

**Dublin City University – Policy and Practice
on Assessment and Examination
Accommodations for Learners with
Disabilities**

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Dublin City University – Policy and Practice on Assessment and Examination Accommodations for Learners with Disabilities

1. General Principles

The University is committed to ensuring, **as far as is practicable and within the framework of current legislative requirements**, that its learners with disabilities will have equality of access to and participation in **all** assessment and examination procedures, this includes all formal end of semester examinations and any other assessments and examinations **that contribute to module and or course results** whether during a programme of study or in a final graduation year.

The University is also committed to ensuring that learners with disabilities will be enabled to demonstrate their knowledge and competency on an equal footing with their peers.

The granting of reasonable accommodations to learners with disabilities will at all times be consistent with the academic rigour of programmes and also maintain academic standards. The regime of reasonable accommodations will also ensure fairness to learners without disabilities. Ultimate responsibility for ensuring 'equality of access' to assessment and examinations lies with the University although a number of administrative units maybe involved in agreeing and delivering on reasonable accommodations.

The central tenet of the University's Examination and Assessment Policy for Learners with Disabilities is one of 'fairness and equality'. The Policy and its developed practice are grounded in a developing commonality of agreed policy in Irish HEIs.

International students attending the University's programmes should be aware that practice in relation to reasonable accommodations may be different in an Irish Higher Education context than in their home Higher Education Institution (HEI). Students with Disabilities who have had access to 'reasonable accommodations' in Irish State Examinations should be aware that interventions in HEI assessment and examinations are only granted after the completion of an assessment of need with the Disability Office. Reasonable Accommodations received at Leaving Certificate may not be deemed appropriate in a Higher Education environment due to the academic or vocational nature of programmes.

The granting of reasonable accommodations in the University's assessments and examinations are guided by the principles outlined above but also by the

nature of the accommodations that can reasonably be expected to be available in the learner's environment of professional practice following on from completion of their Higher Education studies.

The University's Disability Support Service's role is to advise in relation to the provision of reasonable accommodations, for learners with long term disabilities, in the University's assessment and examination's practice. Reasonable Accommodations should not be provided without prior consultation with the Disability Service in relation to the individual learner's disability or specific learning difficulty and its impact on teaching, learning and assessment. The Disability Service will liaise with Registry, in relation to reasonable accommodations in formal semester examinations and with individual faculty/school offices and academic staff specifically with regards to continuous assessments and class tests prior to their provision.

2. Definition of Disability

For the purpose of this policy the definition of disability is that encompassed by the Equality Act (2004) and the Equal Status Act (2000)

The legal definition of disability, which is outlined in the *Equality Act (2004)* *Equal Status Act (2000)* defines disability as follows:

- (a) "the total or partial absence of a person's bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of a person's body,
- (b) the presence in the body of organisms causing or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness,
- (c) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person's body,
- (d) a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or
- (e) a condition, illness or disease which affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour."

3. Temporary Disability

A learner is deemed to have a temporary disability, and should approach Registry rather than the Disability Service, if the disability is likely to last less than six weeks. In this case, the learner is not required to register with the Disability Service and should approach Registry directly to request any additional examination accommodations. The learner should approach Registry directly after becoming affected by the disability. If the learner has a temporary disability when completing an element of continuous assessment

or class test, the learner should contact the staff in their faculty office. Supporting documentation verifying the temporary disability will be required.

4. Evidence of Disability

A learner seeking the provision of reasonable accommodations in the University's Assessments or Examinations must provide relevant and up to date medical, psychological or other documentation from a medical or other consultant. Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties must furnish an educational psychologist report carried out within the last five years. A General Practitioner (G.P.) letter will not be accepted for the purpose of verification of disability for reasonable accommodations in University examinations.

5. Procedure for the granting of reasonable accommodations

A learner with an on-going disability or specific learning difficulty seeking the provision of reasonable accommodations in the University's assessments and examinations must register with the Disability Service and furnish the relevant supporting documentation. He/she must also complete an educational needs assessment with the Disability Service. He/she must also agree that information in relation to their disability and the provision of reasonable accommodations may be made known to a relevant academic, administrative and examination staff. All special accommodations will be reviewed by the Disability Service with individual learners on an annual basis.

5.1 Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

To avail of the provision of reasonable accommodations in the University's Assessments and Examinations a student with a specific learning difficulty must complete the following process:

1. Register with the Disability Service
2. Complete an educational needs assessment with the Disability Service
3. Provide an up to date Educational Psychologist's Report – no older than five years
4. Provide the State Examinations' Commission Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations (RACE) Documentation

A learner completing the process outlined above and providing the necessary documentation will receive, where necessary, additional time and the provision of notification to the marker of difficulties in spelling, writing and grammatical construction.

Learners with Specific Learning Difficulties will not normally be granted the provision of a reader, a scribe or taping in the University's Assessments or

Examinations. Students with specific learning difficulties who provide evidence of the following criteria in their Psychological Educational report:

Significant Writing Difficulty (<16 WPM) and
Significant Spelling Difficulty (<16th Percentile) and
Significant Reading Difficulty (<16th Percentile) (a sample of written work may be required)

will be provided with a computer with the relevant assistive technology and training in its use, on registering with the Disability Service, and may use a computer and relevant assistive technology software packages in the assessment of appropriate programme modules. Some course modules may not lend themselves to the use of a computer and technology due to the nature of the subject area being examined.

6. Application Process and Timescale

All learners with disabilities should register with the Disability Service and complete an educational assessment of need as soon as possible in the academic year. It is the individual learner's responsibility to ensure that they make contact and meet the Disability Service as soon as they have registered on their course. In order to avail of the provision of 'reasonable accommodations' in semester one examinations learners, including those on OSCAIL programmes, must register with the disability service by the 31st October of the relevant year. To avail of reasonable accommodations for the second semester examinations new learners with disabilities must have registered by the 28th of February of the relevant year.

7. Initial Responsibility

All learners with disabilities should register with the Disability Service and complete an educational assessment of need as soon as possible in the academic year, this is particularly important in order to ensure that 'reasonable accommodations' are in place in time for continuous assessments and in-class tests. It is the individual learner's responsibility to proactively engage with the Disability Service and the granting of reasonable accommodations is linked to the completion of a needs assessment and the provision by the learner of relevant supporting documentation. Reasonable accommodations in assessment and examination will not be granted outside the completion by the learner of this process. Note that disclosure of a disability by a learner at University registration does not mean that the learner is registered with the Disability Service or will have access to the range of services available to learners with disabilities, including the provision of reasonable accommodations in assessments and examinations. The collection of data in relation to disability at student registration is solely for the purpose of the statistical comparison of participation rates in higher education vis-à-vis the number of people with disabilities in the general population. The Disability Service will contact students who disclose their disability at student registration and invite them to register with the Disability Service and complete an assessment of need where the provision of 'reasonable

accommodations' in assessments and examinations can be discussed and agreed if appropriate.

8. Notification of Examination Venues

Learners with Disabilities will be notified of their examination venues by Registry, through their student portal page at least one week before the commencement of the relevant diet of examinations. Examination venues for Autumn repeat examinations are communicated by post one week prior to the start of the examinations. This time scale will also be the case for students on OSCAIL programmes. Students are advised by the Disability Service of examination accommodations following the completion of their needs assessment and verification of accommodations with Registry.

9. Failure to avail of additional arrangements

Failure by a learner with a disability to avail of prearranged reasonable accommodations in examinations, without medical or other legitimate reasons, will entail the withdrawal of those accommodations during the totality of the relevant semester's diet of examinations. A student whose additional arrangements have been withdrawn must complete a new educational needs assessment with the Disability Service before becoming eligible for any special accommodations again..

10. Anonymous Marking

Students with Disabilities are, where possible, marked anonymously in line with the University's policy on anonymous marking unless they request otherwise through the completion of an educational assessment of need and the granting of the type of reasonable accommodation where anonymity is impossible. Students with some types of disability may note this on their examination scripts in order to avail of a waiver in relation to poor grammar and spelling and the invigilator ensures that 'marking guidelines', (see Appendix 3) are included and forwarded to the relevant lecturing staff. It is also recognised that it is not always possible to preserve anonymity in very small examination centres.

11. Additional Time

Following the completion of an educational assessment of need additional time, according to need, will be allowed. Additional time is usually the provision of ten minutes extra per hour of examination. It is only in very exceptional circumstance that this time is extended beyond 10 minutes per hour.

Additional time is granted in the following circumstances:

- (a) Where the average speed of communication of the candidate is significantly slower than average.
- (b) Where disability worsens due to stress and/or environmental variations (e.g. those with some mental health or medical conditions).
- (c) Where candidates with speech difficulties are taking oral tests.
- (d) Where the completion of practical tasks is delayed due to the candidate's disability.
- (e) Where a candidate's reading speed is significantly slower than average

12. Alternative Venues

All learners with disabilities, receiving reasonable accommodations, normally sit examinations in different venues than their peer group. These venues will be shared with other students with disabilities. Only in very exceptional circumstances will a learner with a disability sit an examination in a separate and individual venue.

13. Use of Computer in Examinations

Criteria for Learners with Disabilities requiring the use of computers in Assessment and Examinations

The following students will be granted this reasonable accommodation subject to receipt of evidence of disability/specific learning difficulty:

- Students who are blind or have visual disability that require the use of specific assistive technology available only on a computer, such as screen readers or magnification software
- Students with physical disabilities who have dexterity problems that result in poor hand writing
- Students with specific medical conditions that result in diminished stamina and their evidence of disability confirms that the use of a pc will benefit the student and limit stamina difficulties
- Students with a specific learning difficulty who provide evidence of the following criteria in their Psychological Educational report:

Significant Writing Difficulty (<16 WPM) and
Significant Spelling Difficulty (<16th Percentile) and
Significant Reading Difficulty (<16th Percentile) and

A sample of written work may be required.

13.1 Assistive Technology

The use of a computer may be the primary and most effective means of communication by some candidates with disabilities. A computer must be

used only by the learner with a disability and not by somebody acting on her/his behalf.

It is the responsibility of the examination candidate to be proficient in the use of the computer and appropriate software. Likewise, the candidate should be proficient in the use of any piece of technological aid that she/he wishes to use.

All 'technological accommodations' granted in assessments and examinations are approved on an individual basis for each diet of examinations. Smaller shared examination venues and invigilators will be required.

The Disability Service will provide any piece of technological aid that a candidate wishes to use. All students using a computer/laptop in examinations must sign the form 'Use of computers in examination' and abide by rules set down.

13.2 Use of Computers in Examinations by students registered with the Disability Service.

The following criteria will apply:

Learners with a disability/specific learning difficulty who on completion of an educational assessment of need by the Disability Service have been granted the use of a laptop while in the University will be provided with a separate non wireless enabled computer, with the relevant Assistive Technology, by the Disability Service for the purpose of completing examinations.

Learners with a disability who use hi-tech assistive technology within the University **may** be allowed to **use their own equipment** in examinations if it is clear it is not practical to transfer software and/or other devices to an examination laptop. However, the computer, laptop or computer lab hosting the examination will not have wireless access during the period of the examination. This hi-tech assistive technology may include; voice recognition technology, document reading software, screen magnification and screen reader software.

For all students who have been granted this accommodation the following rule applies: Students will sign the attached use of computer form, or otherwise note their agreement to adhere to the University's Regulations (Appendix 2) This form outlines the University's regulations and states that if any unauthorised documents or other resources are found on a computer during inspection by qualified technical staff of Disability Services/Computer Services Department prior to each examination, then they immediately forfeit their right to use their own technology for the duration of their examinations. The University's disciplinary procedures will also apply.

Appendix One

Guidelines on reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities

1. Alternative Examination Arrangements

1.1 Time allowance

Additional time, according to need and as identified through the completion of an assessment of need by the student with ***the Disability Service*** will be allowed, in the following circumstances.

- (a) Where the average speed of communication of the candidate is significantly slower than average.
- (b) Where disability worsens due to stress and/or environmental variations (e.g. those with some mental health or medical conditions).
- (c) Where candidates with speech difficulties are taking oral tests.
- (d) Where the completion of practical tasks is delayed due to the candidate's disability.

1.2 Rest breaks

Some candidates may require rest breaks during an examination. These may be needed:

- If the student experiences fatigue such that they are unable to concentrate or communicate for an extended period of time;
- If the student requires medical or other treatment during an examination;
- If the student experiences worsening of physical or sensory disability without breaks over the examination time period, or is unable to maintain a suitable position for the examination time period.

If an examination is interrupted for rest breaks, the duration of the break shall not be deducted from the time allowed to complete the examination paper.

A candidate may be allowed to move around the venue, should this be required. Candidates who require rest breaks to use toilet or other facilities must be accompanied by an invigilator.

1.3 Physical space

The physical space available should be appropriate for the effective provision of the 'reasonable accommodation', **for example**.

- (a) A large table to accommodate enlarged papers, Braille material, and/or technological aids.
- (b) Adequate floor space for manoeuvring wheelchairs, mobility aids, crutches, canes and any other physical aid.

1.4 Personal assistants

Personal assistants carry out practical tasks for candidates whose disability affects their ability to perform such tasks. A personal assistant will be known to candidates. A personal assistant may be permitted to stay with the candidate in the examination venue.

1.5 Announcements

It will be the responsibility of Registry to ensure that all announcements/amendments by lecturers are conveyed to all students with disabilities sitting examinations in separate examination venues.

2. Alternative presentation of examination question papers

Depending on the candidate's disability, she or he may require an examination paper in one or more of the following formats. The University will ensure, as far as is practicable, that these are on offer.

- Electronic format,
- Braille
- Enlarged print, paper enlarged to A3 size or alternative font style
- Alternative coloured paper, e.g. yellow, grey, blue or green paper
- The paper may be read aloud to the student
- The questions may be communicated through an Interpreter

2.1 Electronic format

Examination question papers may be provided electronically, and accessed with a suitable computer, with or without assistive technology. Assistive technology used to access the examination paper may include screen or text reading software or screen magnification software.

The candidate may use a word processor to respond.

Candidates who may require an electronic format of the examination paper are those who:

- (a) Are dyslexic or have a specific learning disability
- (b) Are vision impaired or blind
- (c) Are slow readers due to physical limitations.

2.2 Braille

A Braille version of the examination paper will be made available when identified as a requirement through the completion of an assessment of need. Requests for examinations in Braille should, as in the case for all other facilities, be made well in advance of the examination to the Disability Service

A student requesting Braille examination papers will also be provided with a print and / or electronic version of the paper, and in the case of a print paper, access to a reader. This will ensure that an alternative means to access the paper is available to the candidate, should it be required.

Candidates who may require a Braille version of the examination paper are those who are blind or vision impaired and fluent Braille readers.

2.3 Enlarged print

Some candidates may need examination papers in enlarged print.

- Best practice guidelines indicate that A4 papers should not be simply enlarged to A3 size. The Disability Service will liaise with academic staff to ensure that examination papers will be produced: In an enlarged sans-serif font size on standard A4 paper.
- In an alternative font to suit the student's needs.

Candidates who may require enlarged print are those who are vision impaired, or in some circumstances those who have specific learning difficulties

2.4 Examination papers in colour

Some candidates may need the examination paper in a colour other than black print on whitepaper, for example:

- black print on yellow paper;
- black on blue;
- black on green, or
- black on grey.

The Disability Service will provide coloured transparencies or appropriate paper for this purpose.

Candidates who may require alternate coloured paper are those who have specific learning difficulties, are vision impaired and whose reading speed, accuracy or comfort reading is improved by alternative colour contrast.

2.5 Tactile representations of diagrams, graphs, maps, etc.

There are many courses within the University which rely on graphs, diagrams, maps, etc. to convey information. This type of information may be made available, wherever necessary, through tactile representation. Requests for such diagrams should be made well in advance of the examination. Examiners may also provide description of diagrams for inclusion with tactile diagrams. Candidates who may require tactile representations of diagrams are those who have visual impairment or visual perceptual impairment.

2.6 Readers

A reader will read and re-read the entire, or part of the examination paper, as well as any part of the candidate's text, as requested. Sometimes a candidate may need a reader and an amanuensis. In such instances the same person may act as both.

The University will ensure, as far as is practicable, that the reader will have good working knowledge of the subject under examination. She/He will be able to read accurately the examination paper at a reasonable rate.

A candidate should have had adequate practice in the use of a reader. If a reader is not the primary means by which a candidate is accessing an examination paper (e.g. if it is being provided electronically or in Braille), then it may be possible for the invigilator to read the paper or parts thereof to the candidate.

When a reader is required, it is best that she or he be directed by an appropriate lecturer as how best to assist the candidate in the examination. .

A Reader

- (a) Shall not give factual help or offer suggestions to candidate
- (b) Shall not advise the candidate on how to organise responses

Candidates who may require a reader include those who are:

- (a) Visually impaired
- (b) Slow readers due to physical limitations

2.7 Interpreters

An interpreter is a communicator who uses alternative modes of expression in order to make a text available to a candidate with a disability. Interpreters are used principally for deaf candidates.

Means of communication used include:

- (a) Use of sign language
- (b) Use of writing
- (c) Saying the word or phrase.

The interpreter may be made available to interpret when requested to do so by the candidate. Any words or phrases interpreted for the candidate must be underlined on the question paper, and this paper should be returned to the examiner. The University will ensure as far as is practicable, that the interpreter has a good working knowledge of the subject matter in question. If an interpreter is provided, additional time, a separate examination venue and appropriate invigilation will be granted.

The following methods are all possible and permission to employ one or more of these will be considered by ***the Disability Service*** where they are identified through an assessment of need.

- Dictation to an amanuensis
- Signing the examination
- Braille, Braille-mate, Braille 'n Speak, Braille n' Print
- Technological Aids.

2.8 Dictation to an amanuensis

Candidates who may require an amanuensis are those who:

- (a) Are visually impaired
- (b) have a Physical Disability

An amanuensis or scribe is an individual who types or writes down a student's dictated answers to questions in an examination. A taped record of the examination should be recorded in order to verify answers prepared and given by the student.

2.9 Using an Irish Sign Language Interpreter in examinations

Using an amanuensis

Candidates whose first language is Irish Sign Language (ISL) may wish to sign their examination and to have this simultaneously transcribed by an amanuensis. Clearly, the amanuensis in this instance would be proficient in sign language.

Using a video

Candidates whose first language is sign language may wish to sign their examination on video. Someone proficient in sign language in turn will transcribe this in print. If a candidate is allowed to sign the examination either to an amanuensis or on video, additional time, a separate venue and appropriate invigilation will be necessary.

Note: All rules governing the use of an amanuensis and transcription should apply equally to the above.

3. Braille, Braille-Mate, Braille n' Speak, Braille n' Print

Candidates who have a visual disability may use Braille in order to respond to examinations. However, it should not be assumed that all visually impaired candidates are fluent readers of Braille. In fact only a small percentage of visually impaired persons can read Braille.

It is advised that the Braille machine is attached and adapted to a printer, which will produce a printed text. If a printer is not available, a transcription in print of the Braille text should be made for the examiner marking the examination. The University will supply the printer, Braille paper and/or the computer printout paper.

Appendix Two

Responsibilities of Students with Disabilities in the use of computers/laptops in the University's Examinations

FORM OF UNDERTAKING – PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

You have been granted permission to use a computer/laptop in your examinations – no wireless enabled computer/laptop may be used in an examination. The Disability Service will normally provide the computer/laptop for use in your examination unless it is deemed impracticable because of the use of particular assistive technology. You may not use your own computer/laptop in examinations.

You should attend the examination centre 30 minutes before the start of the examination.

The computer/laptop should only be used by yourself and not by somebody acting on your behalf.

You should be proficient in the use of the computer and appropriate software. Likewise you should be proficient in the use of any piece of assistive technology that you wish to use.

You should not bring any computer discs, CDs, DVDs or USB Key into the examination hall.

You should only save complete examination scripts onto the floppy disc or CD provided by the Registry

You should sign the relevant floppy disc or CD and ensure it is named with the relevant examination, date and time.

You should at all times use great care in the use of a computer/laptop in examinations.

DECLARATION

I understand that I may not use my own computer in examinations. If any personal data files which have the potential to give an unfair advantage are found I will not be permitted to use computer/laptop in future examinations and the University's disciplinary procedures will apply.

Signed by:

Date:

Student Number:

Witnessed by:

Appendix 3



Assessment of Students with Dyslexia in Examination Situations

Conditions for Assessment

- Students must register with the Disability Support Service and have supporting documentation (An educational psychologist's report or equivalent).
- Every student goes through a process known as a *Needs Assessment*
- Dyslexic students are normally entitled to an extra 10 minutes per hour in exams.
- Some students may require the use of word-processing facilities in addition to extra time.

Marking and Feedback

The following points are an extract from
'Guidelines of good practice with respect to marking the work of dyslexic students' : Oxford Brookes University
http://www.brookes.ac.uk/asa/exams/pdfs/guidelines_marking_dyslexia.pdf!

General Guidelines

1. Mark only for Ideas, understanding & knowledge

If taking grammar, punctuation & spelling into consideration, make the student aware of this

2. Read Fast!

- Scan quickly through the answers to get an overall sense of content.
- By reading quickly it is easier to assess the work for ideas, understanding and knowledge.
- Sometimes structure is lacking but understanding & knowledge are present

3. Feedback – Positive & constructive

Students benefit greatly from feedback which is clearly expressed & positive.

4. If correcting the Student's English....

Make the student aware of this and identify key, repetitive errors. Explain these clearly to the student and offer the correct alternatives.

5. Check Drafts

If possible provide the student with feedback on draft assignments. Students benefit greatly from comments highlighting the correct presentation, structure & layout design.

Further Information

Should assessors require any further information about dyslexia or other forms of specific learning difficulty, they can contact Anne O'Connor by phoning extension 5160 or email anne.oconnor@dcu.ie

Alternatively, they can contact our Learning Support Tutor, Lucy Dendy on 087 288 9057 or email lucy.dendy@dcu.ie

There is also a range of material and publications available for assessors to consult. Check out <http://www.dcu.ie/students/disability/learning.shtml> for some useful tips.

