

# Examinations Policy for Disabled and Dyslexic Students

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## Rationale

- 1.1 Among the obligations imposed on the University by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Part IV (1995) [1] and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (2001) [2] is a requirement to make 'reasonable adjustments' such as special examination arrangements which adjust the examination situation to create a fair assessment process. The University has undertaken such adjustments for many years and the Act simply confirms good practice.
- 1.2 There is a wide variety of disabilities which may affect study in Higher Education. These include physical disabilities, sensory impairments, specific learning difficulties [3] (e.g. dyslexia or dyspraxia), and mental health difficulties. It is therefore impossible to state requirements which would apply to all disabled and dyslexic students. In some cases special arrangements permit the student to take the standard examination with some modifications e.g. brailled papers or additional time to complete the paper; in other cases it is necessary to negotiate alternative assessment arrangements, with due regard to parity in the standard required e.g. a viva in place of written examination.
- 1.3 Special examination arrangements will enable the student to demonstrate his/her knowledge and understanding of the subject notwithstanding his/her disability or specific learning difficulty.
- 1.4 However, provided it has considered any 'reasonable adjustments' that can be made to examination arrangements to ensure that students with disabilities are not placed at a disadvantage, the University is not obliged to accept a standard of achievement that is lower than it would accept from a student without a disability.
- 1.5 The DDA does not state what institutions are required to provide as reasonable adjustments and institutions have to take responsibility for deciding on what would be considered reasonable in each individual case. Some guidance can be found in the Disability Rights Commission 'Guidance on post-16 education. This guidance is not legally binding but it can be taken into account by courts and tribunals. For example: 5.78 of the guidance states *although an education provider has no duty to alter a competence standard, it needs to consider whether or not a reasonable adjustment could be made to some aspect of the process by which it assesses a competence standard.* An example is cited in the guidance of extra time for dyslexia *as likely to be a reasonable adjustment.*

- 1.6 Special examination arrangements are for disabled and dyslexic students and are separate from Special Considerations. A disabled or dyslexic student for whom special examination arrangements apply might still be eligible to receive extra consideration under the Special Considerations policy if the student's disability results in additional difficulties which had not already been foreseen or where an *additional* temporary condition/disability occurs which affects the examination process. If, however, the condition is exacerbated by the assessment process this would be considered under the Examination policy. If students do not have a recognised disability but require special examination arrangements these requests would fall under the Special Considerations policy.
- 1.7 This policy is intended to consider reasonable adjustments for assessments undertaken under timed conditions only. Other assessments are not covered by this policy. The University considers that reasonable adjustments for assessed coursework should largely take place before coursework is handed in. Alternatively, Faculties might consider alternative forms of assessment when appropriate. Guidance about reasonable adjustments is available in the Guidance on Making Reasonable Adjustments for Students with Disabilities.

## Policy

- 2.1 The University is required under the terms of the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties. Additional examination arrangements represent reasonable adjustments relative to the requirements of the Equality Act. A flexible policy of recommendations for special arrangements for examinations will be adhered to in order to ensure that no student is disadvantaged because of his/her specific needs and that the University's legal obligations are met. These recommendations will not extend to adjustments of the 'competence standards' expected in relation to any particular examination.
- 2.2 Enabling Services at the University [4] are responsible for making appropriate recommendations for special examination arrangements concerning individual students who have disclosed a disability, health condition, mental health difficulty or a specific learning difficulty. The purpose of this centralised process is to ensure parity across different Faculties and programmes. (See Appendix 1.)
- 2.3 It is the responsibility of the Faculty's Examination Officer(s) to organise the facilities required in liaison with the University Examinations, Awards and Graduation Team. Any additional costs are **not** charged to the individual student.
- 2.4 Special examination arrangements will apply to all examinations and in-house assessments, as well as practical examinations where appropriate. It is recognised that in some Faculties professional regulations will not allow special examination arrangements for some practical examinations. (E.g. see Appendix 2 for Faculty of Medicine Examination Policy.)

## Procedure

- 3.1 It is important to ascertain the student's **current** needs. Although a student may previously have received special examination arrangements this does not provide sufficient grounds for making similar arrangements at HE level. Any consideration of special arrangements at university level must take into account the student's current capability, and the demands of the programme of study.
- 3.2 It is important that the student's needs are assessed as soon as possible during the academic year. Students with specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia/dyspraxia), disabilities, long-term health conditions or mental health difficulties can register with Enabling Services as soon as they have enrolled with the University. It is essential that students register with Enabling Services for additional support (such as extra time in examinations) to be put in place; students are able to register at any point in their course although it is beneficial to register as early as possible.
- 3.3 In the case of 'standard' recommendations [6] such as 25% extra time [7] these will be entered onto Banner by Enabling Services without prior consultation with the Faculty. The

Faculty will be sent information about the recommendations for each student. If, however, the special examination arrangements are more complex, Enabling Services will contact the Faculty in the first instance and any recommendations will be negotiated and agreed with the Faculty before the information is put onto Banner. It is recognised that in a few cases the professional body requirements which are associated with some courses (e.g. Health Professions) may preclude the application of these recommendations. (See Appendix 2 for an example.)

- 3.4 In each case students will be expected to produce documentary evidence of their disability or specific learning difficulty.

In the case of **students with disabilities or mental health difficulties** this will take the form of a letter from the student's GP, consultant or other relevant health professional.

In the case of the **students with specific learning difficulties** this will take the form of a full diagnostic educational assessment report (post 16 years of age) by either an Educational Psychologist or an appropriate Specialist Dyslexia Tutor. (Reports for GCSE or A level examination arrangements or screening assessment reports are not acceptable.) Students will need to provide a copy of the assessment report to Enabling Services who will make a decision about whether the report is appropriate. Enabling Services will organise an updated assessment for the student if necessary. If this is not possible before the University deadline [8] and there is clear evidence of dyslexia or other specific learning difficulties interim recommendations can be put in place.

- 3.5 Recommendations are made to the Faculty and Examinations, Awards and Graduation Team after the student's needs have been assessed by the appropriate service. In most cases these needs would not be re-assessed before each examination. However, in some cases it might be necessary, for example if a student's condition changes or additional conditions need to be taken into consideration.
- 3.6 The University's Examinations, Awards and Graduation Team will inform Faculties and Enabling Services of the deadline by which students must make themselves known to Enabling Services, and also the date by which all recommendations should be received. In exceptional circumstances, however, the Examinations, Awards and Graduation Team will try to accommodate students' needs after the agreed deadline but it will not be possible to guarantee this.

## **Provision**

A flexible approach to need can be made by considering one or more of the following arrangements. Some students may require a combination of provision.

### **4.1 Standard recommendations**

1. 25% extra time in an Additional Exam Requirements room [9] for examinations with a substantial written component [10].
2. Identification of scripts by a coloured sticker, to ensure that in 'anonymous marking' a dyslexic student or a student with other specific learning difficulties is not penalised for typical dyslexic spelling and syntax errors (See Appendix 3.)

### **4.2 Other recommendations**

(to be agreed with the appropriate Service and the Faculty)

- Additional time in excess of 25%
- Extra time for all examinations, including examinations which do not have a substantial written component
- Examinations in the Faculty with rest breaks of up to 10 minutes per hour.
- Use of a computer (which has been checked to ensure that it is 'clean'), in a separate room [11].
- Room alone with an invigilator.
- A reader (Notes for Guidance for Readers are provided in Appendix 4).

- A scribe – usually with extra time in a separate room. (Notes for Guidance for a scribe are provided in Appendix 5).
- Papers provided in alternative formats e.g. enlarged font, specific typeface or braille.
- A recording of the examination paper in a separate room – sometimes with the provision of some extra time to account for the manipulation of the machine.
- Use of a recorder to produce spoken responses which are later transcribed into text by a typist for marking (arrangements should be made for the student to review the typescript to check for errors before marking).
- Use of a computer with voice-activated software and additional extra time, depending on the expertise of the user. N.B. This will be on the student's own computer because of the nature of the software. The computer will need to be checked to ensure that it is 'clean'.
- Provision of rest periods in excess of ten minutes per hour. Rest periods would be provided in addition to any extra time arrangements.
- Where examinations exceed three hours because of additional time, consideration may be given to offering the examination in two or more parts (e.g. morning and afternoon, or on two successive days) in order to reduce any disadvantage to the student due to the effects of fatigue.
- For students who are prone to fatigue, Faculties may be asked to make independent arrangements so that examinations are spaced with at least one day's rest between them, in order to avoid the effects of physical fatigue.
- Alternative timing to provide for a late or early start according to individual needs.
- Extra time for printing out answers prepared on a computer.
- Smaller venue (up to 6 people).
- Option to sit exams at home or in halls in the presence of a staff member from Education Support in addition to the invigilator e.g. student's mentor.
- Option for student sitting exams in the Faculty to have a member of Education Support present in addition to the invigilator, e.g. the student's mentor.
- Provision of an ergonomic chair, height adjustable desk or other item of specialist equipment.
- In exceptional cases, alternative assessments might need to be arranged where there is an alternative method available for assessing the competency being examined e.g. take-home exams, essays to complete in the examination period, option of a viva instead of written examinations or an informal post-examination viva.

## **Appendix 1: Identification Procedures: Enabling Services**

### **A: Enabling Services Registration Procedure**

1. All students who have applied to the University through UCAS are sent information about Enabling Services. All Students who have declared a disability on their UCAS or Direct Admission application forms are contacted by Enabling Services prior to entry. Students with physical disabilities, long-term health conditions or mental health difficulties are sent a questionnaire by Enabling Services and depending on the severity of need, will be invited to meet a specialist disability practitioner to discuss support needs before they start the course. Other students are seen by Enabling Services as soon as possible after entry.
2. Enabling Services meets with students to ascertain the effects of their specific learning difficulty (such as dyslexia) or disability on their studying, as appropriate. In general, students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia are offered individual tutorial support as well as group workshops. Students with disabilities (such as long-term health condition and mental health difficulties) are offered an intake assessment at their first appointment where their needs are discussed and, if required, they are allocated mentor support.
3. Enabling Services sends a memo to the student's Faculty informing the Faculty about the nature of the specific learning difficulty or disability and setting out recommendations for special examination arrangements together with other reasonable adjustments and support and advice, as appropriate.
4. If an updated diagnostic assessment is required for students with specific learning difficulties (such as dyslexia) Enabling Services will arrange this for the student.
5. Procedures for students who have not been assessed as dyslexic
  - i. A student can request an initial dyslexia screening assessment during the academic year. This consists of an interview with a specialist dyslexia practitioner. The results of the initial screening will indicate whether the student needs to go forward for a full dyslexia assessment.
  - ii. The student will be offered a full diagnostic assessment as appropriate. Depending on the results of the diagnostic assessment, the procedures above will then be completed.

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## **Appendix 2: Faculty of Medicine: Adjustment to Assessment for students with a disability or learning difficulty (UG programmes)**

### **Introduction:**

The University of Southampton has many students with various disabilities, chronic medical conditions and specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dyspraxia). These students are entitled to a range of additional support in their studies, depending on their individual needs.

The definition of "disability" is drawn from legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) later subsumed under the Equality Act 2010 and encompasses the obvious physical and sensory impairments, but also chronic conditions involving pain, reduced dexterity or fatigue, mental health difficulties, and recurrent conditions such as epilepsy. People with impairments of less than 12 months duration are unlikely to be included within the Equality Act. However, temporary conditions with effects lasting less than 12 months may also be supported depending on individual circumstances.

The Faculty wishes to support students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions and learning differences, to achieve their full academic potential. The BM programmes have a strong vocational component and students also need to be safe and competent practitioners throughout their studies and after graduation, as outlined by the General Medical Council's publications *Good Medical Practice*, *Tomorrow's Doctors*, *Medical Students: Professional Behaviour and Fitness to Practise* and *Gateways to the Profession Advising Medical Schools: encouraging disabled students*.

The Equality Act 2010 made it unlawful to treat a person less favourably than someone else, or to fail to make a reasonable adjustment, for reasons relating to a disability, unless that discrimination can be formally justified under one of the criteria identified in the legislation. These criteria include maintaining academic or other standards (e.g. professional body requirements) and health and safety issues specific to the individual situation. However students should be aware that the Equality Act does not automatically guarantee that they will be accepted onto a course in medicine leading to a medical degree. An assessment will be made of the individual's precise circumstances by the disability services and occupational health service.

The Faculty of Medicine's policy aims to support students whilst ensuring that graduates are able to practise safely as a doctor, patients' safety is always paramount.

### **The General Medical Council:**

The General Medical Council's publication *Good Medical Practice* stipulates that in providing care doctors must "keep clear, accurate and legible records which report the relevant clinical findings, the decisions made, the information given to patients and any drugs prescribed or other investigation or treatment". By awarding a medical degree a University is confirming that the graduate is fit to practise as a Foundation Doctor to the high standards laid down by the GMC in its guidance to the medical profession *Good Medical Practice*.

### **Fitness to Practise:**

If a student's ability to study is considered to be so severely affected by their condition that it is likely to affect their future practice and employment as a medical practitioner, their case will be considered by the Faculty's Student Progress Committee and, if necessary, they will be required to attend a Health Screening Panel as part of the Faculty's Fitness to Practise Policy. Full details of the Faculty's Fitness to Practise Policy can be found within [Policies and Guidance Section](#) of the Faculty's website.

### **University Enabling Services and assessment of disability and/or specific learning difficulty:**

The Faculty of Medicine has a special responsibility to ensure that all students will be eligible for registration by the General Medical Council upon graduation. It is important that students are able to fulfil the rigorous demands of professional fitness to practise.

Enabling Services at the University supports students with a full range of disabilities and specific learning difficulties. All students with a disability are welcome to request a prospective visit to Enabling Services. Students who indicate on their UCAS form that they have a disability will be referred to the University's Enabling Services during the application process. All medical students undergo health screening by the Occupational Health Department of Southampton University NHS

Trust, prior to enrolment. A student may also self-refer to Enabling Services at the University at any time during their programme.

Students who indicate on their UCAS form that they are dyslexic (or have a specific learning difficulty) will be referred to the University's Enabling Services on enrolment. However, students with dyslexia are also welcome to request a prospective visit to the University's Enabling Services. Students who declare that they are dyslexic at any time during their programme will be required to undertake an assessment of their dyslexia through Enabling Services at the University. A Pastoral Tutor who considers that a student may have a specific learning difficulty may also refer a student to Enabling Services for assessment. A student may also self-refer to Enabling Services at any time during their programme.

### **Reasonable Adjustments for Examinations and Assessments:**

- For those students with learning difficulties (such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or dyscalculia) undertaking *written* assessments under examination conditions, the following list represents the Faculty's standard adjustments which will normally be accepted if recommended by Enabling Services at the University:
  - 25% additional time in an Additional Examination Requirements room
  - Identification of examination scripts by a coloured sticker to ensure that, in anonymous marking, a student with a specific learning difference is not penalised for typical spelling and syntax errors
  - Examinations in Faculty with rest breaks of up to 10 minutes per hour
  - Use of a "clean" computer for examinations requiring essay answers (not applicable to short notes or MCQ type examinations),
  - Use of coloured overlay, if recommended
- For all other disabilities, consideration will be given to each individual case. Approval of such cases cannot be guaranteed by the Faculty as each student's ability to achieve the required competencies of the programme must be assessed and will depend on the nature of the disability concerned. Each case will be referred to the Faculty's Student Progress Committee and each case will be considered alongside the GMC guidelines. As part of this approval process, a student may be referred to the Occupational Health Service for further assessment of their Fitness to Practise.
- Students undertaking spotter or problem solving examinations may be given additional time for reading and writing at each station if it is appropriate to their circumstances. This does not usually include clinical examinations such as the Mini CEx or OSCE (any "reasonable adjustments" to clinical situations would be recommended by occupational health following their assessment of fitness to practise and in line with GMC guidelines).
- Students will have the opportunity to take examinations in two parts if they exceed 3 hours.

It should be noted that, given the nature of the BM programmes and graduates' future employment as doctors, it cannot be guaranteed that additional examination recommendations will be approved.

### **Procedure for Additional Examination Recommendations (AERs):**

1. A student will be identified as having a disability or learning difficulty by Enabling Services.
2. The Faculty Student Office will receive a written report from Enabling Services, confirming that a student has been identified as having a disability or a specific learning difficulty, such as dyslexia. The Enabling Services' report will recommend reasonable adjustments to assessments.
3. Standard adjustments (as listed above) for students with learning difficulties such as dyslexia will normally be accepted and the Faculty will contact each student and the respective originating service to confirm this acceptance. Should a recommendation for a student with

learning difficulties fall outside of the standard adjustments listed above, the case would need consideration by the Faculty's Undergraduate Student Progress Committee (see point 4).

4. AERs received for any other disability (or for adjustments which fall outside of the standard adjustments for students with learning difficulties) will be referred to the Faculty's Undergraduate Student Progress Committee for approval. This may involve a further referral to the Occupational Health Service for assessment of a student's need for the adjustment and/or Fitness to Practise.
5. Once the adjustment is approved or refused the Faculty will contact each student and Enabling Services to confirm the outcome. After discussion, a lesser adjustment may be agreed.
6. For all approved cases, every effort will be made to put the AER in place for the next suite of assessments. However, this can only be guaranteed if the Faculty is given sufficient notice of the recommendation.
7. For those disabilities, impairments or conditions that have the propensity to fluctuate, i.e. to improve or deteriorate, the Faculty will require the student to return to Enabling Services for annual review of the AER.



### Appendix 3: Marking dyslexic students' [14] scripts

Note this relates to examinations only.

#### Types of written error

Some students give cause for concern because of the **unexpected**, poor quality written work. The main features which tutors may question are:

#### Inconsistencies in spelling

- a specific word misspelled in many different ways on one page
- simple, high frequency words such as *who* and *how* misspelled or muddled
- parts of multi-syllable words in incorrect order
- letters within words out of sequence e.g. **flied/feild** for **field**
- a tendency to use phonetic spelling
- capital letters used in the wrong place
- substituting less effective words because of worries about spelling

#### Weak sentence construction

- words missed out of sentences
- phrases not in the correct order
- meandering construction – too many ideas telescoped together
- lack of sophisticated use of punctuation
- punctuation muddled e.g. *the boys hats'* for *the boys' hats*
- lack of sound, grammatical construction
- inconsistent use of tense
- poor essay structure
- weak sequencing of ideas, paragraphs and sentences
- cause and effect in incorrect sequence
- lack of confidence in using abstract language
- lack of awareness of writing genre

The above points are not intended to be an exhaustive checklist but just examples of typical difficulties which are observable when marking written work.

#### **Appendix 4: Guidelines for the use of readers**

A reader is a person who, on request, will read to the student:

- the entire (or part of the) examination paper
- any part of the student's answers

For students requiring a reader and a scribe, the same person may act as both.

- Additional time should be permitted for the use of a reader.
- A reader will normally be a responsible adult who is able to read accurately and at a reasonable rate and who has a working knowledge of the subject and the terminology.
- A reader is responsible to the Faculty Examination Officer, and the person appointed to act as the reader must be acceptable to the Faculty Examination Officer.
- A reader should not normally be one of the student's subject tutors. On no account may a relative of the student be used as a reader.
- Candidates should be provided with rough paper or an additional answer book for all rough workings which must be handed in at the end of the examination
- A student should, wherever possible, have adequate practice in the use of a reader.
- A student using a reader must be accommodated in such a way that no other student is able to hear what is being read.

During the examination a reader:

- must read accurately
- must only read the rubrics and questions, not explain or clarify
- must neither give factual help to the student nor offer any suggestions
- must not advise the student regarding which questions to do, when to move on to the next question, or the order in which the questions should be done
- can only repeat instructions given on the examination paper when the reader is specifically requested to do so by the student
- can read the responses when specifically requested to do so by the student
- must, if requested, give the spelling of a word which occurs in the question paper - otherwise spellings must not be given
- must not expect to read throughout the examination because the student will be expected to carry out some form of planning for each response.

## Appendix 5: Guidelines for the use of a scribe

A scribe writes down, types or word processes a candidate's dictated answers to questions for the student. For students requiring a reader and a scribe, the same person may act as both.

- Additional time should be permitted for the use of a scribe. This will normally be an extra 10 minutes per examination to allow for printing out of typed scripts for checking by the students.
- A scribe will normally be a responsible adult who is able to produce an accurate record of the student's answers; who can write legibly, type or word process at a reasonable speed; and, should ideally, have a working knowledge of the subject and the terminology.
- Students should be provided with an additional answer book or rough paper in order to plan answers.
- Some students may prefer to draw their own diagrams/charts, when they are required for the answer. These should be indicated as an appendix in the question by the scribe and should be clearly labelled by the student on a separate answer book, indicating number of appendix, question number being answered and a title. For those students who have poor co-ordination, the scribe can be requested by the student to draw the diagrams to the student's dictation.
- A scribe is responsible to the Faculty Examination Officer, and the person appointed to act as the scribe must be acceptable to the Faculty Examination Officer. The student cannot nominate the scribe but should be given the name of the scribe prior to the examination.
- A scribe should not normally be one of the student's subject tutors. On no account may a relative of the student be used as a scribe.
- A student should, **wherever possible**, have adequate practice in the use of a scribe.
- A student using a scribe must be accommodated in such a way that no other student is able to hear what is being dictated.
- It is the student's responsibility to direct the scribe regarding the layout of the response which the student feels is appropriate.

During the examination a scribe:

- must neither give factual help to the student nor offer any suggestions
- must not advise the student regarding which questions to do, when to move on to the next question, or the order in which the questions should be done
- must write down, type or word process answers exactly as they are dictated
- must write, type or word process a correction on a typescript or Braille sheet if requested to do so by the student
- may, at the student's request, read back what has been recorded
- must not expect to write throughout the examination because the student will be expected to carry out some form of planning for each response. This will be conducted by the student in an additional answer book provided by the Faculty Examination Officer and any rough workings crossed through before it is handed in at the end of the examination.

## Related University Policies/Guidelines

Academic Integrity  
Academic Integrity - Guidance for Faculties

Developing Inclusion Practices at the University of Southampton  
Inclusivity Good Practice Checklist

Equality Opportunity and Diversity Policy  
[www.resource1.soton.ac.uk/hr/manging/diversity/eo.html](http://www.resource1.soton.ac.uk/hr/manging/diversity/eo.html)

Fitness to Study  
<http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/fitness-study.html>

Reasonable Adjustment Guide for Staff and Managers  
Guidance on Making Reasonable Adjustments for Students with Disabilities

Special Considerations Policy

Student Entitlement Declaration  
Student Entitlement Declaration

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[1] For more information see Disability Right Commission (2007) *Code of Practice (revised) for providers of post-16 education and related services*. The Stationery Office

[2] ibid

[3] Specific learning difficulties include dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, visual stress etc. The majority of current students registered with Dyslexia Services are dyslexic and the term dyslexia is used throughout the document although reasonable adjustments apply to other specific learning difficulties.

[4] Education Support: Enabling Services and Dyslexia Services

[5] For example, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia

[6] See section 4.1

[7] See section 1.5

[8] See 3.6

[9] The Examinations, Awards and Graduation Team organise Additional Exam Requirements Rooms for students requiring extra time; students from different Faculties might be grouped together depending on the timing of the examination.

[10] If students need extra time for **all** exams this will need to be negotiated with the Faculty and would not be a standard recommendation.

[11] It is sometimes possible to organise Computer Rooms for groups of students; at other times students requiring use of computer will need to sit the examination in the Faculty.

[12] Previously Disability and Mentor Service

[13] Previously Learning Differences Centre

[14] and students with other specific learning difficulties

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