

Quality Code for Higher Education

Information about Reasonable Adjustments to Assessments for Students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD)

1. This document explains a number of alternative examination strategies which may be recommended by Additional Learning Support. This list is not exhaustive as recommendations are based on individual student's needs.
2. All alternative examination arrangements must be agreed with Additional Learning Support and are based on evidence of a student's difficulty. For example, the amount of extra time for a student with dyslexia is based on their Psychological Assessment Report. The required evidence is usually discussed or submitted as part of DSA process and is the student's responsibility. If assessment is required, it is the student's responsibility to pay for the assessment.

TIME-RELATED CHANGES (E.G. ADDITIONAL TIME, REST BREAKS)

Extra Time

3. A specified amount of extra time per hour may be recommended for students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) if the process of reading the examination paper, formulating, writing and/or checking their examination answers takes them longer than their non-disabled peers for reasons relating directly to their disability. This includes students with physical impairments, sensory impairments or dyslexia, as well as students with conditions resulting in the early onset of fatigue or chronic pain.
4. Students with conditions which can be exacerbated in an examination setting (such as those affecting students with mental health difficulties) may require additional time to relieve time pressure.
5. Usually the extra time allowance is calculated as a percentage, according to the student's level of need. For example, a student may be entitled to receive 25% extra time, or an extra 15 minutes per hour.
6. Most students with additional time sit their exams in a dedicated room.

Rest Breaks

7. Some students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) need additional time in the form of a rest break or rest breaks. For example, a student with a disability that causes pain may need to spend several minutes each hour standing and walking around to relieve pain. A student with arthritis affecting their hands may need to take a break from handwriting to rest their hands. Some students may require rest breaks in order to attend to personal needs.
8. Rest breaks may also be provided so that the examination session does not become an endurance test for the student, particularly if extra time has been allowed.
9. Time for rest breaks should be additional to the length of the exam. A student cannot use the rest break to continue working on the exam paper. Students who need to move around during rest breaks will be required to take their exams in their Department to minimise the disturbance to other students.

Flexible Time Arrangements

10. Some students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) may require flexibility in the scheduling of their examinations. This may involve any of the arrangements listed below. Specific arrangements would have to be negotiated with the Department, Additional Learning Support and the Examinations Office. The Examinations Office will be responsible for ensuring that the arrangements ensure the security of the examinations process.

Changes to scheduled examination times within a given day

11. For example, students with conditions that result in early fatigue and impaired concentration may require morning examinations in preference to afternoon examinations.

Changes to scheduled examination dates and times within the examination period

12. For example, a student who experienced fatigue as a result of a physical disability may find it difficult to manage a number of examinations in quick succession. Examinations may need to be scheduled so that, where possible, rest periods are provided between examinations.

Examinations split into more than one session

13. When additional time is provided for an examination which is already lengthy (e.g., three hours) the result may be too fatiguing, physically and mentally, for some students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD). Splitting such examinations into more than one session may be a more suitable arrangement.

The Use of Specific Personnel

14. Some students may require the use of specific personnel within examinations. Additional Learning Support will support training of staff. Their roles are detailed below. Where specific personnel provided by Additional Learning Support are used they will also be trained as invigilators. Please refer to the examination process, in Section 11 of the Quality Code for further information. All funding is subject to DSA funding or internal transfer if ALS staff is required.

Amanuensis (also called a Scribe)

15. Students whose ability to write or type is impaired may require an amanuensis to write for them. For example, a student may not be able to handwrite at all, may write very slowly, or may experience a high level of pain when handwriting. A student who is not able to maintain the posture for writing may require an amanuensis, as may a student who is able to present information better in an oral rather than a written format. Usually Additional Learning Support will first establish if the student is able to type as opposed to handwrite, however if typing is not a suitable option, then it may be decided that they should use an amanuensis.
16. The student dictates his/her answers to the amanuensis and the amanuensis will either handwrite or type the student's answer verbatim. It is suggested that the student and the amanuensis should meet prior to the examination for a practice session so that both parties are familiar with each other and with the process of using a scribe. Amanuenses are recruited and trained by Additional Learning Support and undertake a typed and written assessment as part of the selection process.

Reader

17. Students who are unable to read print or who access auditory information better than visual information because of a disability may require a reader. A reader dictates the examination paper as it is written and does not paraphrase or explain questions. A reader may also be required to read the student's examination answers back to them.

Interpreter

18. If any instructions are delivered orally, students who are deaf and who use sign language will require an interpreter. The interpreter would be provided as part of the DSA funding as with all non-medical help or internal transfer. The interpreter may be necessary to allow the student to clarify information on the examination paper. Students who are deaf may require an interpreter if the assessment involves the student giving an oral presentation.

Personal Assistant

19. A student who requires assistance in personal and/or practical ways during the course of an examination may require a Personal Assistant. The Personal Assistant may be required to provide assistance with manual tasks at the student's instruction; for example, turning pages, inserting a disk into a computer, removing the student's cardigan. A Personal Assistant may also be required to assist with personal care tasks during rest breaks. This is subject to DSA funding or the temporary access arrangement process, e.g. a broken arm.

Alternative forms of assessment

20. In certain circumstances a student may be unable to sit part of an assessment due to the nature of their disability. In this situation, it is important for the module leader to consider the learning outcomes and skills which the module is assessing and whether they can be assessed via an alternative method, e.g. coursework. Changes to the format of the assessment should be discussed with the awarding body's examination board and the student's Department. In such circumstances a request for an alteration to the assessment should be made to Higher Education Learning & Teaching Committee.

Use of Computers in Examinations

21. There has been an increasing demand by students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) to take their examinations on computers. This is not surprising as students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) are now often recommended computer equipment to support them in their studies. The use of computers in examinations may be for the purpose of providing examination questions in an appropriate format for the student. In addition, or alternatively, the personal computer may be used by the student to formulate and produce examination answers. This is subject to the awarding body's examination board eligibility. This is also subject to SFE's position on computers for all students.
22. Most students who require the use of a standard computer in exams will be seated in the computer examination room. The Examinations Office is responsible for this type of arrangement. Students who require specialist computer software or who need rest breaks or specialist ergonomic equipment will need to sit their examinations in their departments. Responsibility for this provision is with the Department. Where specialist equipment is required the Department should liaise with Additional Learning Support. This is subject to the awarding body's examination board eligibility.
23. The computer software that can be used in examinations will include software such as word processing and spread sheet packages. Word processing packages should be in accordance with the College standards and include spelling and grammar checkers. Specialist software may only be used if it has been explicitly recommended by Additional Learning Support.

Guidelines for the Use of Computers in Examinations:

24. The following guidelines apply to a student using a personal computer to produce examination answers.

25. Generally students will not be allowed to use their own computer equipment, as the College will attempt to provide any equipment that they may require. In rare cases where the student requires personalised software such as Jaws the student's own computer may be used. This must be set up by a qualified technician and all of the student's files should be copied onto 2 portable storage devices. These files can be restored after the examination.

26. A blank data stick should be supplied by the College, which will be initialised and labelled with the student's name, student number and time of the examination. The answers will be printed out immediately after completion of the examination. The printed answer paper will be checked and each page signed by the student. Where students are unable to sign the examination paper their personal assistant or the invigilator will be required to sign the printed answers for them in their presence.
27. To ensure that the answers can always be printed out there should ideally be at least one printer available in the computer room assigned for the purpose of the examination of students with a learning difficulty or disability (LDD). If it is not possible to have a printer available or there is a printer failure then the completed examination paper may be copied onto another data stick as a back-up.
28. Extra time should be allowed for printing of the examination answers and checking the quality of the printout. Both these tasks should be carried out under supervision. The data stick should be returned with the printed examination script and any rough working the student wishes to hand in.
29. In order to minimise the chance of the student's examination being lost due to equipment failure, the answers should be saved to consecutive data sticks every 10 to 15 minutes, these should also be provided by the College. In the event of a PC break down the student will be required to change PCs and continue working. In this case the amount of time lost during the changeover plus the 10-15 minutes since the last file save shall be added to the examination writing time.

TYPES OF IMPAIRMENT AND RELATED ALTERNATIVE EXAMINATION STRATEGIES

30. This section outlines the broad types of disability and the associated difficulties for which an alternative assessment strategy may be required. Underneath each difficulty is a list of appropriate alternative assessment. It is important to remember that students may have a number of difficulties associated with their disability and may also have more than one type of disability. As such, some students require a mix of alternative assessment strategies.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (or Myalgic Encephalomyelitis)

31. This may cause tiredness, headache, pain, general weakness and impaired concentration. The condition may gradually improve but can be subject to relapse. It is important that appropriate furniture is considered including desk/chair heights and the use of a sloping writing surface. Flexibility may be needed in scheduling examinations.

Difficulty: impaired concentration due to fatigue, especially in the morning.

Alternative: extra time, rest breaks, flexible time, afternoon only exams.

Difficulty: low endurance for writing/ slow writing speed.

Alternatives: scribe, extra time, rest breaks, computer.

Conditions which cause chronic pain

32. There are a number of causes of chronic pain. Students with this difficulty may require rest breaks to change posture. Appropriate furniture should be provided e.g. supportive chair.

Difficulty: unable to maintain posture to write for length of exam.

Alternatives: scribe, extra time, rest breaks, flexible time, computer if easier to type.

Dyslexia / Specific Learning Difficulty

33. This term refers to a range of difficulties with receiving, processing, expressing or retrieving information. Students may have difficulties with reading, writing (organisation/structure, spelling, grammar, and punctuation) and memory. Some students may have difficulties with using numbers. The amount of extra time recommended will be based on the student's psychological report.

Difficulty: accessing information in a written form.

Alternatives: Reader, extra time.

Difficulty: expressing own knowledge in a written form.

Alternatives: extra time, scribe, computer with use of spell-checker.

Hearing Impairment

34. Students may have a hearing loss that can range from partial to a total loss. Depending on the extent of loss, communication is through hearing aids, lip reading, 'cued speech', sign language/signed English. A hearing loss can affect the development of language skills such as speech, reading and writing depending when the loss occurred. Sign language may be a first language to individuals whose hearing loss occurred prior to language development.

Difficulty: unable to access oral information (e.g. examination instructions). A separate examination venue may also be appropriate.

Alternatives: interpreter, facing student and speaking clearly (for lip-reading), all instructions produced in writing, use of an induction loop.¹

Difficulty: English difficulties

Alternatives: additional time, dictionary/thesaurus, computer with spell-checker.

Medical Condition

35. There are obviously too many conditions to list individually. While individual conditions may cause difficulties, students on prescribed medication may also have associated difficulties. Specific permission may be required to take medication, move around or lie down, eat or drink. A Personal Assistant may be required if a condition is severe. Attention should be paid to the furniture and examination venue. A Personal Assistant will only be granted in accordance with the DSA needs assessment. All alternative arrangements may be appropriate.

Mental Health Difficulties

36. Students may have a range of difficulties such as anxiety, depression or obsessive compulsive difficulties. Some students may be subject to panic attacks. Difficulties may affect concentration and attention. If students are taking prescription medication they may be affected by side effects such as drowsiness. These difficulties may become acute under exam conditions. Students with high anxiety levels and/or panic attacks can take their exams in an alternative examination room. A separate examination venue may also be appropriate.

Difficulties: extreme examination related anxiety/stress, reduced ability to maintain concentration.

Alternatives: separate examination room, rest breaks, flexible time.

¹ A portable loop system can be borrowed from Additional Learning Support

Physical Disability

37. This may involve impaired function in a part of the body, inability to move a body part or inability to co-ordinate movement. Students may require a separate examination venue. Appropriate furniture should be provided and attention should be paid to the physical environment. A student, who has difficulty manipulating the immediate environment e.g. turning pages, inserting computer discs, may require a Personal Assistant.

Difficulty: inability to write using a pen/reduced writing speed

Alternatives: scribe, computer if typing accuracy not affected, extra time, rest-breaks if fatigue occurs.

Difficulty: involuntary head movements interfering with reading and writing.

Alternatives: reader, scribe, large print, computer with voice synthesiser or large print, extra time.

Repetitive Strain Injury

38. A range of injuries caused by overuse resulting in pain/stiffness in hands, wrists, forearms and neck. A student may have difficulty in manual tasks such as writing. Consideration needs to be given to appropriate furniture: desk and chair heights, sloped writing board, and to adequate space for equipment and personnel. Extra time for the student to write can create difficulties as this may make the students condition worse. Advice should be sought from the student's GP. This may be at a cost to the student as this is not covered by ALS/DSA funding methodologies.

Difficulty: difficulty with writing / slow writing speed.

Alternatives: scribe, additional time, flexible time, rest-breaks, computer if typing is easier.

Visual Impairment

39. A person with a visual impairment will have a loss of vision, which can range from low vision to no functional vision. Consideration needs to be given to the physical environment especially the lighting when a student has low vision. A separate examination venue should be considered which includes space for both equipment and personnel.

Difficulty: unable to read examination questions in standard print.

Alternatives: reader, taped questions, Braille papers, large print, closed-circuit television (CCTV), computer with large print or voice synthesiser.

Difficulty: unable to see handwriting when answering questions.

Alternatives: scribe, CCTV, computer with specialist software.