



# **Your DSA support and COVID-19 Student Survey 2**

## **FINAL REPORT June 2021**



# Contents

Introduction	2
Method	2
Summary of results	4
Summary of themes	9
Comparison between 2020 and 2021 survey results	10
Acknowledgements	12
Appendix 1: Selection of comments received	13

# Introduction

From March 2020 to March 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted students in Higher Education. Students have faced uncertainty about their learning delivery, assessment methods, progression to the next academic year or graduation and what the future 'new normal' will look like for their studies. Lockdowns and restrictions have impacted students' accommodation arrangements and home life, the suitability of their study environment, their physical and mental health, financial and work demands, whilst others will have had caring responsibilities for children or family. For disabled students, including those receiving Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) support, the impact of COVID-19 on academic progress could be more complex as the move to online learning and support may have created additional challenges to study progress and success.

As a result of the Government COVID-19 restrictions on campus activity, face-to-face teaching, and then the lockdown rules, the delivery of Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) one-to-one support quickly moved to remote online support in March 2020, with this mode of delivery being predominant through to the current time.

In April 2020, the Association of Non-Medical Help Providers (ANMHP) surveyed both students and Non-Medical Help (NMH) providers about how the COVID-19 pandemic was impacting Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) support, particularly with regard to the provision of online or remote support that may have previously been provided in-person or face-to-face.<sup>1</sup>

Following a year of COVID-19 restrictions, the move to blended learning and teaching by many Higher Education Providers and resulting changes in student academic and social experience, the ANMHP management committee agreed that it would be useful to issue a follow-up survey to students to gather views on the efficacy of DSA support during the pandemic and whether this has had an impact, be it positive or negative, on the ability for disabled students to engage with their academic studies.

## Method

The survey was issued via the online SurveyMonkey platform and Microsoft Word, audio file and British Sign Language (BSL) formats were made available upon request. The survey comprised of nine structured questions, one semi-structured question and one free text box that enabled participants to comment further. The survey was carried out anonymously and encouraged respondents to contact their NMH provider, assessment centre or funding body if they had any specific queries about their support.

The survey was distributed in the following ways:

1. To the Association of NMH Provider members by email.
2. To registered NMH providers as listed on the Student Loans Company site by email.
3. By posting the invitation and link on the ANMHP JISC forum email list.
4. By request to various professional organisations within the DSA sector.

It is estimated that approximately 500 NMH providers were approached to send the survey request and link to their students. The Association of Non-Medical Help Providers did not seek to record which NMH providers or professional bodies distributed the survey to their students.

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<sup>1</sup>The original survey report is available to download from the ANMHP website here: <https://nmhproviders.co.uk>

The survey was made live on Wednesday 10th March 2021 and was open for 28 days, closing on Tuesday 6 April 2021. The Association invited students to respond and comment on the following questions or statements:

Question	
1	Please indicate your type or types of DSA support.
2	What is the year of your study?
3	*My DSA learning support is important for my academic progress at this time.
4	*The Covid-19 situation has negatively impacted my academic progress by adding additional challenges.
5	I feel that I require additional DSA support through this period due to the changes to my academic studies.
6	The Covid-19 situation is negatively impacting my general wellbeing.
7	Remote online DSA support is effective for me.
8	*When face-to-face DSA support is unrestricted and allowed again, my preference would be:
9	*My DSA-funded assistive technology and software is helping me to access my online learning.
10	*During the Covid-19 crisis please indicate any other factors that are impacting your studies: a. Access to a suitable study environment. b. Access to reliable technology or internet connection. c. Access to a private, discrete place to receive support. d. Your mental wellbeing. e. None of the above. f. Other factor(s). Please comment.
11	Please make any other comments.

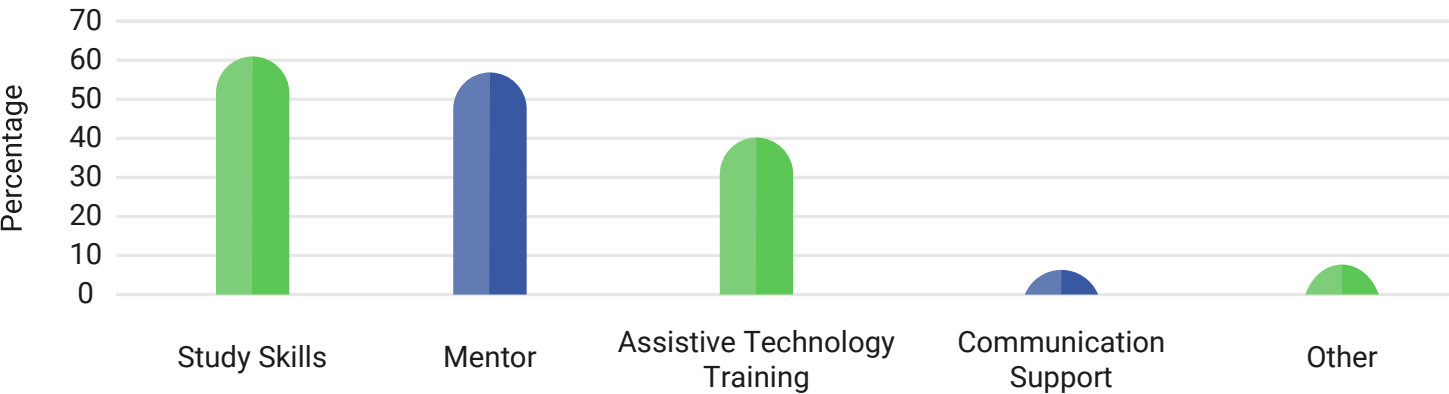
\* These questions were either new or altered in the second survey.

# Summary of Results

A total of 2,885 student responses were received.

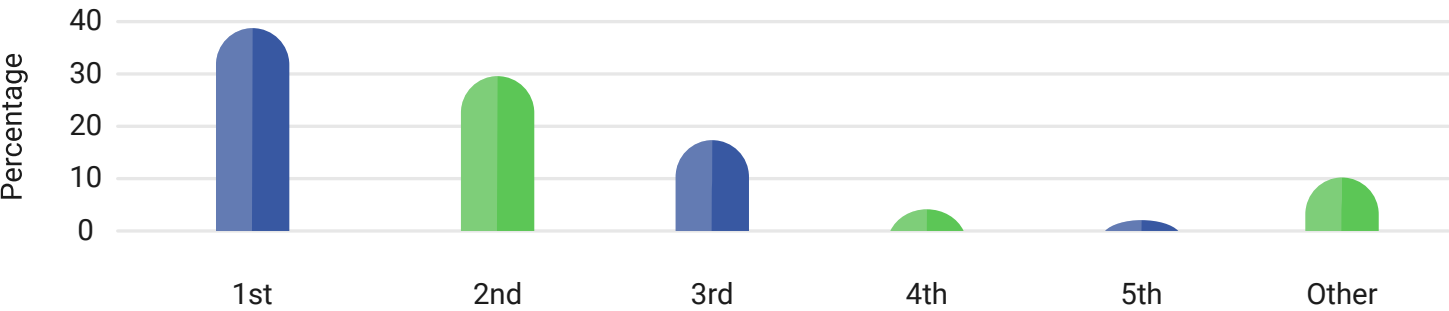
## Question 1: Please indicate your type or types of DSA support

Answer Choices	Responses	
Study Skills	60.77%	1753
Mentor	57.68%	1663
Assistive Technology Training	40.48%	1167
Communication Support	4.93%	143
Other	8.08%	234



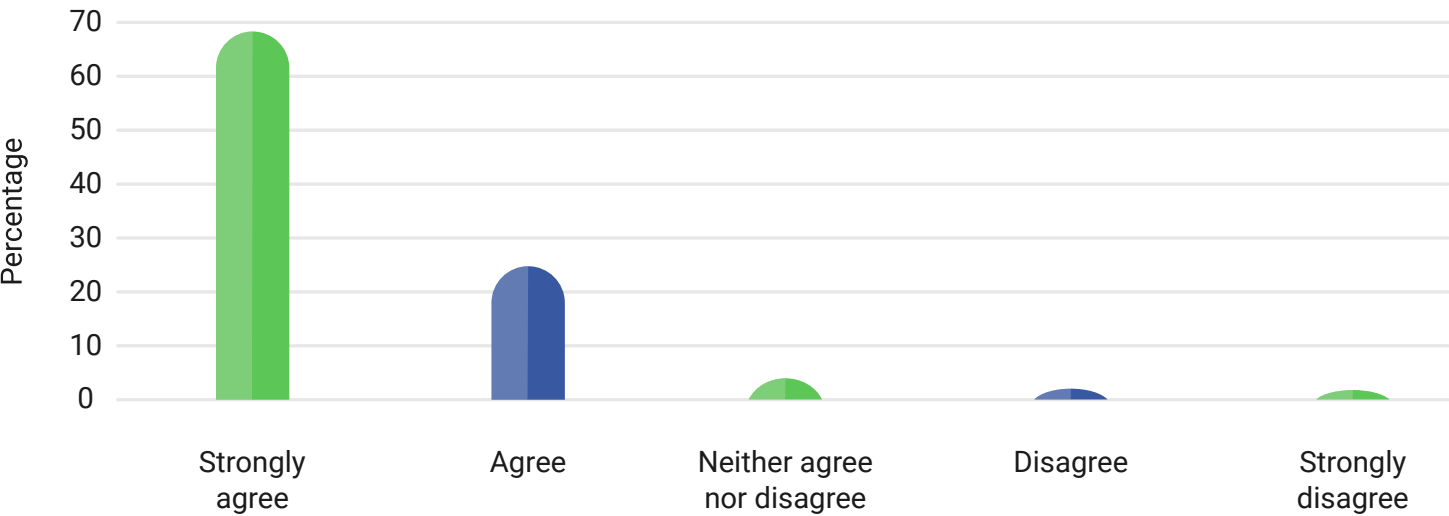
## Question 2: What is the year of your study?

Answer Choices	Responses	
1st	38.33%	1105
2nd	30.08%	868
3rd	17.90%	516
4th	5.48%	158
5th	0.90%	26
Other	12.90%	373



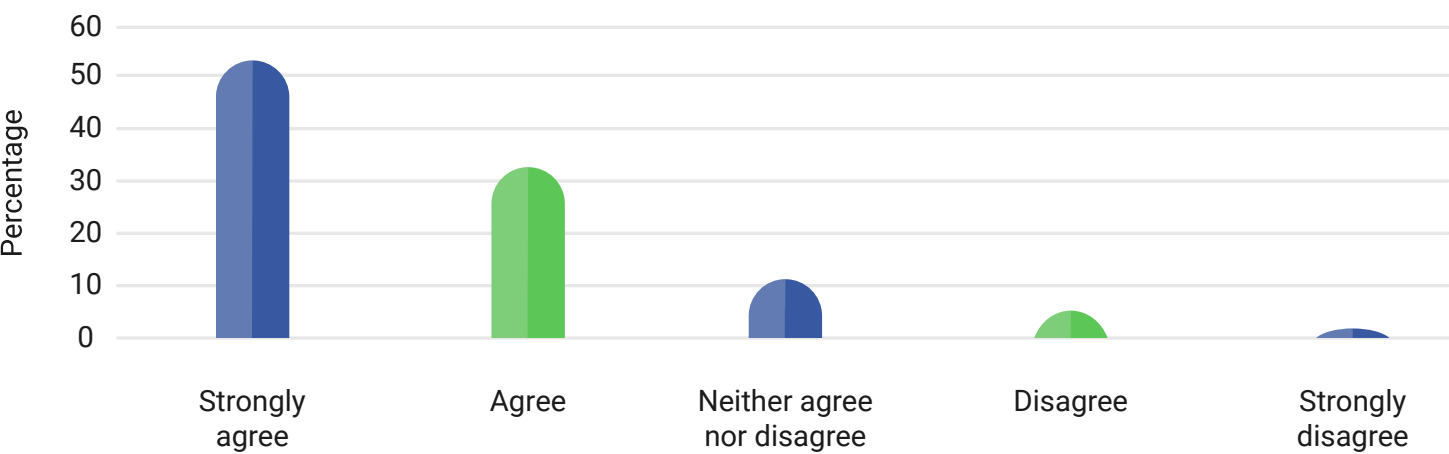
Question 3: My DSA learning support is important for my academic progress at this time.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	68.40%	1973
Agree	24.31%	702
Neither agree nor disagree	5.17%	149
Disagree	1.46%	42
Strongly disagree	0.66%	19



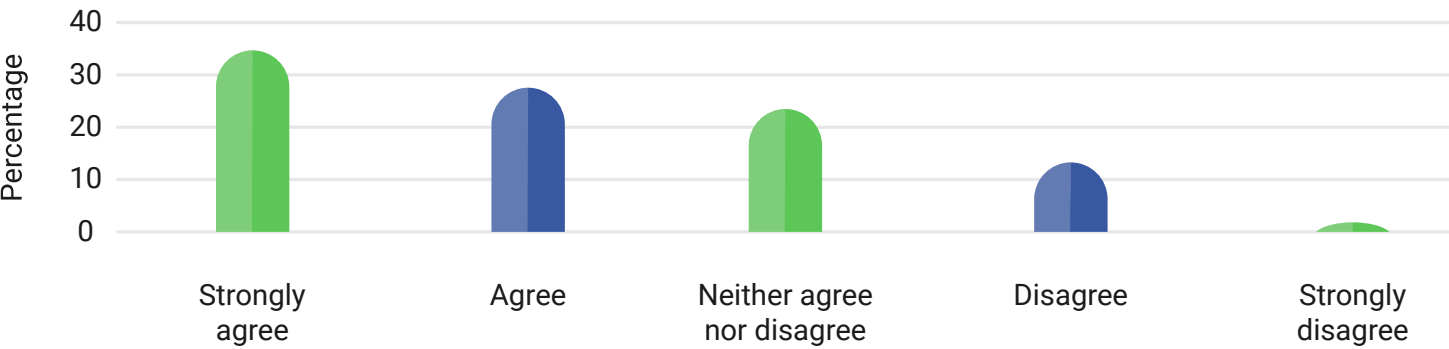
Question 4: The Covid-19 situation has negatively impacted my academic progress by adding additional challenges.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	52.31%	1509
Agree	31.36%	904
Neither agree nor disagree	10.27%	296
Disagree	4.96%	144
Strongly disagree	1.11%	32



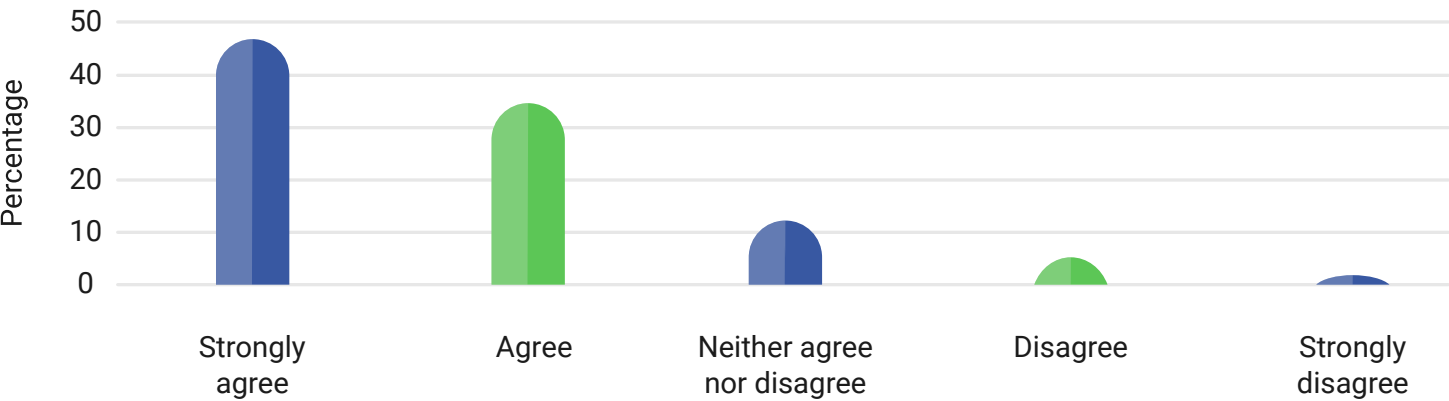
**Question 5: I feel that I require additional DSA support through this period due to the changes to my academic studies.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	34.34%	990
Agree	29.45%	850
Neither agree nor disagree	24.97%	720
Disagree	10.16%	294
Strongly disagree	1.08%	31



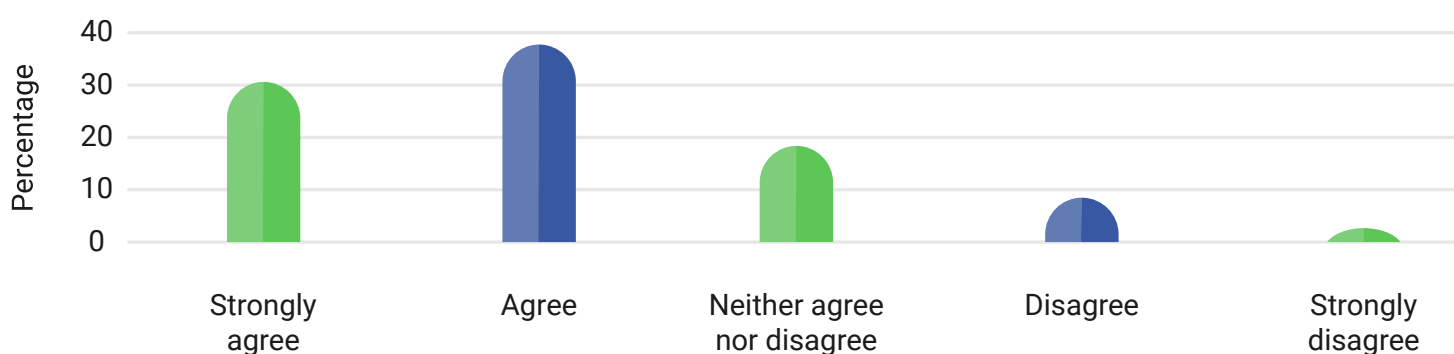
**Question 6: The Covid-19 situation is negatively impacting my general wellbeing.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	47.94%	1384
Agree	34.76%	1003
Neither agree nor disagree	11.09%	343
Disagree	4.34%	125
Strongly disagree	1.08%	31



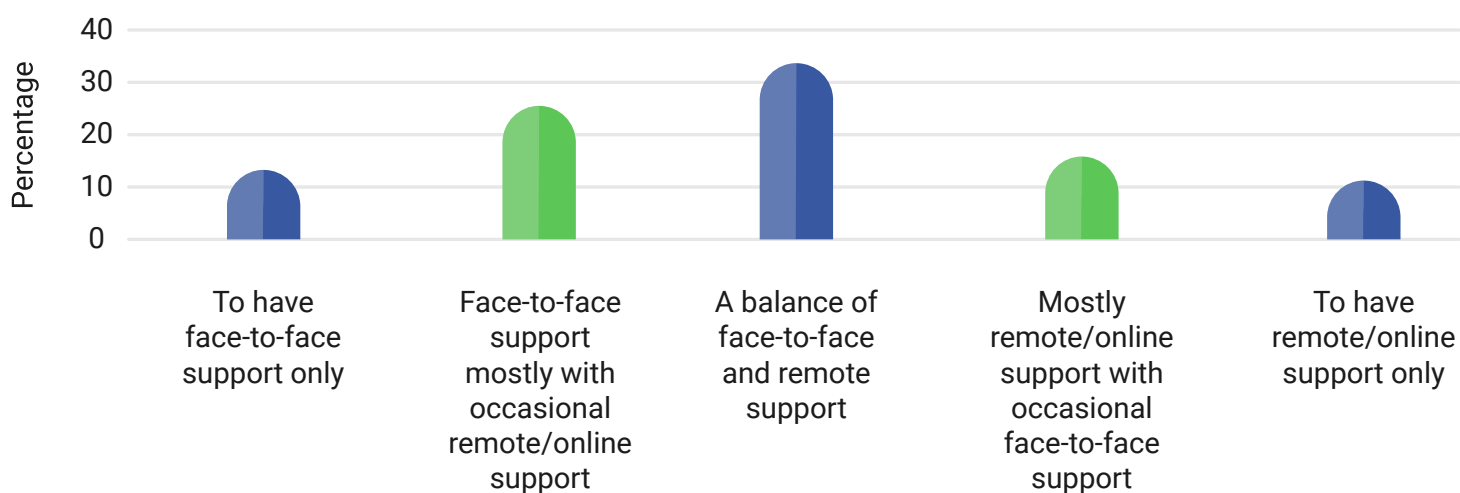
**Question 7: Remote online DSA support is effective for me.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	30.18%	871
Agree	38.67%	1116
Neither agree nor disagree	18.94%	546
Disagree	8.57%	247
Strongly disagree	3.64%	105



**Question 8: When face-to-face DSA support is allowed and unrestricted again, my preference would be:**

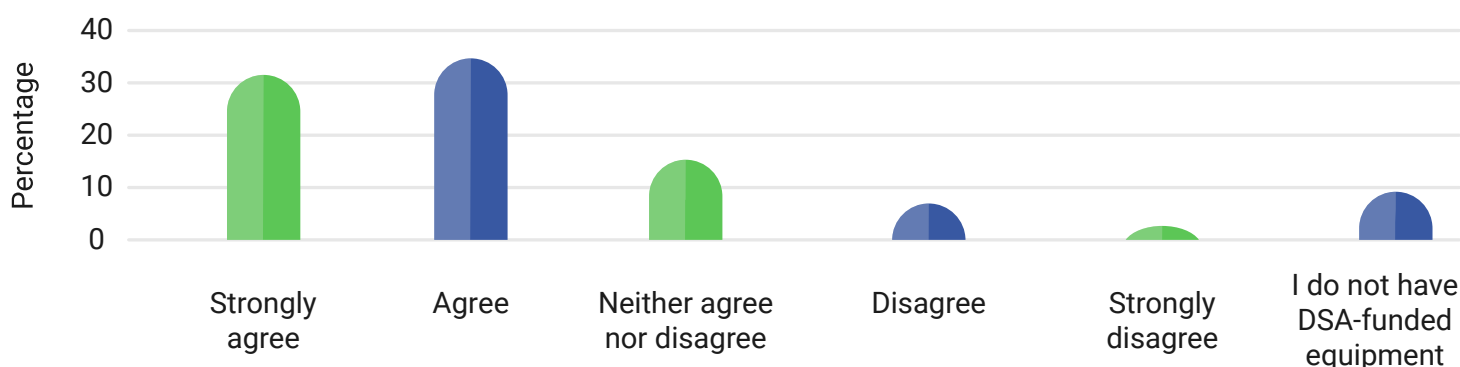
Answer Choices	Responses	
To have face-to-face support only	13.42%	387
Face-to-face support mostly with occasional remote/online support	25.88%	746
A balance of face-to-face and remote support	33.09%	955
Mostly remote/online support with occasional face-to-face support	16.58%	478
To have remote/online support only	11.03%	318





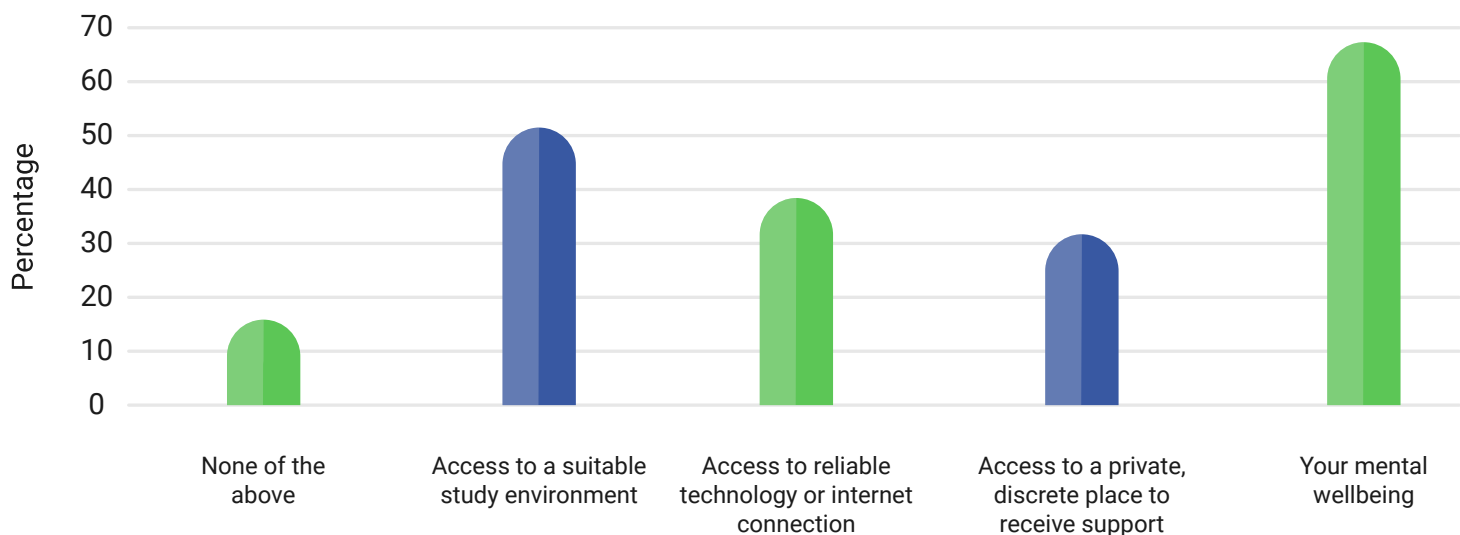
**Question 9: My DSA-funded assistive technology and software is helping me access my online learning.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
Strongly agree	31.32%	904
Agree	33.71%	973
Neither agree nor disagree	15.85%	457
Disagree	6.42%	185
Strongly disagree	3.12%	90
I do not have DSA-funded equipment	9.57%	276



**Question 10: During the Covid-19 crisis please indicate any factors that are negatively impacting your DSA support.**

Answer Choices	Responses	
None of the above	15.23%	439
Access to a suitable study environment	51.20%	1477
Access to reliable technology or internet connection	37.43%	1080
Access to a private, discrete place to receive support	31.84%	918
Your mental wellbeing	67.57%	1948
Other factor(s)	Comments	337



**Question 11: Please make any other comments about your DSA support here.**

<b>Answered</b>	447
<b>Skipped</b>	2436

<b>Response category</b>	<b>Number of responses<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>% of total comments</b>
DSA support reference	366	82%
HEI studies/support reference	32	7%
COVID-19 reference	37	8%
Mental Health reference	39	9%
Remote support reference	53	12%
Home and/or family reference	11	2.5%
Technology reference	81	18%

## Summary of Themes

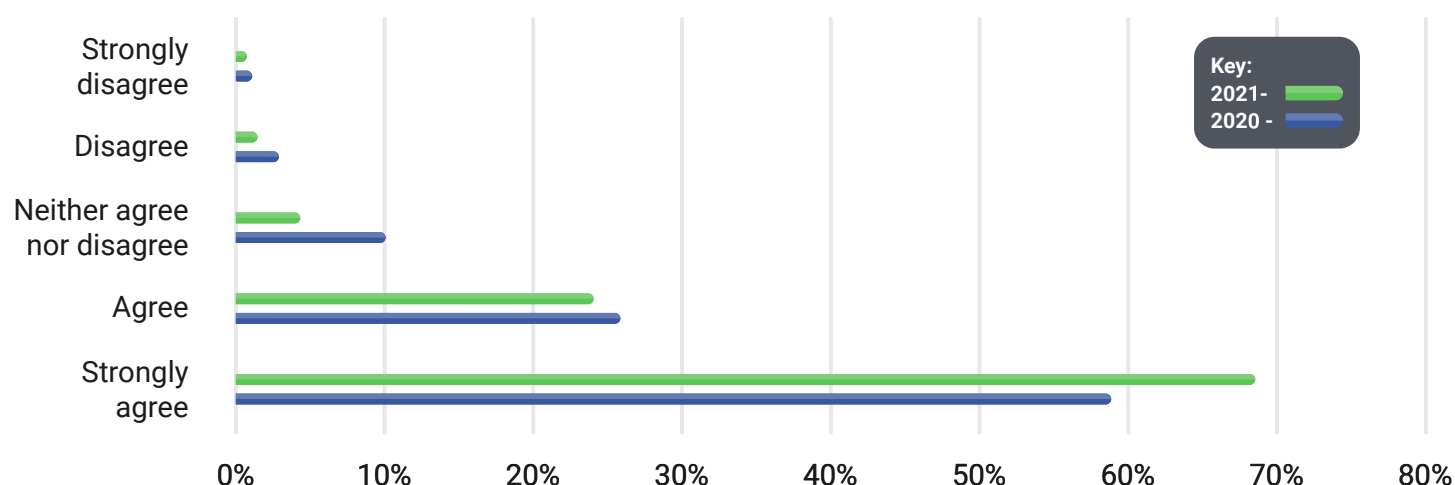
1. Respondents were generally positive about their DSA support currently, some stating that it is invaluable to the continuation of their academic studies. Many students linked DSA support to maintaining their academic progress, accessing their learning, and protecting their mental wellbeing. A few respondents expressed some dissatisfaction around access and arrangements for DSA support.
2. Deteriorating mental health was identified and commented on by many students, and some expressed distress and ill health.
3. Respondents choose to add a significant number of comments about their university or college support, the communications, and the accessibility of online teaching and assessment.
4. Challenges relating to home circumstances were frequently mentioned; childcare, other caring responsibilities, privacy, needs for paid work, and access to technology.
5. Many respondents expressed the challenge of COVID-19 alongside their disability.
6. Responses gave a mixed picture on remote support. Although the survey data indicates that over 50% have found it effective, the comments were mostly from those where remote support is less effective or ineffective.
7. Issues around access to assistive technology and internet unreliability were raised by students.
8. Respondents were thankful for the chance to express themselves through the survey.

<sup>2</sup>Many responses fell into more than one category.

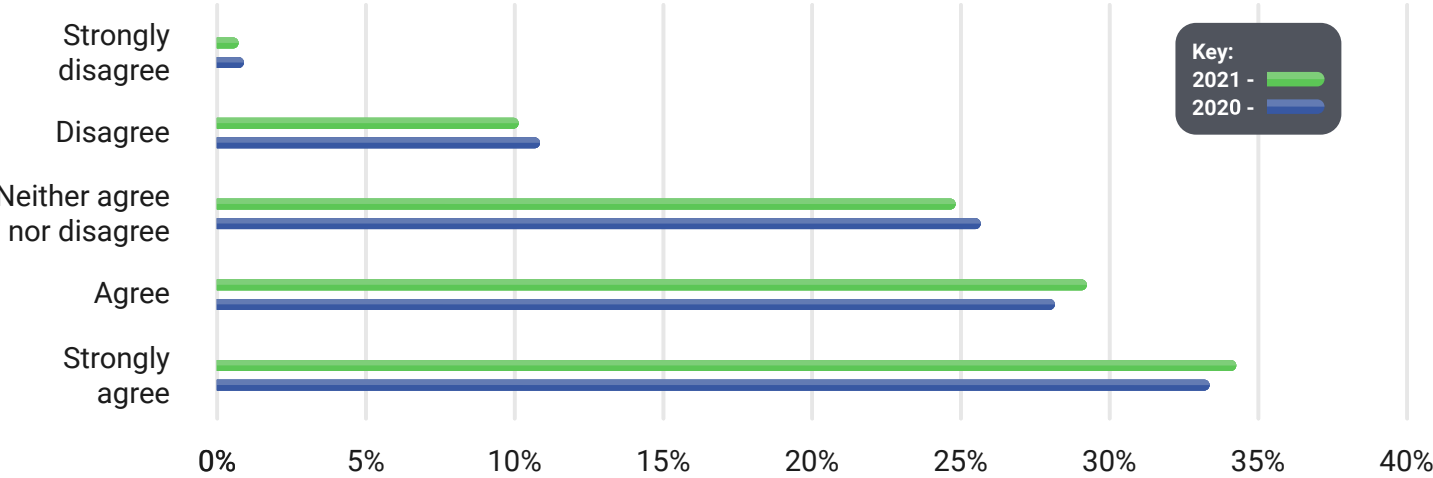
# Comparison Between 2020 and 2021 Survey Results

No.	Question	2020	2021
3	My DSA learning support is important for me/my academic progress at this time.	Strongly agree: 59.0% Agree: 26.2% Neither agree nor disagree: 10.3% Disagree: 3.2% Strongly disagree: 1.2%	Strongly agree: 68.40% Agree: 24.31% Neither agree nor disagree: 5.17% Disagree: 1.46% Strongly disagree: 0.66%
5	I feel that I require additional DSA support through this period due to the changes to my academic studies.	Strongly agree: 32.9% Agree: 28.1% Neither agree nor disagree: 25.8% Disagree: 11.7% Strongly disagree: 1.5%	Strongly agree: 34.34% Agree: 29.45% Neither agree nor disagree: 24.97% Disagree: 10.16% Strongly disagree: 1.08%
6	The Covid-19 situation is negatively impacting my general wellbeing.	Strongly agree: 44.6% Agree: 34.6% Neither agree nor disagree: 13.1% Disagree: 6.4% Strongly disagree: 1.3%	Strongly agree: 47.94% Agree: 34.76% Neither agree nor disagree: 11.90% Disagree: 4.34% Strongly disagree: 1.08%
7	Remote online DSA support is effective for me.	Strongly agree: 18.8% Agree: 36.1% Neither agree nor disagree: 26.3% Disagree: 12.7% Strongly disagree: 6.1%	Strongly agree: 30.18% Agree: 38.67% Neither agree nor disagree: 18.94% Disagree: 8.57% Strongly disagree: 3.64%

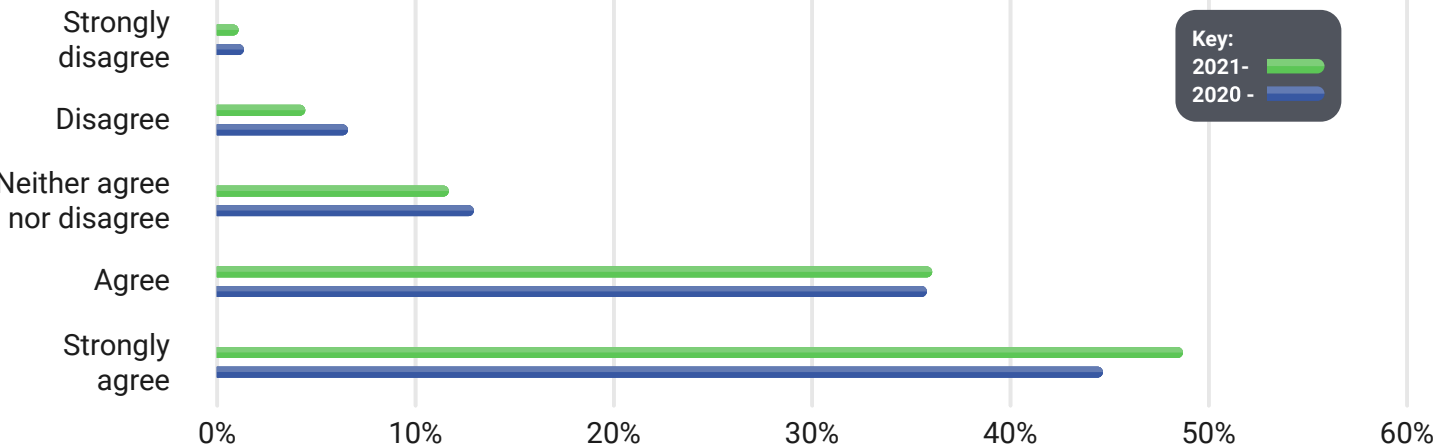
## 3. MY DSA learning support is important for my academic progress at this time.



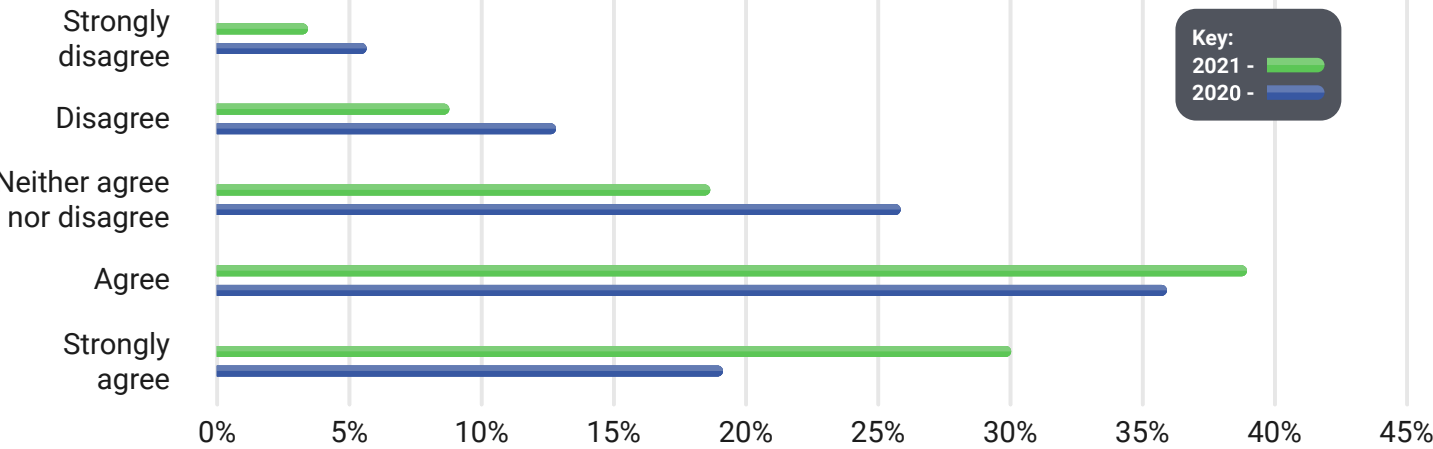
5. I feel that I require additional DSA support through this period due to the changes to my academic studies.



6. The Covid-19 situation is negatively impacting my general wellbeing.



7. Remote online DSA support is effective for me.



# Acknowledgements

The Association of Non-Medical Help Providers would like to thank all students who took part in the survey, all providers who shared the survey with their students and the professional associations who distributed the survey request via their memberships.

# Appendix 1: Selection of Comments Received

A full and anonymised list of comments received from the survey is available upon request:  
[Contact the Association of Non-Medical Help Providers](#)

## Positive comments

1. It has been invaluable and my study skills tutor has been excellent.
2. The DSA support received has been extremely beneficial and I am very grateful as I would have likely not been able to pursue my course without it. Thank you.
3. Mentor has been phenomenal. Made a huge difference to my capacity to stay well and study
4. Thank you for the brilliant mentoring/help with planning for deadlines. I also find the assistive technology incredibly helpful, and will continue to use it even after I have completed my studies
5. Fabulous equipment with technology that has changed the way I can learn and great support
6. The support took a long time to be put in place (most of my first year) but has been really helpful since all the equipment and my 1:1 tutor were all up and running. My 1:1 tutor has been especially helpful and supportive. Thank you.
7. My DSA support has been crucial and has enabled me to study and continue studying. Excellent support and I am taking advantage of this wonderful opportunity. I am very grateful and will do my best so my studies also have an impact on my field of research.
8. Ongoing DSA support has helped me to cope with the following aspects of the pandemic - loss of routine - loss of social interactions - needing to construct a full-time learning environment at home - navigating Covid related anxiety.
9. I would not be able to continue to study without my DSA support. It is integral to my ability to work to the best of my ability.
10. I had fantastic support from my tutor throughout she went beyond, she was always prompt with help and emails being remote made everything less stressful. I honestly could not of completed my degree without her. Thank you!
11. My DSA support has been unbelievably fantastic. I couldn't have done my degree without the support of my tutor, my equipment and DSA.
12. The mentoring has been invaluable in keeping me focussed and motivated during a time when I could easily have become withdrawn and distracted. The software is extremely beneficial for my academic work and the remote training on this software was comprehensive and easy to access
13. Above all else I am one hundred percent sure that I would not have passed the last academic year without the support of my tutor and I am deeply grateful as I love my course and I know that I have a great deal to bring to my chosen profession.
14. This is the first year I have received DSA support and I think the support, particularly my mentor, has been key to me continuing through any challenges I have faced during the year and has helped me gather tools that I can use again and again throughout the year.
15. I am so thankful to my mentor and the DSA team, without this support in place I would have left my course

## Negative comments

1. It caused me distress having to wait from August 2020 until January 2021 before I could receive my DSA support. This was too long a delay and stopped me accessing the support I needed.
2. It was never explained to me what I needed to do and I have been very confused and stressed since applying. I have only just come to realise that I needed to do everything myself and I still don't know how to do that. I don't even fully understand how I am meant to get some of the things I was told I would get through my assessment. The only thing I managed to arrange and actively receive is fortnightly mentoring over Microsoft teams. I think that for disability support, it's very ableist and unsupportive of helping people understand. It's a stressful application and even more confusing. I applied for DSA because of anxiety and that almost stopped me from applying because it's so intimidating. I also think their emails and wording is confusing which confuses me even more as someone with ADHD.
3. I have also had to put in for extra hours it would be really helpful if the support was given and not had to chase this as has caused even more anxiety. on a positive the support has been exceptional and I cant thankyou enough it's got me through this degree I don't think I would have coped without this !!!so huge thank you!!
4. I have been frustrated by SFE processing of my application, which took 6 months for no apparent reason. Consequently, I am just on the cusp of using my DSA support and yet has not added to my learning experience. I feel very positive about the response I have had from DSA providers so far.
5. Very slow and complicated process which has added to my distress.
6. The sheer amount of paperwork that I have to work through every year, and the lack of clear guidance as to what I need to fill out, is extremely stressful. Please make the process easier for applications! Otherwise, people are dissuaded from applying for this vital service.

## Comments about face-to-face vs. online learning and support

1. It has affected me by not having a place to study and concentrate. Also find learning online a lot harder than in person.
2. I feel since I been having online support I'm not getting as much done as before, there much more problems with sometimes you can't hear or even share. Which has been really stressful
3. Support being 'hundreds' of miles away and so no use for face-to-face.
4. Social interaction, I feel that there is a great need for people to learn how to integrate again, this is my 1st year and have met my peers just once and this was when we had to wear face masks... people were expressionless, this creates a very isolated feeling, despite being around people - it's bizarre. 2. No exercises! which is incredibly important to keep mind, body and soul well
5. Meeting others and working together, I don't know anyone in my year since I haven't met them at all.
6. Overall, I really enjoy my support it helps me with my writing and planning. I would just like everything to be face to face as this is how I learn better.
7. My weekly support via zoom has been the only thing keeping me on track and keeping me going. My support is incredibly confidence giving :).
8. [name removed] has been amazing! She has helped and supported me so much, I don't know what I would have done without her. At first, I was apprehensive about online support, however I would pick online support in heart beat to have [name removed] be my Study Skills Tutor again.

9. My support through my mentor [name removed] has been vital and I believe it is the main reason I am coping well with my studies and mental health. It is amazing to know that I have someone to talk to, if I'm have a bad few days, I know she is there. The remote meeting allows me to be more open and it's more private. Thank you for providing this service, it has help significantly.
10. Despite the changes being made due to the pandemic, my support has still been effective and useful remotely. I am able to discuss my work by sharing my screen on Skype and I can still talk about action plans and strategies for my uni work load.
11. My online mentor has been invaluable during this year. It has been the only regular contact with the outside world. [name removed] has been hugely supportive over the last year...
12. My DSA support has been very helpful with dealing with the challenges of online learning and managing the workload of my course. It's been very easy to engage with the online support and feel comfortable talking about my problems.
13. If it wasn't for the help of my mentor through video chat, I feel that my studies would have had a severe impact on my mental health. Through my mentor and [name removed] it has given me a lot more confidence and the support has been absolutely amazing, both with my mental health and my studies, I cannot thank them enough for what they have done so far.
14. I get on very well with my mentor and I would like to continue to see her in the future. I would preferably like to continue seeing my mentor via zoom/Skype, as I find it is more convenient for myself and my mentor.
15. I've found that the remote support is much better for me and I get more from it and it's always more convenient especially as I don't live on campus, I don't have to travel over an hour for a session that's an hour I find the remote support on Microsoft teams much better in terms of time and productivity.
16. I have been really impressed with how my DSA mentors/tutors have adapted to delivering support online. As a distance learner, I really hope I have the opportunity to continue receiving my support online as I do not need to travel to campus as regularly as before lockdown.

## End of Report