

Policy and Practice on Assessment and Examination  
Accommodations for Learners with Disabilities in the  
University of Limerick

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## Introduction

This publication outlines the University of Limerick's Policy and Practice on Assessment and Examination Accommodations for Learners with Disabilities.

One of the primary functions of the Disability Service in the University of Limerick is to determine reasonable accommodations in examinations and assessments for students with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation (RA) in examinations might be any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Making a reasonable accommodation in examinations might involve changing procedures, modifying examination papers, and providing additional facilities such as the use of assistive technology in written examinations. Every student with a disability has different needs. To best tailor the services to individual students, a Needs Assessment is carried out. This Needs Assessment helps determine the additional examination requirements. Once RA's are determined students may need to be trained in using the accommodation granted. For example, students who are granted the use of a computer in written exams should be proficient in word processing and with the use of the relevant Assistive Technology (AT).

The publication is divided into two sections, each dealing with particular areas:

- Section 1 is the University of Limerick's Policy on Assessment and Examination Accommodations for Learners with Disabilities
- Section 2 clearly describes alternative assessment arrangements in the University of Limerick, in detail, and introduces criteria for granting these accommodations. In addition, the section outlines the possible alternative presentation of examination question papers and describes the communication and technological supports available.

Finally, also included are several appendices giving additional information and highlighting other useful resources.

## Section 1: The University of Limerick's Policy on Assessment and Examination Accommodations for Learners with Disabilities

### 1.0 Guiding Principles<sup>1</sup>

1. Alternative arrangements should be made for candidates who, because of a temporary, permanent, or long-term disability, have special assessment needs in examinations.
2. Provision should be made for both physical and learning disabilities.
3. Alternative arrangements should not put the integrity, status, or reputation of the examination or assessment at risk.
4. Alternative arrangements should be designed to remove as far as possible the impact of a disability on a candidate's performance, so that he or she can demonstrate in the examination his or her level of achievement.
5. Alternative arrangements are designed to assist a candidate in demonstrating his or her achievements in an examination setting. They are not designed to compensate for a possible lack of achievement arising from a disability.
6. Since a core principle of examinations is to ensure equitable treatment for all candidates, arrangements should not give the candidate for whom they are made an advantage over other candidates.
7. Independent evidence of a disability and support needs should be required before allowing alternative arrangements.
8. The precise arrangements to be made should be determined on the basis of the disability or impairment established in each individual case and of the particular needs of the candidate in each individual subject area. Different subjects and different methods of assessment may make different demands on candidates.
9. The provision of any examination accommodations will be in line with criteria outlined in this document and is at the discretion of the University. Provisions beyond these guidelines can only be given in exceptional circumstances.
10. A candidate's disability may be such that it is not possible for him or her to participate in a particular mode of assessment (an aural examination for a candidate with severe hearing impairment), in which case it should be open to the candidate to apply for exemption from part of the assessment procedure.
11. Where it is not possible for a candidate to participate in a particular mode of assessment, an alternative assessment procedure may be specified.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Guidelines for NEPS Psychologists on the Assessment of RACE Applications 2008 Examinations*

12. An alternative procedure is not acceptable where the purpose of an examination would be compromised by its use (e.g., reading a test of reading comprehension to a candidate with a specific reading difficulty).
13. Circumstances that may affect a candidate's performance (e.g., illness, trauma, bereavement) should, insofar as is possible, be addressed during the examination period.
14. For the purpose of the HEI *Policy and Practice on Assessment and Examinations for Learners with Disabilities*, the definition of disability is that encompassed by the Equal Status Acts 2000-2004. See Appendix 1 for further information on legal definitions used here.

## **1.1 General Principles of the University of Limerick's Examinations and Assessment Policy for Learners with Disabilities**

- 1.1.1 The University of Limerick is committed to ensuring that its examination and assessment system as far as possible enables candidates with disabilities to compete equally with their non-disabled peers. This refers to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes including all assessment and examination procedures that contribute to module or course results. The University of Limerick aims to have examination procedures that are effective in assessing the knowledge and abilities of such candidates, whilst at the same time upholding academic standards.
- 1.1.2 For the purpose of this policy, a reasonable accommodation might be any action that helps alleviate an educational disadvantage. Making a reasonable accommodation in examinations and assessments might involve changing examination procedures and providing additional services (e.g. additional time, materials in large print, provision of assistive technologies). Reasonable accommodations will also ensure fairness to learners without disabilities in that learners with disabilities will not have advantage over their peers.
- 1.1.3 Responsibility for ensuring 'equality of access' to assessment lies with academic departments and Student Academic Administration. However, several other offices may be delegated responsibility for agreeing and delivering on reasonable accommodations. In the event of a dispute as to the provision of reasonable accommodations it shall be referred to the Vice President Academic and Registrar for final determination.
- 1.1.4 It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that the University is aware of his or her disability and to apply for any variation in assessment conditions, which he or she may wish to claim. These guidelines (Section 2) set out the arrangements for organising the effective assessment of learners with disabilities. For the University's staff to respond appropriately to recognise learner needs, it is crucial that

those with disabilities inform the University through the Disability Office in good time in the manner indicated by these guidelines.

- 1.1.5 The definition of disability used here is that used in equality legislation (e.g. Equal Status Acts 2000-2004).

## **1.2 University of Limerick Policy and Regulations**

- 1.2.1 Wherever possible, candidates with disabilities should undertake the same assessments as others undertaking the course. The usual way of taking disability into account will be to vary the assessment format. This may involve the use of technology, additional time or alternative formats.
- 1.2.2 A needs assessment is carried out with the Disability Service. This assessment helps to determine the level of examination supports required. The Disability Service will review each learner's case annually to determine if the examination accommodations are appropriate.
- 1.2.3 If a candidate is unable through disability to be assessed by the methods prescribed for the course, the University may vary the method in consultation with the Head of Department/School as appropriate, bearing in mind the objectives of the programme and the need to assess the learner on equal terms with other learners.
- 1.2.4 A leaflet explaining the University of Limerick's policy will be produced to explain the process to candidates seeking to avail of examination supports.
- 1.2.5 A candidate seeking reasonable accommodations in the University's assessments or examinations must provide relevant and current medical, psychological or other documentation from a medical or other consultant – see Appendix 2.
- 1.2.6 Candidates with temporary disabilities (a person is deemed to have a temporary disability if the disability is unlikely to last for longer than a year e.g. a sports injury or temporary illness) must contact the University's Medical Centre at soon as possible before the commencement of examinations.

## **1.3 Notification of Examination Accommodations**

- 1.3.1 The Disability Service will inform the candidate, on completion of their educational needs assessment and on agreement with Student Academic Administration the detail of their granted reasonable accommodations.
- 1.3.2 Student Academic Administration is responsible for the provision of agreed examination accommodations and also for communicating the location and detail of examination accommodations directly to candidates with disabilities.

- 1.3.3 The Disability Service/Student Academic Administration may source educational support workers, such as scribes, used in examinations. These support workers will receive training in their examination duties from the Disability Service/Student Academic Administration.
- 1.3.4 Some HEIs have a policy of anonymous marking for all candidates in examinations. In such cases, candidates with disabilities are, as far as practicable, marked anonymously unless they request otherwise. Use of alternative examination arrangements may affect the anonymity of the candidate.
- 1.3.5 Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties and those with hearing impairments may be given the option to note their disability on their examination scripts. The invigilator may ensure that marking guidelines, (see Appendix 4) are included and forwarded to the relevant lecturing staff.



## Section 2 - Guidelines on reasonable accommodations for Learners with Disabilities in the University of Limerick

### 2.1 Examination Accommodation Process

- 2.1.1 Every student with a disability has different needs. To best tailor services to the needs of individual students, a Needs Assessment is carried out by the Disability Service. A report is generated following this Needs Assessment and the recommendations are circulated to relevant departments and administrative offices within the University including Student Academic Administration. Should the needs or requirements of the student change, he/she should ensure that the Disability Officer is informed.
- 2.1.2 Candidates should contact their Disability Officer well in advance of any examination and ensure that they meet the relevant deadlines set to ensure their examination arrangements can be put in place. Candidates who require specialist examination supports such as a computer, assistive technology or reader/scribe will need to attend training in the use of such accommodations.
- 2.1.3 The provision of any examination accommodations will be in line with criteria outlined in this document and is at the discretion of the University. Provisions beyond these guidelines can only be given in exceptional circumstances and must be requested through a candidate's Disability Officer.
- 2.1.4 The Disability Service will advise on the provision of reasonable accommodations and will liaise with Student Academic Administration in relation to reasonable accommodations in formal semester examinations. For continuous assessments or other in-class assessments, the Disability Service will liaise with academic departments.
- 2.1.5 Each candidate must complete the following process:
1. Formally register with the Disability Service as early as possible in the Academic Year.
  2. Complete an Educational Needs Assessment with the Disability Service
  3. Provide appropriate supporting documentation confirming the nature and extent of the disability. The documentation must also identify the difficulties that need to be compensated for by the provision of alternative examination accommodations.
  4. Provide notification of the State Examinations' Commission (RACE) Documentation (where possible).
  5. Be aware that the provision of reasonable accommodations in examinations will be made known to the relevant academic and administrative staff.

6. Ensure that any changes to examination accommodations should be discussed with his/her Disability Officer prior to the examination accommodations deadlines set. Those registering with the Disability Service after these deadline dates will be accommodated in subsequent examinations.

## **2.2 Alternative examination arrangements**

For the purposes of this document a reasonable accommodation or adjustment might be any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Making an adjustment might involve changing procedures, modifying the delivery of an examination, providing additional services (for example a reader or materials in large print), or altering the physical environment. These adjustments are outlined in detail below.

### **2.2.1 Time allowance <sup>2</sup>**

Additional time will be granted where it can be demonstrated from medical/psychological evidence that the candidate has difficulties in one or more of the areas identified below. This extra time is set at 10 minutes per hour. In very exceptional circumstances this extra time may be extended.

Additional time is granted in the following circumstances:

1. Where the average speed of written communication of the candidate is significantly slower than average.
2. Where a candidate's reading speed is significantly slower than average.
3. Where a candidate's working memory/processing speed is significantly lower than average.
4. Where disability worsens due to stress and/or environmental variations (e.g. those with some mental health or medical conditions).
5. Where candidates with speech difficulties are taking oral tests.
6. Where the completion of practical tasks is delayed due to the learner's disability.

### **2.2.2 Rest breaks**

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2 SEC: 10 minutes extra time per scheduled hour of each question paper may be allowed where the candidate needs the help of a scribe or would otherwise be unable to make adequate use of the mechanical aids provided for recording the answers or is visually impaired. There is a danger of getting into complex criteria such as a sliding scale for different levels of difficulty. This, however, should be determined by Needs Assessment.

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

1. if the candidate experiences fatigue such that they are unable to concentrate or communicate for an extended period of time;
2. if the candidate requires medical or other treatment during an examination;
3. if the candidate 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.

Extra time is granted if rest breaks are required.

During rest breaks, candidates are not permitted to:

1. read the examination paper,
2. read their answers
3. write or prepare subsequent answers.

A candidate is responsible for managing this accommodation and he/she 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.

### **2.2.3 Furniture in examination venues**

Some candidates may require additional/alternative furniture, such as:

1. writing board,
2. chair supports,
3. alternative desk or chair to meet the candidate's needs,
4. foot stool.

Any additional furniture requirements will be identified as part of a needs assessment.

### **2.2.4 Physical space**

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

1. a large table to accommodate enlarged papers, Braille material, and/or technological aids,
2. adequate floor space for manoeuvring wheelchairs, mobility aids, crutches, canes and any other physical aid.

### **2.2.5 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.

### **2.2.6 Announcements**

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

### **2.2.7 Alternative Venues**

Candidates with disabilities, receiving reasonable accommodations, should sit examinations in alternative venues to their peer group. These venues can be shared with other candidates with disabilities. Only in exceptional circumstances should a candidate have an assessment in a separate and individual venue.

### **2.2.8 Use of disclosure of disability stick-on label**

Students with dyslexia and students who are deaf or have a hearing impairment may opt to disclose their disability on their examination scripts.

Such students should ask for a sticker for their answer booklets, which refers examiners to marking guidelines.

The onus is on the students to request sufficient stickers for insertion on the front cover of their examination booklets prior to their submission.

Students should request stickers at the start of their examinations so they may be included on their booklets while they are completing the other required details and waiting for their exam to commence.

The invigilators should provide these students only with sufficient stickers for their booklets.

### **2.2.9 Learning Disability Awareness**

For candidates who are deaf or hard of hearing or who are presenting with a Specific Learning Disability, a Learning Disability Awareness (LDA) will be

granted. A Learning Disability Awareness comprises an awareness of difficulties with spelling and grammar as well as syntax, structure and cohesion.

If a core component of assessment in a foreign language is that of competence in reading, spelling and grammar, it is not possible to disregard these elements for a candidate with Specific Learning Difficulties. With regard to levelling the playing field of disadvantage, it could be construed as providing an advantage not open to other students. An oral/aural focus might be welcomed by most candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties, but this obviously depends on the stated aim of the course or strand within a course. Similarly, the decision to provide a reader/scribe is dependent upon the purpose of the assessment; if the examination is assessing competence in reading, and reading comprehension in a foreign language, then provision of a reader may not be appropriate. If the purpose of the assessment is to examine competence in spelling and grammar in a foreign language, then provision of a scribe may not be appropriate.

The purpose of the guidance notes in Appendix 4 is to assist examiners to understand that even with the provision of additional supports in examinations, a candidate's disabilities may prevent them from demonstrating their full potential. It provides examiners with a framework for marking the scripts of such candidates. It does not ask examiners to compensate these candidates by giving them additional marks because they have a disability.

## **2.3 Alternative presentation of examination question papers <sup>3</sup>**

A candidate with a disability 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 available, for example:

1. electronic format e.g. *Word*, rtf, html, PDF,
2. Braille,
3. enlarged print, paper enlarged to A3 size or alternative font style,
4. alternative coloured paper, e.g. yellow, grey, blue or green paper, or use of coloured overlays,
5. tactile representations of diagrams, charts or other visual elements.

### **2.3.1 Electronic format**

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

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<sup>3</sup> *Guidelines for students and staff on the modification of examination and assessment arrangements for learners with disabilities* (University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin)

1. blind/visually impaired,
2. slower readers due to physical limitations,
3. learners with a Specific Learning Difficulty such as dyslexia.

Some candidates may require the examination paper in electronic format. Candidates may access the paper using assistive technology such as screen- or text-reading software or screen magnification software.

Text-based papers should be provided in standard text formats such as *Word* (.doc), Rich Text Format (.rtf) or HTML, particularly if the candidate is using screenreading or magnification software such as *JAWS* or *ZoomText*. Visual elements should be accompanied by descriptive text. These formats can be accessed by the candidate on a computer.

Portable Document Format (.PDF) may be appropriate for examination papers where the layout must be preserved or which have been created using applications such as *LaTeX*. PDF is generally unsuitable for candidates with visual impairments using screenreading software such as *JAWS*.

It may be appropriate to provide copies of the paper in multiple formats i.e. *Word* and PDF. Ensure well in advance that the computer being used for the assessment can open the electronic examination paper.

### **2.3.2 Braille**

Candidates who require a Braille version of the examination paper are those who are blind or vision impaired and fluent Braille readers. 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 must be made well in advance of the examination and must comply with the examination deadlines set by the University.

A candidate 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.

### **2.3.3 Enlarged print**

Some candidates may need examination papers in enlarged print. Candidates who require enlarged print are those who are vision-impaired, or in some circumstances, those who have Specific Learning Difficulties

Papers may be provided:

1. as an identical version of the standard paper enlarged to A3 size.

2. in an enlarged *sans-serif* font<sup>4</sup> size on standard A4 paper.
3. in an alternative font to suit the candidate's needs.

### 2.3.4 Examination papers in colour

Some candidates may need the examination paper in a colour other than white. Candidates who may require coloured paper are those who have Specific Learning Difficulties, are vision impaired and/or whose reading speed, accuracy or comfort is improved by alternative colour contrast.

The Disability Service can give advice on appropriate paper for this purpose directly to the learner as part of their on-going learning support needs. Some learners make use of overlays, transparent tinted plastic sheets which can be placed over printed material without the need for coloured paper.

### 2.3.5 Tactile representations of visual elements

Many courses rely on graphs, diagrams, maps or other visual elements to convey information. Learners who have visual impairment or visual perceptual impairment may require such information to be presented as tactile representation. Requests for such materials must be made **well in advance** of the examination.

Examiners may also provide description of diagrams for inclusion with tactile diagrams.

## 2.4 Communication supports

Where possible, candidates with a disability should make use of assistive technology in assessments. In some situations, candidates may require human support such as a scribe to complete an assessment. The HEI will ensure, as far as is practicable, that these are available where appropriate, for example:

1. reader
2. interpreter
3. scribe

### 2.4.1 Readers<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Common sans serif fonts include Arial, Trebuchet MS and Verdana.

<sup>5</sup> Except where indicated, 'reader' refers to both the use of text-to-speech software and human readers.

Candidates who may require the examination paper or their script read to them include those with visual impairments, those with Specific Learning Difficulties such as dyslexia, and slow readers due to physical limitations. In most cases, these candidates can use text-to-speech software to read the examination paper/script, but sometimes a human reader may be required.

Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties *may* require a reader where they demonstrate a level of difficulty in reading attainment <sup>6</sup>(speed, accuracy or comprehension) at or below the 16th percentile.

1. Additional time of ten minutes per hour is recommended when using a reader. This allows the candidate to be able to complete their exam in a reasonable time using this accommodation. A candidate should have had adequate practice in the use of a reader.
2. A candidate may be provided with the assessment question in an electronic format, together with a computer and text-to-speech software. This may also entail the use of a separate venue and/or use of headphones.
3. The institution will ensure, as far as is practicable, that a human reader will have a good working knowledge of the subject under examination. She/he will be able to read accurately a paper/script at a reasonable rate.
4. If a human reader is not the primary means by which a learner is accessing an examination paper (that is, 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.
5. If a human reader is provided, a separate examination room and appropriate supervision may be necessary. If several candidates require only occasional reading assistance, they may be accommodated together with a reader/invigilator.

For detailed guidelines on the use of a reader, please refer to Appendix 3.

## **2.4.2 Interpreters**

An interpreter is a communicator who uses alternative modes of expression in order to make a text available to a person with a disability.

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<sup>6</sup> Where reading skills (accuracy, speed or comprehension) have been assessed by an educational psychologist to be at or below the 16th percentile (current estimate).



Means of communication used include:

1. use of sign language,
2. use of writing,
3. 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 institution 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 where they are identified through an assessment of need.

1. dictation to a scribe,
2. signing the examination,
3. the use of technological aids.

### **2.4.3 Dictation to a scribe/use of voice-recognition software**

A scribe is a person who transcribes dictation from a person whose disability affects the ability to write. For assessment purposes, this would be interpreted as those whose handwriting is illegible, grammatically incomprehensible or produced so slowly that answers could not be fully recorded even with the extra time allowed.

Scribes should only be granted for candidates who cannot produce written communication by any other means, for example, using a word processor.

Candidates who may require a scribe are those who

1. are blind or visually impaired,
2. have orthopaedic impairments which affect writing,
3. tire easily or have muscle weakness,
4. have limited dexterity,
5. have a specific learning difficulty resulting in a written expression level significantly below the average.

Candidates with a specific learning difficulty *may* require a scribe where they demonstrate two or more of the following criteria <sup>7</sup>:

1. a lower than average writing speed (below 15 wpm),

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<sup>7</sup> Speed of writing: the student expresses him/herself in written form more slowly than average, at a writing speed (WPM) of 15 words or fewer per minute. A recognised test of writing speed should have been carried out by an educational psychologist.

2. a level of legibility that would make the paper unreadable to an examiner
3. a speed of processing at or below the 16th percentile

The use of a scribe is not appropriate in subjects which test spelling, such as Modern Foreign Language writing papers, unless it is practical for the candidate to dictate foreign words letter by letter. In other subjects testing written communication skills, including English or Irish, a scribe will be allowed, but the candidate will be assessed only on those aspects of written communication which he or she can demonstrate independently, such as the use of language and effective and grammatical presentation.

If separate marks are awarded for spelling and punctuation, these cannot be credited to a candidate using a scribe. Marks may be awarded for punctuation if this is dictated, and the fact is noted on the scribe cover sheet.

Some possibilities exist where technology can be used instead of or with a scribe:

1. Voice-recognition software which produces a hard copy of the learner's dictated speech can be used as a scribe if the candidate is a fully experienced and proficient user of the software.
2. Software or equipment which produces speech can be used to dictate to a scribe.
3. Software which produces typed text with predictive text when the learner uses a word processor may be used as a scribe. See section 5.1.3 for further information on voice recognition software.

A scribe is not a reader but the same person may act as both scribe and reader where appropriate. The candidate may require the scribe to read back part of what has been written but no comment must be made about any part of the answer given.

Additional time of ten minutes per hour is recommended when using a scribe. This allows the candidate to complete their exam in a reasonable time using this accommodation.

It is recommended that a separate venue be granted when this accommodation is used. The HEI is responsible for ensuring that a candidate dictating to a scribe cannot distract or be overheard by other candidates.

If the candidate and scribe are accommodated separately, a separate invigilator will be required. In addition, a recording of the assessment session is recommended as this will act as a secondary source of information for the examiner if required.

For detailed guidelines on use of a scribe, please refer to Appendix 3.

#### **2.4.4 A note on scribes assisting candidates in examinations which assess competency in a foreign language**

If a core component of assessment in a foreign language is competence in reading, spelling and grammar, it is not possible to disregard these elements for candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties.

The use of a scribe in this context may be construed as providing an advantage to a candidate with a specific learning difficulty, which is not available to other candidates. An oral/aural alternative may be welcomed by many students with a specific learning difficulty, but this will depend on the stated aim of the course or strand within a course.

Similarly, the decision to provide a reader/scribe is dependent on the purpose of the assessment. If the examination is assessing competence in reading and reading comprehension in a foreign language, then provision of a reader may not be appropriate. If the purpose of the assessment is to examine competence in spelling and grammar in a foreign language, then provision of a scribe may not be appropriate.

#### **2.4.5 Using an Irish Sign Language Interpreter in examinations**

Candidates whose first language is Irish Sign Language (ISL) may wish to sign their examination and to have this simultaneously transcribed by a scribe. The scribe in this instance needs to be proficient in sign language.

Similarly, 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 recording. If a candidate is allowed to sign the examination either to a scribe or to video, additional time, a separate venue and appropriate invigilation will be necessary.

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

### **2.5 Assistive Technology<sup>8</sup>**

Depending on the candidate's disability, she or he may require the use of assistive technology to complete an examination. The HEI will ensure, as far as is practicable, that these are available, for example:

1. use of a computer, including access to screenreading, magnification or text-to-speech software
2. Braille and Braille-related devices and software
3. use of voice recognition software

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from *Guidelines for Students and staff on the modification of examination and assessment arrangements for learners with disabilities* (University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin)

### 2.5.1 Use of a computer

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

Computers may be required for assessments by:

1. Candidates who are blind or have visual disability that require the use of assistive technology available only on a computer, such as screen readers or magnification software
2. Candidates with physical disabilities who have limited dexterity that results in handwriting which is difficult to read or unreasonably difficult to produce.
3. Candidates with specific medical conditions that result in diminished stamina and whose evidence of disability confirms that the use of technology will benefit the learner and limit stamina difficulties
4. Candidates who have a specific learning difficulty resulting in a written expression level significantly below the average and where they demonstrate two or more of the following criteria <sup>9</sup>:
  - a. a lower than average writing speed (below 15 wpm),
  - b. a level of legibility that would make the paper unreadable to an examiner
  - c. a speed of processing at or below the 16th percentile

Where the use of a computer is granted to a candidate with SLD, the spelling and grammar checker will not be enabled.

A computer must be used only by the candidate with a disability and not by somebody acting on her/his behalf. It is the responsibility of the 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 is granted to use.

All technological accommodations granted in assessments and examinations are approved on an individual basis and for each set of examinations. Smaller shared examination venues and invigilators may be required as a consequence of the use of technology.

Candidates with a disability who use specialised assistive technology within the HEI *may* be allowed to use their own equipment in examinations if it is clear it is not practical to transfer software, personalised settings and/or other equipment to an examination computer. This technology may include voice recognition technology, document reading software, screen magnification and screen reader software.

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<sup>9</sup> Speed of writing: the student expresses him/herself in written form more slowly than average, at a writing speed (WPM) of 15 words or fewer per minute. A recognised test of writing speed should have been carried out by an educational psychologist.

## **2.5.2 Braille and Braille-related devices and software**

Candidates with a visual disability may use Braille in order to respond to examinations. Note, however, that screen reading software is increasingly preferred over Braille by such candidates.

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.

## **2.5.3 Use of Voice Recognition Software for Examinations**

The use of voice recognition technology will be granted in the following circumstances:

1. where candidates have been trained in its use over an extensive period of time to develop a mature voice file, with an appropriate subject-specific vocabulary.
2. where the candidate has adapted to the techniques of using dictation to create formal written English.<sup>10</sup>
3. where it is preferable for the candidate to complete an examination in this format rather than, for example using a computer or scribe.

It should be noted that examinations in some subjects, e.g. Medicine, Mathematics or Science, often require diagrams, formulas or other modelled answers, and these will also require handwritten responses.

The use of a computer with voice recognition software requires a separate examination venue and invigilator. Please refer to information on the use of readers in Section 3.

## **2.6 Alternative Assessment Arrangements – Principles <sup>11</sup>**

Alternative assessment refers to any alteration in the standard form of assessment in order to accommodate a candidate's disability, for example, provision of an oral examination instead of a written test. Some flexibility

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<sup>10</sup> This is a very different process to typing or writing, and requires reasonably extensive practice before the learner develops sufficient fluency and confidence to be able to use this technique in a potentially stressful exam situation. Nerves, anxiety or illness can affect voice recognition, and thus the performance of the software. For further guidance please refer to [http://www.anu.edu.au/disabilities/atproject/voice\\_recognition/usingvr4exams.php](http://www.anu.edu.au/disabilities/atproject/voice_recognition/usingvr4exams.php) [accessed 22 May 2008]

<sup>11</sup> Examination Arrangements for Students with Disabilities: A Guide for Institutions of Higher Education (AHEAD Education Press, Dublin 2)

around the scheduling of examinations may also be appropriate. Note that flexible examination arrangements are granted in exceptional circumstances only.

### **2.6.1 Flexible examination arrangements**

Some candidates with disabilities may require flexibility in the scheduling of examinations. This may involve one or more of the following:

Changes to scheduled examination times within a given day.  
For example, candidates with conditions which result in early fatigue and impaired concentration may require morning examinations in preference to afternoon or evening examinations.

1. Changes to scheduled examination dates and times within the examination period.

For example, a candidate with a physical disability who requires extra time to complete an examination and who experiences fatigue may find it difficult to manage a number of examinations in quick succession. Examinations may therefore need to be scheduled so that, where possible, rest periods are provided between examinations.

2. Examinations split into more than one session.

When extra time is provided for an examination which is already lengthy (for example a three-hour paper) the result may be too fatiguing, physically and mentally, for some candidates with disabilities. Splitting such examinations into more than one session, either on the same day or on successive days, may be a more suitable arrangement.

### **2.6.2 Guidelines for Split Sessions**

The candidate should sign a declaration form where examinations are held at a different time to the scheduled time. The candidate should indicate which part of the examination paper will be answered in that session (for example, part A), and the remainder of the paper will remain unseen by the candidate and retained by the supervisor.

Where practical, the candidate should sit the first session on the preceding day(s) to the scheduled examination time, and conclude on the scheduled examination day.

### 2.6.3 Oral Examination and Assessment <sup>12</sup>

Some candidates with disabilities may find it impractical to write or type their answers and in such cases, an oral assessment may be appropriate. There follows some advice on conducting oral assessments with candidates with disabilities.

The academic department may prefer to have two staff present at oral interviews; the second examiner is usually the tutor in charge of the tutorial group or section in which the candidate has worked all semester or year. This person will be familiar to the candidate, thus reducing some of the pressure of nervousness, and will also be familiar with the candidate's usual behaviour and competence. If you are both the lecturer and tutor, it is advisable to arrange for an additional member of staff to be present.

If the oral exam involves discussion between the examiners and the candidate, then experience suggests that the senior examiner should remain outside the interaction and provide the main evaluation while the second examiner leads in the questioning and discussion of the materials with the candidate. This permits greater objectivity of assessment.

Logistical difficulties can arise if a number of candidates require an oral assessment. These candidates will need to be examined as close as possible to the time of the equivalent written assessment in order to preserve the integrity of the assessment. In such circumstances it may be necessary to have a team of oral examiners, with an overlap of one examiner for every two teams to help ensure the integrity of the assessment.

The oral assessment will often be held at the same time as the written assessment and may be assessed without benefit of experience in marking the written scripts (which makes it important to have two examiners present to provide two assessments).

From experience, those managing examinations should reach an agreement with the candidates *in advance of the actual interview* about the terms by which the oral assessment is to be conducted.

The procedures for essay-style assessments usually include:

1. allowing the candidate the full reading period in which to decide on the questions to be attempted. This may require one examiner to read the questions to the candidate and possibly make initial notes based on the candidate's dictation;
2. giving the candidate an agreed amount of time in which to prepare the answer to the first question. This may also involve an examiner taking down some dictated notes;
3. giving the candidate an agreed amount of time in which to present the answer orally to the two examiners. The candidate then leaves the

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from *Managing Oral Examinations for Students with Disabilities: A Guide for Staff and Students* (The Australian National University)

- room while the two examiners agree on a tentative mark for that question;
4. following the same procedure for each of the remaining questions;
  5. after the final question has been answered, the candidate should be given a few minutes in which to add to, or revise, any previous answers (somewhat equivalent to the editing that may take place in a written assessment).

Both the examiners and the candidates need to know in advance whether the oral assessment consists solely of the candidate presenting the answers to the paper or whether there will be interventions or questions by the examiners leading to possible elaboration, 'editing', or discussion of the material presented by the candidate. If interactions are permitted, the nature of the assessment may diverge from the conditions which prevail for written assessments in which there is generally no possibility of prompted elaboration or clarification of points.

To help ensure that both written and oral scripts are assessed equally, tape the oral interview and retain the tape for later reference. Some examiners prefer to listen again to some or all of the assessment once they have begun marking the written scripts.

## **2.6.4 Combinations and Variations**

### **a. Written/oral combination**

Examiners sometimes require a combination of written and oral assessment. This combination approach may be appropriate for candidates who have some written capacity but could not sustain that capacity for the duration of the assessment. The variations are agreed on in advance by the examiner and the candidate. The candidate may be asked to write one answer, or half the paper, or spend an hour making outline notes for all the answers; and then complete the rest of the paper orally. The script is then assessed on both the oral presentation and the written answers or outline.

### **b. Multiple-choice/short answer assessments**

For *multiple-choice assessments*, a reader or scribe is the simplest solution - in this situation no special skills or experience are required, so a senior student or tutor could do the job. Extra time may be needed for visually-impaired candidates to allow for the reading and re-reading aloud of each question.

Candidates who can manipulate a mouse or keyboard may be able to take the examination using a computer if the examination paper is presented in an appropriate electronic format.

In *short answer assessments*, the taped exam format is suitable. In an oral interview, the candidate should be given a breathing space between each item and the opportunity to revise previous responses.



### **c. Practical assessments**

The University recognises that practical assessments present challenges and that many of these challenges will have been addressed over the course of the term. Different adaptations will have evolved during the teaching year and these adaptations should inform how formal practical assessments are carried out. It is crucial that the examiner and the candidate, in consultation with the Disability Office/Student Academic Administration arrange the system for final assessment well in advance.

### **d. Some further points to note about oral exams**

The unfamiliarity of an oral interview can cause nervousness for both the examiner and candidate. However, as some learners will face this procedure several times, they may become more experienced than examiners, who may only occasionally participate in oral assessments. Some points for examiners to remember include:

These candidates have not selected an oral assessment as an 'easy option'; this format offers them a practical way of communicating their knowledge. They may develop competency in oral assessment, but this is comparable to other candidates developing 'good exam techniques' in written exams.

Awkward or hesitant oral expression should be regarded in the same terms as semi-legible handwriting.

Just as candidates in written assessments may think or write differently in examination conditions, so too should allowances be made for different styles and tempos of oral responses. A candidate should not be expected to talk continuously and fluently for the duration of the assessment; brief (and less than adequate) answers are also common in written assessments.

In conclusion, there are three basic guidelines for holding an oral or taped exam:

1. Agree the assessment procedures to be followed well in advance of the exam both with the candidate(s) and the other examiner(s) in consultation with Student Academic Administration. This helps to avoid confusion and unintended compromising of the integrity of the assessment.
2. Be explicit about the procedure of the assessment so that both the examinee and the examiners have some feeling of control over the interview or taping.
3. Decide on the breakdown of the assessment criteria in advance of the assessment and follow these guidelines closely. This helps to safeguard against subjectivity in your assessment of oral materials.

## 2.6.5 Modification of Examination Papers for Deaf or Hearing Impaired Candidates. <sup>13</sup>

The main educational disadvantages for deaf or hearing-impaired people are language disability and the restriction of access to information. Depending on the onset of deafness, a learner may experience difficulty with syntax and possess a restricted vocabulary. As a consequence they may have an inappropriate or immature style of writing and/or may misinterpret written material.

If a deaf candidate uses Irish Sign Language (ISL) as their first language, they will learn all technical concepts in the visual medium first. ISL uses a different grammatical structure to English, causing some difficulty when translating ISL. A deaf learner who has become deaf prior to the acquisition of speech will need significantly more time and will have to work harder than their hearing peers to acquire the same knowledge.

While deaf learners will need to familiarise themselves with the terminology of their subject/discipline, they may still experience difficulties in understanding and undertaking assessment tasks. Most deaf candidates will need alternative assessment arrangements.

Alternative arrangements may include the following:

1. language modification (see below),
2. use of a word processor with spell and grammar checker,
3. amplification for aural tests or the use of a reader to enable a candidate to lip-read,
4. in oral examinations or presentation, the use of a sign language interpreter/lip speaker if the candidate has difficulty with speech,
5. presentation of assessments in ISL (see below),
6. individual consideration for group work which may include a briefing session for staff and candidates as the specific requirements of the deaf/hearing impaired candidate and the monitoring of group dynamics

### Language modification

It may be necessary to review assessment questions with a view to modifying potentially problematic language and phraseology. Where necessary, the carrier language will be modified *without changing the meaning of the question*. There will be no modification of:

1. technical, subject specific terms or phrases
2. any text of English Language examinations
3. any text of foreign language paper

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<sup>13</sup> Guidelines for Students and Staff on the modification of examination and assessment arrangements for learners with disabilities (University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin)

4. material where the understanding of the source material is being assessed.

Deaf candidates should receive both a modified and original copy of the examination/assessment question in order for them to maximise their understanding of the task. Language modification will be undertaken by the Learner Support co-ordinator in Disability Services in consultation with candidate's department. This must be undertaken prior to the final version of the examination paper being agreed and must be approved in the same manner.

#### Presentation in ISL

In exceptional circumstances where learning outcomes cannot be assessed by any other mode, the presentation of assignments or examinations in ISL recorded on videotape may be permitted (tapes will be transcribed or voiced over by Disability Services). Two independent interpreters will jointly undertake the transcription and sign a declaration, which will be returned with the videotape to the external examiner.

## Appendix 1: Disability Legislation and Evidence of Disability

The legal definition of disability, which is outlined in the *Equal Status Acts 2000-2004*, defines disability as follows:

1. “the total or partial absence of a person’s bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of a person’s body,
2. the presence in the body of organisms causing or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness,
3. the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person’s body,
4. a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or
5. a condition, illness or disease which affects a person’s thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour.”

The Act is very much a legal definition and does not really assist colleges in responding to the individual needs of students applying to the college. A more effective working definition which defines disability is as follows:

“A student is disabled if he/she requires a facility which is outside of the mainstream provision of the college in order to participate fully in higher education and without which the student would be educationally disadvantaged in comparison with their peers.”

## Appendix 2: Documentation Required for the Granting of Reasonable Accommodations

Applicants with a Specific Learning Difficulty must provide a copy of the Educational Psychologist's report. This report must be current, that is to say the assessment should have been carried out within the last 5 years.

All other applicants must have verification documentation completed by a Medical Consultant/Specialist.

*General Practitioner (G.P.) letters will not be accepted as suitable medical evidence for candidates with a permanent disability.*

Examples of recognised professionals for the purpose of the verification of disabilities are given below:

<b>Type of disability</b>	<b>Accepted</b>
Blind / Vision impaired	Ophthalmologist
Deaf / hard of hearing	Audiologist, ENT Consultant
Physical / Mobility Disability	Orthopaedic Consultant, Neurologist (consultant), Other Consultant specific to condition
Medical Condition	Relevant consultant in area of condition
Mental health condition	Psychiatrist
Dyslexia / specific learning disability	Educational Psychologist – enclose full report not evidence of disability form
ADD / ADHD & Asperger's Syndrome	Clinical Psychologist / Psychiatrist
Head/Traumatic Brain Injury	Consultant physicians, neurologists, neuropsychologists,
Other disabilities	Relevant medical consultant / specialist

**A reader:**

1. must read accurately;
2. must only read the instructions of the question papers and questions but not explain or clarify;
3. must repeat instructions given on the question paper only when specifically requested to do so by the candidate;
4. must abide by the regulations since failure to do so could lead to the disqualification of the candidate;
5. must not advise the candidate regarding which questions to do, when to move on to the next question, nor the order in which questions should be answered;
6. may enable a visually impaired candidate to identify diagrams, graphs and tables but must not give factual information nor offer any suggestions, other than that information which would be available on the paper for sighted candidates;
7. may read numbers printed in figures as words (e.g. 252 would be read as two hundred and fifty two but at the point of reading the number it should also be pointed to on the script). An exception would be when the question is asking for a number to be written in words (e.g. Write the number 3675 in words.);
8. must not decode symbols and unit abbreviations (e.g. 22 should not be read as two squared but the function simply pointed to by the reader since part of the assessment is recognising what the superscript 2 means. Similarly, if the symbol  $>$  is printed, it should not be read as 'greater than' but simply pointed to by the reader.);
9. may read back, when requested, what has been written in the answer;
10. may, if requested, give the spelling of a word which appears on the paper but otherwise spellings must not be given.

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<sup>14</sup> Adapted from *Examination Arrangements for Students with Disabilities: A Guide for Institutions of Higher Education* (AHEAD Education Press, Dublin 2)

**A scribe:**

1. must write down or word process accurately what the candidate has said, except in an examination requiring word processing, in which case, a scribe will not be permitted;
2. must draw or add to maps, diagrams and graphs strictly in accordance with the candidate's instructions, unless the candidate is taking a design paper, in which case a scribe will only be permitted to assist with written parts of the paper;
3. must abide by the regulations since failure to do so could lead to the disqualification of the candidate;
4. must write or word process a correction on a typescript or Braille sheet if requested to do so by the candidate;
5. must immediately refer any problems in communication during the examination to the invigilator;
6. must not give factual help to the candidate or indicate when the answer is complete;
7. must not advise the candidate on which questions to do, when to move on to the next question, or on the order in which questions should be answered;
8. must not expect to write throughout the examination if supervised rest breaks have been permitted;
9. may, at the candidate's request, read back what has been recorded.

**A computer:**

1. must only be used by a candidate who, as a result of an impairment, presents handwritten communication that is illegible, incomprehensible or produced at below average speed as evidenced by a diagnostic or medical report.
2. must have been cleared of any previously stored data, as must any portable storage medium used. Storage media such as memory sticks or discs must not be used by a candidate, but can be used by an examinations officer to take the completed work to a printer;
3. must reflect the candidate's normal method of producing written work except in cases where temporary injury gives rise to the need for a word processor;
4. must be in good working order at the time of the examination;

5. must either be connected to a printer so that a script can be printed off or have the facility to print from a portable storage medium. This may be done after the examination is over, not in the extra time. The candidate should be present to verify that the work printed is his or her own. Word processed scripts must be attached to any answer booklet which contains some of the answers;
6. must be connected to mains electricity;
7. must be used to produce scripts under secure conditions, otherwise they may be refused;
8. must not give the candidate access to other applications such as calculators, spreadsheets etc;
9. must not include graphic packages or computer aided design software unless permission has been given to use these;
10. must not include voice-activated software unless the candidate has permission to use a scribe or relevant software;
11. must not be used to perform skills which are being assessed;
12. must not be connected to an Intranet or any other means of communication.



## Appendix 4: Guidance on the Assessment of Candidates with Specific Learning Difficulties<sup>15</sup>

### 4.1 Marking and Feedback

The following points are extracted from 'Guidelines of good practice with respect to marking the work of dyslexic students', Oxford Brookes University.

#### Summary of Guidelines<sup>16</sup>

What To Do	Rationale
Assess or discuss the level of correction that the learner will be able to use effectively.	A learner with SLD is usually best-placed to advise on the form of correction that is most effective.
Read quickly to assess ideas, understanding & knowledge, ignoring grammar, spelling & punctuation errors, without making corrections or comments.	Holistic thinking does not lend itself to the linear nature of words; reading quickly may enable the reader to access the holistic pattern of thought.
Comment on where the learner has done well and explain why a particular aspect of the work is good, rather than/as well as being critical.	Models of good practice and correct usage are easier to retain and replicate; learners with SLD find it difficult to "read between the lines".
Explain what is required and what went wrong; use clear explicit English avoiding innuendo, sarcasm and complex sentences; avoid using grammatical terms.	A learner with SLD is unlikely to know how to correct an error without some guidance or explanation; they are often unfamiliar with grammatical terms/rules.

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<sup>15</sup> Adapted from *Guidelines for Students and Staff on the modification of examination and assessments for learners with disabilities* (University of Dublin – Trinity College Dublin)

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.brookes.ac.uk/asa/exams/pdfs/guidelines\\_marking\\_dyslexia.pdf](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/asa/exams/pdfs/guidelines_marking_dyslexia.pdf) (accessed 15 March 2008)

<b>What To Do</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Inform the learner if you are marking for ideas, understanding and knowledge and ignoring spelling, punctuation and grammar.	Absence of lots of corrections (they are used to a lot!) may create a false impression of improvement and can be demoralising when re-appraisal occurs.
If you decide to mark for spelling, grammar and punctuation avoid marking every error - select and indicate about four types of error.	Numerous corrections can be demoralising; simply correcting spelling and grammar will not lead to improvement - helping the learner identify types of error together with models of correct usage will help.
Use one colour pen to comment on ideas, understanding and knowledge and a different colour for spelling, punctuation and grammar. Avoid using red pens.	Anything which helps to differentiate functions of words is useful for the learner with SLD. Red often has negative associations from school days and can be demoralising.
Use highlighter pens to indicate which areas of text "belong together" if you want to indicate where changes in structure or organisation are necessary.	Anything which aids differentiation of text is helpful; colour is instantly recognisable and will give the learner an additional sense of control over the text.

## 5.1 Presentation and Layout

The revised papers follow the guidelines for layout set out below. These could be used as a template for future papers.

### All Questions

1. All papers should have a clear easy to read sans serif font and at least 12pt font size. The British Dyslexia Association (BDA) recommends Arial as it does not run letters closely together. It is a familiar and readily available font.
2. The BDA also recommends cream paper, matt rather than shiny.
3. Each page should have plenty of white space rather than being 'busy'. If text is dense it is easy for some readers with dyslexia to see 'rivers of white' on the page which distract from the text and cause visual discomfort.
4. Text alignment should be left aligned with ragged right edge.
5. Single spacing should not pose particular problems as long as the text is not a dense block. We recommend however that there should be a 6pt gap between different stages of a question..
6. Emboldening and italicising text can be confusing – which is why we recommend that emboldening and italicising should be used only for file and folder names.
7. Simple emboldening should be used judiciously. It is helpful to embolden keywords or words which might be easily confused. This is applicable to MC papers. **NOT**, for example is a key word and it can be useful to make it bold.  
e.g. Which of the following is **NOT** an example of ...

Advantages and disadvantages can be confusing and again it is useful to embolden.

e.g. Which of the following is a **disadvantage** of .....?

8. In all papers lines to separate different questions were judged by all the project team to aid clarity and make it easier to track. Many people like to use a paper or reading frame to move down the text paper in order to make tracking easier. In the table cell there should be 0.5cm gap between line and text below.
9. We recommend a single column of text rather than two columns. Two columns make the page more crowded and the second column could easily be missed.
10. The title of the paper should be a heading at the top of the paper rather than in the text. For example:

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<sup>17</sup> Adapted from *Readability Project Final Report* (Professional Association of Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties)

## **Using the Computer and Managing Files**

rather than:

**The following is a test for Module 2, Using the Computer and Managing Files.**

### **Non-Multiple Choice Questions**

In non-multiple choice questions there is often a quite long passage of text setting the context. This is less dense and therefore more readable if separated into short paragraphs

As well as breaking this into smaller paragraphs, we recommend ragged right edge rather than justified text alignment. Justified text all too easily creates 'rivers' of white throughout the text

As the standard setting we have used single line spacing with a 6pt. gap after stages of a question and after each short paragraph.

### **Multiple Choice Questions**

Use single spacing with a 6pt. gap after the paragraph as the standard setting. There are 2 returns after the stem and 1 return after each option. In these papers there are fewer filenames and titles which need to be emboldened and italicised. We therefore recommend emboldening key word/s.

The purpose of punctuation is to separate phrases, sentences etc. within continuous prose in order to clarify meaning. For purely paper versions of tests it is not therefore necessary to use punctuation to separate options in a multiple choice question. The separation is made clear by the layout.

Full stops, however, are recommended by the RNIB in electronic versions of multiple choice papers. This will be necessary for older versions of screen reader software or material in DAISY format. Therefore the layout of each multiple choice question in any e-version format should incorporate a full stop after:

- the question number,
- each answer option,
- the mark allocation.

One column is preferable to a 2 column layout.

Options should be designated by capital letters, dispensing with the need for brackets.

## 5.2 Structure and Content

### All Questions

1. Signposting is a way of providing clues for learners as to what to expect from the questions. The knowledge and skills required to answer them, of course, remains the same. At the beginning of the paper it is useful to provide an initial signpost by stating the number of questions contained in the paper and the time allocated. Currently this information is given in MC papers but not on others. We suggest that it should be applied to all papers. We suggest initial guidance to learners on these lines:

**There are 26 questions which must be completed in 45 minutes.**

Note that numbers are clearer if expressed as digits are rather than words.

2. At the end of a paper it is useful to state: **This is the end of the paper.**
3. Repetition in question papers can be helpful and can be another way of signposting what is required. Variety of language is likely to confuse rather than help those with poor reading skills. For this reason syntax and phrasing should be as consistent as possible. Some frequently used signpost phrases are shown in the example below.
4. It is a useful convention to start a paper with straightforward questions and leave harder questions to the second half of a paper. Learners with poor reading skills approach tests with fragile confidence.
5. A simple sentence in the grammatical sense contains a single clause. The more embedded clauses there are in a sentence, the less accessible it is. The most frequent changes made in revising papers is to split longer sentences.
6. Use full stops rather than colons or semi-colons which are less definite breaks.
7. Remove bracketed phrases which interrupted the flow of a sentence. The information given in a bracketed phrase was usually clearer made into another sentence.

### Non-Multiple Choice Questions

1. As before, we recommend short single-spaced paragraphs with a 6pt gap between paragraphs. This applies especially to non-multiple choice papers.

2. We recommend short sentences.
3. The questions should be staged to reflect the sequence of processes which the learner will need to consider.
4. The sequence of information must be logical, following the order in which the learner will need to approach or consider it.
5. Non-multiple choice questions are usually set within a work-based context. The information included about the work context should be confined to what is strictly relevant to answering the test, both in the introduction and the questions which follow. It is possible to omit 'scene setting' descriptions without impairing the integrity of the question.

### Multiple Choice Questions

1. In options it is often helpful to repeat phrases, in order to reinforce familiar territory.
2. Each stem should be a sentence rather than a phrase followed by options which complete the question. A sentence reflects a complete thought. The full stop or question mark indicates a pause to assimilate the meaning of the sentence. It signposts the need to stop and take the question on board before proceeding to the options and so lessens the memory load.
3. The options should not be longer than the stem. Long options increase the memory load of a learner who is trying to process four long pieces of information in working memory whilst making a choice between them.

### 5.3 Wording

#### All Questions

1. Consistency of wording is important and there are cases where a longer word is better than a short word which does not quite have the same meaning OR is easily confused. For example, in choosing whether to use *alter* rather than the longer word **manipulate**, we decided that **manipulate** was better as **altering** files or documents could be more easily misunderstood. Readers with dyslexia often take meanings very literally and phrasing needs to be not only consistent but exact. There is the point too that longer words are sometimes more easy to recognise. (**Elephant** in a children's reader is more easily

- recognised than a word like **through**.) It is long abstract nouns and adverbs which seem to be more problematic to read.
2. In most cases a simpler word is a better option than a more complicated one. For example, **good** can often replace **appropriate**. However, in choosing whether to use **bought** or **purchased**, it might be better to use **purchased** as although longer, it does not have the problem of being easily confused as **bought** is with **brought**. These are issues on which it is difficult to make a general ruling and on which different learners would have different preferences. There is no body of research to support decisions.
  3. Use of abstract words makes comprehension more difficult. Instead of a phrase like **Make modifications to.....** write simply **Change.....**.
  4. Passive verbs are more difficult than active verbs. Use **'Insert a text box'** rather than **'You are required to insert a text box'**; **'Change the font to Ariel'** rather than **'the font should be changed to Ariel'**.
  5. Modal verbs (i.e. should and would, as in the example above **'should be changed'**) have an indefinite and confusing feel to them and should be avoided. Very often, again as in the example above, the simple imperative is a good option.
  6. Compound forms of verbs are more complicated than simple forms. Use **'Remove the report title and date at the top of the document'** rather than **'You will need to remove the existing report title and date at the top of the document'**.
  7. We have already made the point that repetition of key words and phrases can be helpful. However, unnecessary words can be omitted. **'Save the file'** rather than **'Please save the file at this stage'**.
  8. Negatives can cause confusion both to dyslexic and non-dyslexic learners. Some questions use the formula *Which one of the following is **NOT** .....*  
Where this is the case the **NOT** should be capitalised, highlighting it as a keyword.
  9. Similarly questions involving advantages and disadvantages can confuse and we recommend treating these also as key words. *What are **the disadvantages** of ...?*
  10. Figures of speech such as **'in the body of the text'** are confusing to learners who take language very literally.
  11. A further consideration is to avoid the use of jargon and specialist vocabulary learners would not have been exposed to at their level of learning.

#### 5.4 Examination terminology

There are phrases which are commonly used in examinations. These should be identified and made available for training learners in developing examination skills. Examples include *'Which one of the following is...'*; *'What does \_ \_ \_ stand for?'*

#### 5.5 Embedded Good Practice

Good practice embedded in the production of test papers include:

1. use of Arial font,
2. use of bold and italics to set out folder and file names,
3. use of bold to set out names of specific text or images to be located,
4. use of bold for key words like **not**,
5. laying out information for data input clearly, for example **Module 5, databases**,
6. laying out visual images clearly, for example **Module 2 icons to be identified**,
7. freedom from cultural and gender bias,
8. a standard of English which in many tests is functional and clear and would be accessible to learners.