, are not permitted to deliver DSA-funded support if they have been assessed as 'needing' similar DSA funded support by a DSA study needs assessor.

14. If the framework supplier or an employee of the framework supplier has a conflict of interest which could affect the selection of NMH suppliers (e.g. a financial interest or other in an NMH supplier), this should be declared to SLC and managed appropriately in line with the contract arrangements. Volumes and patterns of recommendations will be monitored and discussed with the Welsh Government to ensure a fair and balanced process for NMH quotations.