GMIT

INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA NA GAILLIMHE-MAIGH EO
GALWAY-MAYO INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Policy on the Provision of Reasonable Accommodations for Examinations and Assessments

**Approved by Academic Council on 17th June 2019
And Governing Body on 27th June 2019**

In line with Code of Academic Policy No 6 *Equality Policy for Students*[1], this policy on the provision of reasonable accommodations for examinations and assessments is designed to ensure that the Institute's procedures and practices for examinations operate in a manner that is consistent with it's commitment to equality of opportunity for students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties. GMIT is committed to ensuring students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties are provided with reasonable accommodations for examinations and assessments that enable them to demonstrate their knowledge and competency on an equal footing with their peers.

Provision of reasonable accommodations:

1. Students requiring reasonable accommodations for examinations must registered with the GMIT Access and Disability Service.

2. The approval of reasonable accommodations is based on the student having a significant, ongoing disability, mental health difficulty or specific learning difficulty.

3. Students must provide the Access and Disability Office with documentary evidence in the form of a consultant/ medical report, medical evidence or psychological assessment, confirming they meet the criteria for the approval of reasonable accommodations for examinations.

4. Where a student was approved for reasonable accommodations for examinations for prior state examinations, evidence of this must be provided to GMIT and where appropriate, a needs assessment and further testing may be required.

5. The Access and Disability Service approves all accommodations for examinations for students with disabilities/ medical difficulties or specific learning difficulties. For students with temporary conditions, approval is granted by the Head of Department once the student submits a medical certificate.

6. In exceptional circumstances where it is inappropriate for the student to register with the Access and Disability Service but is attending the GMIT Counselling Service, the Counsellor may approve reasonable examination accommodations in accordance with the Guidelines for the Provision of Reasonable Accommodations (see appendix 2).

7. The Access and Disability Service will notify the Examinations Office and the Head of Department in writing of the approved reasonable accommodations for examinations.

8. The Examinations Office will inform the student in writing of the accommodations that have been arranged for end of semester/ end of year examinations.

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[1] Code of Academic Policy No 6 *Equality Policy for Students available at http://www.gmit.ie/sites/default/files/public/directorate/docs/academic-policy-no6.pdf*

9. It is the responsibility of the student to confirm with the Examinations Office their requirements for each examination sitting.

10. Assistive Technology (AT) is the preferred accommodation for examinations unless the student is unable to use the recommended technology due to the nature of their disability/specific learning difficulty.

11. Students are required to attend training in the use of AT in advance of examinations. This training will be offered on specific dates and students will be notified of this training by the Access and Disability Service.

12. It is the student's responsibility to be proficient in the use of technology for examinations.

13. It is the student's responsibility to notify the Examinations Office of continuous assessments for which they require reasonable accommodations. This must be done in writing two weeks in advance of the assessment.

14. Where a reasonable accommodation has been agreed, failure to avail of examination accommodations without notifying the Examinations Office in advance,may result in the accommodations no longer being available (with the exception of student submitting medical certificates).

15. Where students require accommodations for some but not all examinations, it is the student's responsibility to notify the Examinations Office. Failure to notify the Examinations Office that an accommodation is not required for specified examinations may result in all accommodations being suspended and subject to review.

Appendix 1

Criteria for the Approval of Exam Accommodations

Accommodation	Criteria for Approval
EXTRA TIME 10 minutes extra time per hour of examination	• Where a student has lower than average writing speed or reading speed or working memory or processing speed (at or below the 23rd percentile.
EXCEPTIONAL EXTRA TIME 20 minutes extra time per hour of examination.	• Where a student has a physical disability or medical condition where speed of handwriting in impacted significantly, and the student wishes to hand write their exam.
Rest Breaks/ Movement Breaks	• Where a physical, medical, sensory, or neurological disability will significantly impact on examination performance. • Medical evidence must support the approval of rest breaks.
Shared Room	• Where the student is approved for the use of Assistive Technology. • Where a student has a condition that requires they use a shared room, ie ADHD, Mental Health Difficulties, physical disabilities, medical conditions.

Private Room	• Only in exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Access and Disability Officer.
	• The criteria for the approval of a private room are:
	  o Where examination accommodations may be disruptive to other students using a common venue, ie students approved for voice recognition software.
	  o When a significant medical, physical, sensory or psychological condition exists that requires the student is accommodated in a private room. Medical evidence must support the approval of a private room.

Approval of Assistive Technology	
Use of Read Write Software	• SLD students with a reading speed, accuracy or comprehension at or below the 16th percentile. • Other: Where a student's ability to read is significantly impacted by a medical, sensory, neurological, psychological or physical disability.
Use of a PC/ laptop	• Students with an SLD who meets one or more of the following three criteria:

	○ *A writing speed below 15 wpm* ○ *Processing speed below the 16th percentile* ○ *Illegible handwriting making paper unreadable.* - Where a physical, sensory, medical or psychological condition significantly impacts on a student's ability to write.
Use of Voice Recognition Software	The use of voice recognition software may also be approved. ***It is the responsibility of the student to be proficient in the use of this software in advance of examinations.*** Use of voice recognition software will require that the student is accommodated in a private room.

Other

Use of a Scribe	- In exceptional circumstances where the use of technology is not an option given a physical, sensory, medical or psychological condition, a scribe may be approved. - For students with specific learning difficulties a scribe may be approved if a student's spelling attainment is at or below the 2nd percentile.
Spelling/ Grammar Waiver	- Where competency in spelling, grammar and written expression is not a core component of an assessment, a spelling and grammar waiver may be approved for students with SLD's and students who are Deaf or hard of hearing. - Students with SLD's should have scores below the 10 percentile. For students with scores above the 10th percentile, this accommodation requires the approval of the Access and Disability Officer in advance. - For languages that form a compulsory part of a course an alternative will be provided. Should a student decide to study a language when an alternative is available, a spelling and grammar waiver cannot be granted.
Extension for the production of Written Work	- Where a student requires proof-reading services due to a significant specific learning difficulty with spelling, grammar and written expression. - A two week extension will apply subject to the approval of the learning support lecturer in conjunction with the Head of Department or Subject Lecturer as appropriate.
Reader	- Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. - Students with SLD's where AT is not appropriate given the subject content.
Sign Language Interpreter	Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
Support Worker	Where a student requires personal care for their physical wellbeing, in exceptional circumstances, a support worker may be present in the examination in addition to an

	examination invigilator. This support can only be approved by the Access and Disability Officer.

Appendix 2

Guidelines for Provision of Reasonable Accommodations

Guidelines on Alternative Venues for Examinations

- Alternative venues should be fully accessible to students with disabilities.
- The physical space available should be appropriate for the effective provision of the reasonable accommodation, for example:

  - A large table to accommodate enlarged papers, Braille material, and/or technological aids.
  - Adequate floor space for manoeuvring wheelchairs, mobility aids, crutches, canes and any other physical aid.
  - Access to power points for equipment and/or assistive technology.

Guidelines on Provision of Rest Breaks in Examinations

- Rest breaks should be considered as pauses in the exam and the exam time should be stopped when a student takes a rest break. Students will normally have 10 minutes per hour.
- Students should tell the invigilator when they wish to have a rest break. They may take as much or as little out of their allocation as they wish at any one time.
- Students can choose to stay in the room for their rest break, or may leave the room if supervised by a member of staff. This can include going to the bathroom, taking a drink or snack if recommended, or moving around to relieve physical discomfort.
- Students may not talk about or work on the examination during their rest break. The student's examination papers should also be turned over during rest breaks.

Guidelines on Provision of Scribes in Examinations

The role of a scribe is to record a student's dictated answers in an examination.

Guidelines for the HEI

- Both the student and scribe should have access to training and practice sessions before the examination.
- The scribe should be an independent person and not known to the student.

- The scribe may also act as the invigilator for the examination.
- Sometimes a student may require a reader and a scribe. Is such instances the same person may act as both.
- Scribes should have proficient typing skills if typing a student's dictated answers, and should be capable of writing legibly at appropriate speed if writing a student's dictated answers.
- Scribes should have a good working knowledge of the subject being examined.

Guidelines for Scribes

- The scribe is required to produce an accurate record of the student's answers and to write/type at an appropriate speed.
- The scribe should arrive before the commencement of the examination, allowing sufficient time to establish a rapport with the student, to make seating arrangements and to agree guidelines for:

  - Presentation
  - Spelling
  - Punctuation
  - New paragraphs etc.

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  The scribe should be relaxed. This may help to alleviate any anxieties the student may have in relation to the examination.
- The scribe should advise students as to the duration of the examination, the number of questions to be answered and any additional instructions.
- The starting time and finish time of the examination should be clearly stated by the scribe and/or invigilator.
- An institution may require that the examination script is submitted in electronic format and that the examination material is recorded on an official computer located in the institution, not on a laptop belonging to the student or scribe.
- If using a computer, the scribe should ensure the computer is set to automatically save work regularly (every 3 to 5 minutes). If using Microsoft Word, go to Tools/Options/Save and select the preferred time.
- If the student needs a rest or toilet break the scribe/invigilator should accompany them.
- A student may elect to write sections of the paper themselves.
- If the student writes notes, essay plans or illustrations, these should be included with the examination script. For example, the student might draw rough diagrams

from which the scribe will draw a final version and include both copies with the examination script.

Guidelines on Provision of Readers in Examinations

The role of a reader in examinations is to read the examination questions only. Students may be accommodated together in the same venue with a shared reader. In exceptional cases only an individual reader may be required.

Guidelines for the HEI

- Both the student and reader should have access to training and practice sessions before the examination.
- The reader should be an independent person and not known to the student.
- In the case of a foreign language, scientific, mathematical or technical subject, the reader should ideally have a working knowledge of that subject/language.
- The reader should be able to read accurately and at a reasonable rate.
- The reader may also act as the invigilator for the examination.
- Sometimes a student may require a reader and a scribe. Is such instances the same person may act as both.

Guidelines for Readers

- The reader should advise students as to the duration of the examination, the number of questions to be answered and any additional instructions.
- The starting time and finish time of the examination should be clearly stated by the reader and/or invigilator.
- The reader should not provide content to the student or offer any suggestions.
- The reader should not advise the student on which questions to attempt, when to move on the next question, or the order in which questions should be attempted.
- Instructions given on the examination paper can only be repeated when the reader is specifically requested to do so by the student.
- The reader should make no other comment or use any intonation which emphasises any part of the examination questions, nor make any interpretation of the examination question(s).
- The reader should not discuss any matter with the student during the examination unless it relates to the re-reading of an examination question (having been requested to do so by the student).

Working with Vision-Impaired Students

- Readers should read the examination questions as often as requested.
- Readers should provide information regarding time elapsed and time remaining.
- Readers should help a student using tactile maps, diagrams, graphs and tables to extract the information which the print copy would provide to a sighted student.
- Readers should give the spelling of a word on an examination paper if requested.
- Readers should report any communication problems during the examination to the invigilator.

Guidelines for the Provision of Irish Sign Language Interpreters.

- The interpreter should arrive before the commencement of the examination, to make seating arrangements and to interpret interactions between invigilators and students. This time should also be used as an opportunity for the student and the interpreter to become familiar with each other's communication styles.
- The interpreter should translate all announcements and information given by the invigilator prior to and during the examination.
- The interpreter should translate all interaction between the examiner and the student, including questions and clarifications. The interpreter should interpret no other speech/sign, nor go beyond the student's or the invigilator's/examiner's communications.
- The student may request that the interpreter translate questions from the written examination paper. If, following translation, there is need for further clarification, the interpreter may attempt to rephrase their interpretation but they must not attempt to introduce additional information over and above that which is specifically mentioned in the question. Any further clarification that is sought should be referred to the examiner and not offered by the interpreter.
- Where a student's first language is ISL an interpreter may, if requested, offer a translation of ISL vocabulary into English; this may include offering the spelling of word in English on the basis of ISL vocabulary.
- The interpreter must not provide additional examples, contextual information nor should he/she attempt to provide guidance to the student in answering a question.
- If a student wishes to sign his/her assignment or examination and to have this simultaneously transcribed by a scribe, the interpreter may seek clarification, as is normal in interpreted interaction. This should be done in a manner that reduces the impact upon the student's flow. If the interpreter is seeking frequent clarification,

the matter should be raised with the Disability/Access Officer at the earliest opportunity, and a suitable replacement for further examinations should be found.

Guidelines for Computer Based Examinations

Student's Responsibilities during Examinations

1. The student must confirm that they are proficient in the use of the technology for examinations. To ensure competence in the use of the assistive technology, a number of training sessions may be required.
2. Where word processing is required by a student a minimum typing speed of 20 words per minute (wpm) is recommended. Training will be provided and it is the student's responsibility to be proficient in typing for his/ her examination.
3. During an examination it is the student's responsibility to save and print their own work. If they do not save their work and it is lost, they will not receive any additional time to finish their exam.
4. Students should not be permitted to bring any computer related equipment of their own (e.g. a memory stick or mouse) into the examination without prior approval and checking. In situations where appropriate facilities cannot be provided or where it is not practical to transfer software/personalised settings (voice recognition software, document reading software and screen magnification software) it may be permitted for a student to utilise their own equipment and/or the equipment supplied to them by the HEI.
5. If students have any difficulties during an examination they must alert the invigilator.

The following guidelines should be taken in to account with regard to computer setup:

1. Students should be provided with written guidelines on how to use their software under examination conditions and, if necessary, should attend training sessions prior to the examination period.
2. Students who are using a computer will sit their examinations in a different venue to their peer group. These venues are normally shared with other students.
3. Technical support should be available for each computer based examination session and at any other necessary stages (e.g. printing).
4. No access is provided to the internet, intranet or any other means of communication. Different examination images may be created to meet the needs of different cohorts (i.e. visually impaired students, students with specific learning difficulties etc.).

5. Sufficient work stations should be available in the examination venue including at least one replacement computer (and printers where required). Appropriate contingency plans should be put in place in the event of any computer malfunction and/ or failure during the examination sessions.
6. The computer should have an adequate power supply (i.e. should be charged and/or plugged in for the duration of the exam). The computer must have been cleared of any previously stored data, as must any portable storage medium used.
7. Where word processing (MS Word) is being used the software package should be set to background-save the students work.
8. Where word processing is utilised students may either save or print their examination answers.

Saving examination answers to USB key:
- A USB key is provided with the exam paper by the HEI.
- Students save their work to the USB key.
- USB key is returned to the Examinations Office at the end of the examination.
- A backup copy must be saved to the examination computer/ laptop.

Printing examination answers:
- Where students are required to print their examination answers ensure that adequate paper and toner are available to meet the demands of the test centre.

Computer Based Examinations for Students who are Blind/Vision Impaired

1. The computer must be set-up in line with the general computer set-up guidelines.
2. For a blind student, document reading software, word processing facilities and/or Braille/Braille-related devices and software may be needed.
3. A large screen or enlarged font may also be allowed.

Guidance for Use of a Computer as a Reader

1. Computer software which reads out an electronic paper, but does not decode or interpret the paper, may be used in place of a personal reader. The software must be tested to ensure it reads the electronic examination paper accurately. Academic departments must adhere to HEI guidelines when creating electronic examination papers.
2. Where the software is unable to give factual information from diagrams, graphs and tables for a blind/vision impaired student, it must be supplemented with the support of a personal reader (see Guidelines on Provision of Readers in Examinations).

Guidelines for Use of Voice Recognition Software

1. Students who qualify for the use of Voice Recognition Software in an examination must develop a mature voice file with appropriate subject specific vocabulary.
2. Ensure the computer being used meets at least the minimum software requirements as set out in the manufacturer's guidelines.
3. Ensure the USB headset has been installed and tested with the software prior to the examination.
4. The examination must be held in a separate venue where the accuracy of the software cannot be impacted by external noise.
5. As it is not recommended to transfer and use voice files on different hardware from that which it was created, permission may be given to the student to use their own equipment. In this case, the computer should be cleared of any previously stored data and verified by a nominated member of staff in the HEI.
6. The invigilator may be required to scribe if Voice Recognition Software is being used and there are any handwritten requirements, for example: diagrams, formulas or other modelled answers.

Appendix 3

Guidelines for Examiners when Marking Scripts from SLD and/or DHH Students

Guidelines for Examiners when Marking Scripts from SLD and/or DHH Students[2]

A student with a SLD or a DHH student can be disadvantaged when assessment takes the form of a written timed examination. Student's written work may contain:

1. **Surface errors** in spelling and grammar such as inaccuracies in the use of tense, grammatical agreement, plurals, spelling and punctuation.
2. **Structural flaws** including weak sequencing of ideas, paragraphs, and sentences; unclear expression of cause and effect; lack of competence in using abstract language or lack of awareness of writing genre.

When marking the examination script of a student with a SLD or a DHH student, the following Marking Guidelines should be taken into consideration:

1. First, read the script quickly to judge the student's underlying understanding of the topic; then assess their performance against the learning outcomes. If the script contains all the required elements but does not introduce them in a clear logical order, avoid penalising the student for a lack of structure in their writing unless this is a stipulated competency being assessed.
2. Errors in **spelling** do not mean that the student is confused about the meaning of the word or its function in their writing. Generally, such errors do not lead to ambiguity and should not be penalised when subject knowledge is being assessed.
3. **Lexical** errors, such as *coarse* for *course,* do not mean that the student is confused about the meaning of the words. This kind of error should not be penalised unless it leads to ambiguity.
4. **Grammatical** errors, like incorrect tense endings, lack of subject – verb agreement and incorrect word order may not affect the meaning of the sentence. For example: *Some of the features of Socratic dialogues were they seek definitions of abstract ideas, cross examining beliefs to expose contradictions and he used to use questioning to bring the pupil to recognise the truth.* Here the student's meaning is clear, the errors do not lead to ambiguity and the student should not be penalised.
5. *Punctuation* may not be used as a tool for clarifying meaning. Scripts may contain long sentences that are difficult to follow with indiscriminate punctuation or no

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[2] Adapted from *Guidelines for Marking the Work of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties (University of Central Lancashire)* http://www.uclan.ac.uk/information/services/sds/marking_guidelines_for_students_with_specific_learning_difficulties.php [accessed 14th June 2012]

punctuation at all. Very short sentences or fragments of sentences might also be produced. For instance: *The study considered three main areas of research. The effect's of frequent drug use the role of the family in the offenders behaviour and the impact of custodial sentence's on reoffending.* In this case the student's meaning is clear, but such errors can lead to ambiguity which will be reflected in the mark awarded.

6. Some students may have **restricted vocabulary** and use a far more limited range of words that one would expect. Avoid penalising students who may have an immature style of writing, unless written communication is a specified learning outcome.

7. Where grammar and spelling are core competencies of a course a student's work must be marked on the basis of accuracy in the language and therefore these marking guidelines will not apply.

8. In all subjects, if a student's errors make a material difference to the meaning of their work, it will not be possible to classify them as surface errors that do not incur penalty. For instance, if a nursing student writes *hypertension* instead of *hypotension*, this will affect the mark awarded.

9. In all subjects, if the surface errors or structural flaws make the student's work so ambiguous that it is impossible to decipher the meaning, then this diminishes his/her ability to demonstrate the module's learning outcomes and this would be reflected in the marks awarded.