



**University of
Sunderland**

**Examination & Assessment Procedures
for
Disabled Students
and
Students with
Specific Learning Difficulties**

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1 Rationale

- 1.1 Disabled students, students with compromised mental health and students with Specific Learning Difficulties (such as dyslexia) may be entitled to reasonable adjustments for examinations and assessments. These adjustments are known as accommodations.
- 1.2 An accommodation enables a student to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a way that is complementary to their learning and study styles. The aim is to maintain academic rigour but remove disadvantages by using strategies and technologies that alleviate the impact of a disability or Specific Learning Difficulty on the assessment process.
- 1.3 Accommodations apply to students' examinations and assessments throughout their studies.
- 1.4 The University promotes inclusivity and it has a duty to consider reasonable adjustments for assessment and examinations. However it is acknowledged that an examination in itself may be considered to form part of a competency standard. For example, a Legal Practice Course exam which is testing the ability to work at speed and under pressure in a legal situation. If there are any exams to which Faculty staff feel the competency test might apply they should be discussed with the Head of Department/Associate Dean, and then with Academic Services and Disability Services to ascertain if there are other methods of assessing the skills, and only then look to establish that particular exam as a competency test where reasonable adjustments might not apply.

2 How Accommodations Are Agreed

- 2.1 It is the responsibility of the student to make contact with the Disability Support Team (DST) to discuss and consider accommodations for assessments and examinations. Students should contact the DST as soon as possible and generally at least 4 weeks before any assessment or examination. For students who wish to use the services of a British Sign Language interpreter 6 weeks' notice is required (see Appendix B, pages 11 & 12).
- 2.2 Students must provide the Disability Support Team with written verification of their disability or Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) before accommodations can be implemented.
- 2.3 The Disability Support Team may seek further clarification of a student's requirements by consulting other professionals e.g. a psychologist, or by asking students to participate in a further assessment, such as a keyboarding speed test.

- 2.4 Accommodations are itemised on a student's Learning Support Memo which is issued by the Disability Support Team. Learning Support Memos are sent electronically to appropriate academic staff, Examination Coordinators and Disability Support Tutors within Faculty.

3 Procedure for University Main Assessment Periods

- 3.1 Accommodation needs for assessment periods are organised and delivered within Faculty and managed between the Faculty Examination Coordinator(s) and the Disability Support Team.
- 3.2 The Disability Support Team inform the Faculty of the accommodation needs for all students who register with the DST. This information is itemised on a student's Learning Support Memo which is sent by email to Faculty staff.
- 3.3 Faculty Examination Coordinators are responsible for ensuring that information from the Learning Support Memo is input directly into the timetabling system CMIS and for ensuring that agreed accommodations are put in place for each student.
- 3.4 Faculty Examination Coordinators are responsible for informing students that their accommodations have been put in place.
- 3.5 Faculty Examination Coordinators are responsible for informing invigilators of students who are entitled to accommodations for that examination.
- 3.6 During assessment periods the Disability Support Team may host examinations when Faculty cannot provide the necessary accommodations e.g. where specialist equipment is required. The Disability Support Team will notify Faculty of any such students so this can be annotated onto CMIS and confirmed to the student by the Examinations Coordinator.
- 3.7 In regard to 3.6, Faculty Examination Coordinators will provide the Disability Support Team with examination question papers and supplementary papers at least 2 days before the exam date.
- 3.8 In regard to 3.6 the Disability Support Team will, once a week, deliver completed examination papers to the Faculty office. Faculty administration staff is responsible for circulating completed answer papers to academic(s). Alternatively, Faculty staff should contact the Disability Support Team if they wish to collect the paper.

4 Accommodations for Coursework & Assessments other than during Main Examination Periods

- 4.1 Accommodations for assessments other than those scheduled during university wide assessment periods are organised by the individual lecturer/faculty. These may include presentations, time-constrained tests, MCQs and mid-semester exams.
- 4.2 Agreed accommodations are included in a student's Learning Support Memo, which is circulated to appropriate academic staff, including Faculty Disability Support Tutors and Faculty Examination Coordinators.
- 4.3 To receive approved accommodations for course work and other types of assessment students must liaise with the module lecturer. The module lecturer is responsible for implementing accommodations.
- 4.4 The Disability Support Team is not involved in the organisation and co-ordination of coursework assessments but is available to provide information and advice to Faculty staff.

5 Reviewing Accommodations

- 5.1 If a student's level of impairment or circumstances in regard to their disability or SpLD change, accommodations may be reviewed. A review can generally be undertaken up to 4 weeks prior to the assessment or examination.
- 5.2 A student requesting a review of accommodations from Faculty staff should, in the first instance, be referred to the Disability Support Team.
- 5.3 The Disability Support Team will review accommodations with the student and, where reasonable and appropriate, will explore additional or alternative arrangements. Any changes to accommodations will be agreed and communicated by the Disability Support Team in the form of a revised Learning Support Memo.
- 5.4 If after consideration, it becomes apparent that a student may have unreasonable difficulty sitting examinations or difficulty with the standard method of examination, alternative assessment methods may then be considered (see Section 6: Approval of Alternative Assessment Methods).

6 Approval of Alternative Assessment Methods

- 6.1 Alternative assessment methods may be appropriate when the addition of a student's agreed extra time would make the exam unreasonably long in

the context of their disability or condition, or if there are documented disability related reasons that indicate that consideration be given to alternative assessment methods. Alternative assessment options might include a viva, an essay or assignment, or an alternative examination paper (see Appendix C: Alternative Examination Papers).

- 6.2 Students must discuss the possibility of alternative assessment methods with the appropriate academic member of staff (usually the module lecturer). When considering alternative assessment methods Faculty staff should liaise with the Disability Support Team in regard to accepted good practice and the concept of 'reasonable adjustments'.
- 6.3 Lecturers must obtain the approval of the Module Leader before any alternative assessment method is implemented. This is to ensure that the new assessment method will afford students the opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of module learning outcomes.
- 6.4 Module Leaders should get written agreement (an email) from the Chair of the Module Board for an alternative assessment method.
- 6.5 For final year degree students or those exams that otherwise contribute to a non-degree final award, the appropriate external examiner must also be consulted prior to the agreement and implementation of alternative assessment methods or examination papers.
- 6.6 Staff involved in approving alternative methods of assessment should keep their own records of discussion and decisions. Copies of decisions should be kept in the student's central file, held by Faculty Examination Co-ordinators. Decisions made must be communicated in writing (email) to the Disability Support Team in advance of the assessment.

Appendix A

Guidance for Invigilators

- A.1 Invigilators will ensure that accommodations for disabled students and students with SpLDs are implemented during the examination.
- A.2 Invigilators should apply discretion when discussing accommodation needs with others or when implementing arrangements as many students have not disclosed their disability or SpLD to their peers.
- A.3 Invigilators will receive, with their general examination pack, details of student accommodations for the exam. Invigilators should check for any particular student requirements. Students in receipt of accommodations are encouraged to report to the invigilator, at the exam venue, 10 minutes before the exam is due to start to confirm accommodations are in place.

- A.4 If students do not present themselves it is important that invigilators do not call out their names and ask them to come forward.
- A.5 Students who present themselves and whose accommodations are not already known to the invigilator should produce a copy of the written confirmation of their accommodation needs as provided by the Faculty Examination Co-ordinator or the Disability Support Team.
- A.6 Invigilators must ensure that the main body of students leave the exam hall quickly and silently, so as not to distract others that may be still working. It is appropriate to suspend the exam and recommence it when the hall has been cleared.
- A.7 When a student uses a PC to write answers the invigilator should ensure that before the start of the exam students are instructed how and where to save their work. If required, Faculty must provide memory sticks or other storage devices. The Faculty/invigilator should check the PC's hard drive before the exam starts and observe that the candidate makes proper use of the technology throughout the exam. Printing a hard copy of answers does not constitute part of the exam time and should be done after it is finished. However, students with SpLDs must spell check their work during the exam time, not afterwards.
- A.8 If assistive technology is required a student may be approved to use their own laptop and assistive software for examinations. This will have been confirmed in advance by the Disability Support Team. The student should be given access to the examination room 30 minutes before the start of the exam to set up their kit and allow the Faculty/invigilator time to carry out appropriate checks.
- A.9 Invigilators should be aware that if a student has been awarded 'rest breaks as required' there is a possibility that the period of invigilation may be longer than that for a student with a stipulated number of rest breaks.
- A.10 **British Sign Language Interpreters**
The role of a BSL interpreter is to act as communicator. Invigilators should familiarise themselves in advance with the information in Appendix B11 and contact the Disability Support Team if they have any questions about working with a BSL interpreter.

APPENDIX B

Types of Accommodation

- B.1 Extra Time**
This is probably the most frequently required accommodation. It can be awarded for a number of reasons e.g. to allow a student with dyslexia time to re-read questions and plan and check answers, or to compensate someone who, due to a particular condition, writes slowly or experiences pain. There is no standard allocation of additional time; students' needs are assessed individually.
- B.2 SpLD Stickers**
A student with SpLDs is entitled to attach a yellow 'SpLD' sticker to any work submitted for marking. The sticker indicates to the marker that unless professional regulations stipulate otherwise, the work should not be downgraded for poor spelling or grammar.
- B.3 Separate Room**
Students may need to sit examinations in a separate room. Frequently this is because their accommodations e.g. use of a reader or a keyboard, would distract other students. A separate room may also be required because of the impact of a medical or psychological condition. Faculties are responsible for finding a separate room and invigilator and for informing students of the venue.
- B.4 Rest Breaks**
Students with conditions that cause severe pain and/or disrupt concentration can be awarded rest breaks. The break can be taken either inside or outside the exam hall/room. There is no set time for a rest break, although the average break is for 5-10 minutes.
- An invigilator always supervises breaks. The student's exam is suspended for the period of their break and the clock re-started afterwards.
- Some students are allowed 'rest breaks as required'. This is because some conditions fluctuate – on a good day a student may not need a break, on a bad day they may require several. Invigilators should keep a record of the number of rest breaks taken by a student who has been awarded 'rest breaks as required' and enclose the information with the completed examination paper(s).
- Sometimes a break is required for other reasons e.g. to allow a student to take medication or to eat or drink.
- B.5 Alternative Format Papers**
If a student has difficulty reading a standard paper an alternative format paper may be needed. Examples of this include enlarged font size or use

of coloured paper (to diminish the impact of visual disturbances). An electronic version of papers may be required e.g. by students with visual impairments who use speech output software. Less common is the provision of a voice recorded question paper. Electronic exam and assessment papers should be accompanied by a text version of the paper.

Please see Appendix B.8: Braille & Tactile Diagrams for information on students who use Braille.

B.6 Technology

Many students produce work more effectively if they can use technology. For some it is the only way they can do so independently. An example is the use of a PC, sometimes used in conjunction with assistive software such as a text enlarger or speech output. Other examples of assistive technology include a non-programmable spell checker/thesaurus or a CCTV to enlarge printed text. Students who use technology usually require a separate room and invigilator.

B.7 Recording Answers

A student may need to voice record their answers. The Disability Support Team will provide a digital recorder. The student has to sit the exam in a separate room and should be allowed time before the examination begins to familiarise themselves with the functions of the recorder. Afterwards the recording has to be transcribed verbatim by the Faculty before it is passed, together with the original recording, to the marker. Any notes that the student made during the exam should also be sent to the marker.

B.8 Braille & Tactile Diagrams

A visually impaired student may be a Braille user. As graphs and maps cannot be Brailled to a sufficiently high standard they will have to be produced, if possible, in the form of a tactile diagram. As Braille and transcription work is carried out by an external organisation at least 6 weeks advance notice is required in order to plan and prepare papers and to translate graphs, forms and maps into tactile diagrams. Staff who require Braille/tactile versions of papers should contact the Disability Support Team for advice as the paper may have to be redrafted or amended to enable it to be produced in Braille or as a tactile representation.

A printed text question paper must be provided to Invigilators alongside the Braille/tactile version.

The student's answers may need to be transcribed from Braille to printed text. Contact the Disability Support Team for advice.

B.9 Amanuensis

An amanuensis (scribe) writes down a candidate's dictated answers. An amanuensis should not give factual help or offer suggestions to a student,

or give advice on how to organise responses. Amanuenses must be comfortable with the process of taking dictation. A member of the University staff often acts as a combined amanuensis/invigilator. However some students prefer to use their own support worker as amanuensis and this will have been agreed in advance by the Disability Support Adviser and the university will provide an invigilator. Students using an amanuensis sit exams in a separate room.

When taking dictation from a student the amanuensis is to write what is dictated, including punctuation, and may only ask a student for clarification of what they said. An amanuensis may be required to draw maps, diagrams and graphs.

Most, but not all amanuenses prefer to write using a PC. Amanuensis support is provided in a separate room and often the student has also been awarded additional time. The student should be allowed to take a drink into the examination room. The University may feel it is appropriate to record the exam as a back-up to the dictated script. A decision to do so is reached by discussion between the Disability Support Team and appropriate Faculty staff.

An amanuensis may also be required to act as a reader for the examination.

B.10 Reader

A reader will read and re-read the questions or any part of the examination paper as well as any part of the student's text. The reader can only read the questions or answers as they are written on the paper. A student may prefer to use their regular reader/support worker. If so the Faculty must provide an invigilator. If the Faculty provides a reader they should be able to read clearly and accurately at a steady rate. Two copies of the examination paper are required for students using a reader. A separate room is essential.

B.11 British Sign Language (BSL)

Students who have BSL as their first language may use a BSL Interpreter is to act as communicator. BSL accommodations need to be planned well in advance and students are advised to contact the Disability Support Team 6 weeks before the exam schedule begins. The Disability Support Adviser will discuss with the student their level of skill and reach a decision based on the student's experience and the availability of qualified and experienced BSL interpreters.

There are two options for the use of BSL in an examination:

1. Interpreter Support

The aim is to ensure that the student understands the instructions pertaining to the exam and that they are given an opportunity to clarify any words or terminology contained in the exam questions. The student must

meet with the invigilator and interpreter at the exam room 20 minutes before the exam is due to start. The aim is to allow time for the student to read the paper and ask for clarification on any points regarding its content. The time is also used by the invigilator to check that the student understands the administrative procedures of the exam. After this clarification the interpreter leaves the examination room but stays close at hand so they can be called back, should an issue arise. The student writes their own answers.

2. Signing Answers

Students may prefer to sign their examination answers and to have the answers transcribed into a written format. There are two ways of doing this, depending on the student's skills and the experience and skills of available qualified BSL interpreters. If the BSL interpreter can touch type at speed then they may be able to simultaneously interpret and type the answers. If the BSL interpreter cannot touch type then they may have to dictate the student's answers to another person (amanuensis/scribe).

B.12 Vivas

Students who have difficulty writing down their thoughts and ideas may perform better in an oral examination, rather than undertake a written paper. Occasionally a viva is undertaken with a written paper to check a student's understanding of a subject. An academic involved in the subject must conduct the viva.

Deaf students or students with impaired hearing may use a BSL interpreter for a viva.

B.13 Other Accommodations

Students may need to use low-tech aids such as a footrest or a sloped writing board, or to sit in a particular chair, or use a task light.

Students may require a large desk or table to accommodate equipment and assistive technology or Braille papers.

Sometimes a piece of medical kit has to be set up in the examination room, for example a nebuliser for a student with severe asthma (a nebuliser is a small portable machine which administers concentrated doses of medication through a face mask).

A nurse or first aider may need to be close at hand in case the student takes ill or requires medical attention, say in the case of a student who has haemophilia.

Some students may have a condition that requires them to be located close to toilets or the door of an examination room.

Students may need a combination of accommodations, for example extra time, plus a separate room and use of a PC.

Appendix C

Alternative Examination Papers

- C.1 Alternative examination papers may be appropriate when the addition of a student's entitlement to extra time would make the exams too long, causing fatigue and under performance; or when extra time awarded creates exam clashes.
- C.2 Alternative papers are written specifically for an individual student and are taken under exam conditions. It is permissible to split the paper into two parts and schedule them on different days, spreading the exam over a longer period of time and making the length of each exam more acceptable.
- C.3 When sitting alternative papers students may still access other approved accommodations to complete the assessment i.e. use of a PC, amanuensis etc.
- C.4 Section 6 details the procedure for considering and approving alternative assessment methods, including the provision of alternative papers.

APPENDIX D

Role of Faculty Examination Coordinators

The role of Faculty Examination Coordinator for disabled students is to

- D.1 Receive from the Disability Support Team student Learning Support Memos that specify examination and assessment accommodations and input information into CMIS.
- D.2 Ensure that arrangements are made within the Faculty for student accommodations, in conjunction with appropriate Faculty staff and invigilators.
- D.3 Communicate to students that their accommodations have been put in place and confirm changes in venue, dates and time of examinations.
- D.4 Liaise with the Disability Support Team about student examination accommodations.
- D.5 Ensure that examination papers and additional papers (including those in alternative formats) are delivered to the Disability Support Team.