

# QA208 Alternative Assessment



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE  
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY

## QA208 Alternative Assessment 02/12/2019

### 1. Context

University of Galway is committed to the provision of an equitable learning environment that supports all students to fulfil their academic potential. The University, therefore, recognises the rights of students with disabilities to avail of reasonable accommodations to enable them to participate on equitable terms. (See **Appendix 1** below for a brief note on the legal obligations of HEIs towards students with disabilities). University of Galway academic staff are strongly encouraged to ensure that their teaching, learning and assessment activities and practices are as inclusive as possible. The more accessible and inclusive these practices are, the lower the likelihood that students will require standard or non-standard reasonable accommodations. Staff may find the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) helpful when considering how to design inclusivity into the curriculum.

### 2. Purpose and scope

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to all relevant units at University of Galway about alternative forms of assessment as a reasonable accommodation for some students with disabilities. The policy refers to exams (including in-house exams) as well as other forms of assessment/coursework (such as essays, projects or assignments).

### 3. Definitions

A '**unit**' refers to an academic Discipline, School, College, Academy or Centre at University of Galway.

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

'**Disability**' is defined broadly under Irish law (see Appendix 1 below). Students who present to the Disability Support Service (DSS) at University of Galway with evidence that verifies the presence of a disability within the meaning of the law may register with the service for supports and accommodations.

Every student that registers with the DSS undergoes a needs assessment which gives rise to a **Learning and Educational Needs Summary (LENS) report**. This report outlines all supports and accommodations recommended by the DSS.

Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) are obliged under law to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. For the purposes of this policy, a '**reasonable accommodation**' can be defined as any action or adjustment, not part of the mainstream provision of the institution, which may enable a student with a disability to participate on their chosen course, without which they would be disadvantaged relative to their peers. An educational establishment may be held to have discriminated against a student with a disability if they do not do all that is reasonable to accommodate that student.

'**Assessment**' refers to all forms of assessment for which a student receives academic credit, including exams and coursework.

'**Official**' end-of-semester exams refer to exams that are coordinated by the University's Examinations Office.

'**In-house**' exams are defined as exams coordinated and managed by individual lecturers, disciplines, Schools or Colleges (including computer-based/online tests).

A **standard reasonable exam accommodation** refers to any quite commonly recommended adjustment or support that enables a student with a disability to demonstrate their true knowledge and ability in examinations without changing the demands of the examination. Examples of such accommodations include: additional time in exams, allocation to an alternative exam venue, access to assistive technology, provision of a scribe, or marking guidelines for examiners. These standard accommodations are routinely recommended by the DSS and are provided in both official and in-house exams. (See **Appendix 2** below for a complete list of standard exam accommodations). The intention behind the provision of such accommodations is to alleviate a substantial disadvantage without affecting the integrity of the assessment.

A **non-standard reasonable exam accommodation** refers to an adjustment or support that is recommended by the DSS in exceptional circumstances only, where it is recognised that standard reasonable exam accommodations are not sufficient to meet the needs of a particular student. Examples of such accommodations include: a recommendation that a student be assessed by means other than the standard two-hour written exam, a recommendation that a student not sit more than one exam per day, or a recommendation

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

that an altered exam paper be provided for a single student. The implementation of such non-standard accommodations will fall to the relevant College/School/Discipline.

**Assessment other than exams** refers to coursework assigned throughout the academic year such as projects, presentations, or essays. Examples of reasonable accommodations for such assessments include: leniency with deadlines where possible, permission to complete an individual instead of a group assignment, or permission to submit paper-based work instead of an oral presentation.

### 4. Responsibilities

**It is the responsibility of students** with a disability who wish to avail of reasonable accommodations to register with the Disability Support Service (DSS) at University of Galway. Students may register with the DSS, or request a review of their recommended reasonable accommodations, at any stage of the academic year.

**It is the responsibility of the DSS** to conduct a needs assessment for each student who discloses a disability and provides supporting documentation. Following needs assessment, all DSS recommendations (including assessment and exam accommodations) will be set out in the student's LENS report. These can only be changed by a Disability Advisor in consultation with the student. The DSS will share relevant information about each student's recommended in-class and exam accommodations with the appropriate academic and administrative units at University of Galway at the student's **first** registration with the DSS.

When a recommendation for alternative assessment is **first** made (whether at first registration with the DSS or following a subsequent review), the DSS will alert the relevant unit(s) and make the first formal request for alternative assessment(s), if required, on the student's behalf. **In all subsequent semesters, it will be the student's responsibility to contact the relevant academic unit to request alternative assessment as required.**

Where alternative assessment to an **exam** or exams has been recommended as a **non-standard reasonable accommodation**, the student must usually make a direct request to the relevant academic unit each semester, in writing, giving at least six weeks' notice. This minimum notice period may be reduced in exceptional circumstances. Where alternative assessment to coursework has been recommended, students must usually make a direct request as above, giving as much notice as possible.

Students are generally permitted to make use of their recommended exam accommodations in both 'official' and 'in-house' exams. In the latter case, it is the student's responsibility to provide adequate notice to those organising the exam(s) of their requirements.

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

**It is the responsibility of the Examinations Office** to implement standard reasonable exam accommodations for all official end-of-semester exams.

**It is the responsibility of each College/School/Discipline** or other relevant unit to implement reasonable accommodations for in-house exams and other assessments. Where the DSS has recommended an alternative form of assessment, whether for exams or coursework, it will be the responsibility of the relevant unit to determine the appropriate alternative format, having regard to all relevant factors including learning outcomes, accreditation requirements, marks and standards, the integrity of the assessment process, and the legal obligations of HEIs towards students with disabilities. Colleges and Schools are advised to discuss possible alternative assessment formats with accrediting bodies at the point of accreditation or reaccreditation.

The DSS will work with both the student and the academic unit concerned to determine the most appropriate form of assessment. The final decision on approving an alternative form of assessment rests with the Dean of the relevant College (or the Dean's nominee). It may not always be possible to offer an alternative form of assessment.

### 5. Implementation

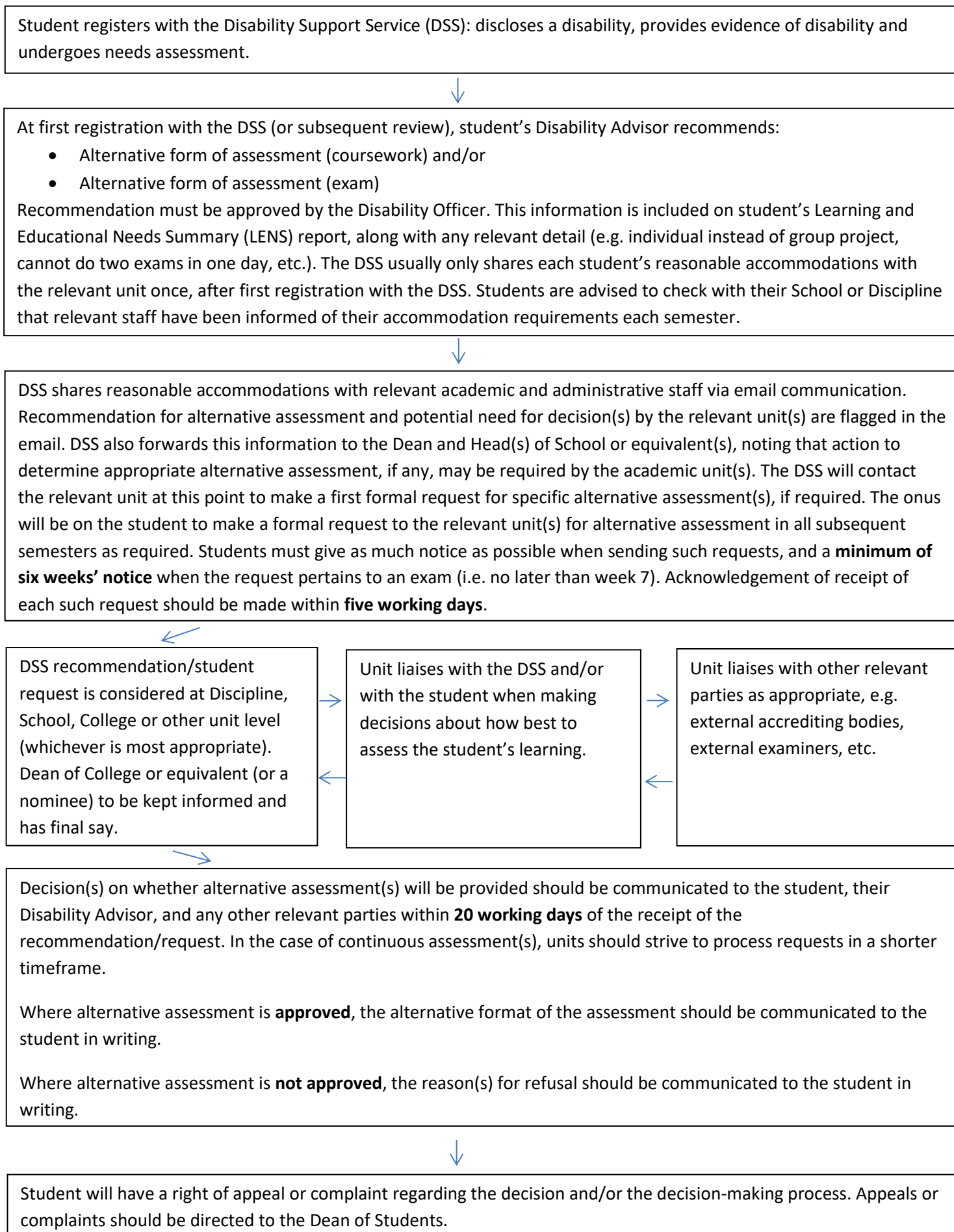
Where the DSS recommends standard reasonable accommodations, these shall be set out on the student's LENS report and implemented by the relevant units as appropriate.

The diagram below sets out the request, decision-making and implementation processes in those cases where the DSS has recommended the non-standard reasonable accommodation of alternative assessment (for coursework and/or exams).

For the purposes of consistency and transparency, each College shall draw up an agreed process for dealing with alternative assessment recommendations by the DSS, having regard to the processes and timelines set out below. The process should include clear information about to whom requests for alternative assessment should be sent, who is responsible for decision-making about alternative assessment, who should have input to the decision-making process, and the key criteria for decision-making on this matter.

# QA208 Alternative Assessment

**Figure 1: Request, decision-making and implementation processes and indicative timelines**



# QA208 Alternative Assessment

## 6. Related policies and documents

Disability Act, 2005

Disability Advisors Working Network (DAWN): *Guidelines and Procedures for the Granting of Reasonable Accommodations in Examinations to Students with Disabilities*. Adopted by DAWN, November 2012.

Employment Equality Act, 1998

Equal Status Act, 2000 (as amended)

University of Galway Access Centre and Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT). *Universal Design for Learning: Top 10 Tips* (February 2018).

### Appendix 1: Legal obligations of HEIs towards students with disabilities

See document below

### Appendix 2: Standard reasonable exam accommodations

See document below

### Appendix 3: Possible options for alternative assessment

See document below

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

### Appendix 1: Legal obligations of HEIs towards students with disabilities

#### **The Reasonable Accommodation Duty under the Equal Status Acts 2000 -2015**

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation in relation to the provision of goods and services is a legal requirement introduced by the Equal Status Acts 2000-2015. Educational establishments, including University of Galway, are bound by the provisions of the Acts, and students with disabilities are legally entitled to a reasonable accommodation where necessary.

Legally, reasonable accommodation must respond to the particular needs of the student. The accommodation must therefore be tailored to the individual, and it cannot be assumed that 'one size fits all'. Service providers must provide an accommodation to enable a person with a disability to access a particular service and a failure to do this is unlawful discrimination. The aim of this provision is to force service providers to overcome their preconceived notions about disability and to focus instead on the capabilities of individual applicants.

However, the duty to provide reasonable accommodation is not an open-ended obligation. Under the Equal Status Acts, reasonable accommodation cannot give rise to more than a nominal cost (discussed below). Legal decisions also suggest that there are procedural and substantive limits to the duty.

#### **Procedural limits**

The duty to provide reasonable accommodation is triggered by an actual situation, when the service provider becomes aware of the need to provide special treatment or facilities to a person with a disability. It follows from this that the service provider must actually be aware that a person has a disability. A two-part test applies for establishing an appropriate accommodation: (1) the service provider must assess the factual position concerning the person's impairment; (2) the service provider must consider what, if any, special treatment or facilities may be available that would enable that individual to avail of the services. This enquiry can only be regarded as adequate if the person with a disability is given a full opportunity to participate at each stage of the assessment and is allowed to present relevant medical evidence and make submissions, including submissions as to what would or would not help them.

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

A person with a disability who is dissatisfied with a service provider's response may bring a legal case for unlawful discrimination. In this situation the complainant must establish that they require a special treatment or facility without which it would be 'impossible' or 'unduly difficult' for them to avail of the particular service (discussed below). If the complainant can show this, the onus shifts to the service provider to show that they were not legally required to provide the required accommodation (e.g., because it entailed a greater than nominal cost).

### Substantive limits

The Equal Status Acts provide that service providers must do 'all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by providing special treatment or facilities, if without such special treatment or facilities it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail himself or herself of the service'. This suggests that once a student is able to avail of an education service in a manner that could not be construed as 'impossible' or 'unduly difficult', then the educational establishment has fulfilled its duty. However, there are as yet no legal decisions on this exact point.

Under the Equal Status Acts, the service provider is only obliged to do what is 'reasonable' to accommodate the person with a disability. Although it is highly probable that this standard does not comply with Ireland's obligations under international law, Irish legal decisions suggest that the word 'reasonable' limits the scope of the service provider's duty. In other words, the Equal Status Acts require a service provider to devise a 'reasonable' solution to a problem. The service provider is not obliged to achieve perfection or to accede to every request made by a person with a disability.

Finally, the Equal Status Acts provide that a service provider cannot be required to provide an accommodation that gives rise to more than a 'nominal cost'. It is for the service provider to demonstrate that the cost of the accommodation in question would be more than 'nominal'. Furthermore, in determining what is a 'nominal' cost, consideration is given to the overall budget of the service provider. This means that the cost must be evaluated in light of the resources of the entire University, not the resources of the individual College, School or Unit that is dealing with the request. The availability of any public grant, funding or scheme that would reduce the cost to the service provider must also be considered in evaluating whether a cost is 'nominal'. Finally, it appears that public bodies are held to a higher standard to private bodies.

In summary, while the duty to provide reasonable accommodation contained in the Equal Status Acts 2000-2015 is not perfect in terms of international law, it is still a strong legal duty that the University must comply with and that students with disabilities are entitled to expect.



## **QA208 Alternative Assessment**

### **Provisions from the Equal Status Acts 2000-2015**

Educational establishments are defined at section 7(1):

a pre-school service within the meaning of Part VII of the Child Care Act, 1991, a primary or post-primary school, an institution providing adult, continuing or further education, or a university or any other third-level or higher-level institution, whether or not supported by public funds.

Under sections 7(2)(a)-(d), Educational Establishments may not directly or indirectly discriminate in respect of:

- (a) the admission or the terms or conditions of admission of a person as a student to the establishment,
- (b) the access of a student to any course, facility or benefit provided by the establishment,
- (c) any other term or condition of participation in the establishment by a student, or
- (d) the expulsion of a student from the establishment or any other sanction against the student.

Under Section 3(1)(a), a disability includes a disability 'which exists at present or previously existed but no longer exists or may exist in the future, or which is imputed to the person concerned ...'

Under Section 2(1), 'disability' means:

- (a) the total or partial absence of a person's bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of a person's body,
- (b) the presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness,
- (c) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person's body,
- (d) a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction, or

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

(e) a condition, disease or illness which affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour.

Disabilities need not be physical. Legal rulings have held that disability includes attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorder, attention deficit disorder (ADD), cerebral palsy, Asperger's syndrome, learning disabilities and Down Syndrome. It also includes mental health conditions such as clinical depression and psychosocial conditions such as schizophrenia.

Reasonable accommodation is defined at section 4(1):

For the purposes of this Act discrimination includes a refusal or failure by the provider of a service to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by providing special treatment or facilities, if without such special treatment or facilities it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail himself or herself of the service.

Section 4(2) states:

A refusal or failure to provide the special treatment or facilities to which *subsection (1)* refers shall not be deemed reasonable unless such provision would give rise to a cost, other than a nominal cost, to the provider of the service in question.

# QA208 Alternative Assessment

## Appendix 2: Standard reasonable exam accommodations

The following are the most commonly recommended **standard reasonable exam accommodations**. These recommendations are included in a student's Learning and Educational Needs Summary (LENS) report and are implemented by the Examinations Office during official end-of-semester exams. Students are entitled to request standard reasonable exam accommodations for in-house or online timed assessments. In the latter case, it is the responsibility of the relevant academic unit to implement the requested recommended accommodations.

**Additional time in exams:** typically, an additional 10 minutes per hour.

**Alternative exam venue:** students may be allocated to a special venue where their supports and accommodations can be put in place. Depending on need, students may be allocated to a smaller exam hall, a PC suite, a low distraction venue, a Library booth, or a room alone to complete their exams.

**Assistive technology:** students may be allowed to make use of an electronic reader, a PC to type their exam answers, or speech-to-text software, for example.

**Scribe:** Students may be allocated a scribe, who writes exam answers while the student dictates, for some or all exams. Occasionally a scribe may also act as a reader.

**Enlarged font or paper size:** for students who are vision-impaired.

**Marking guidelines:** the exam scripts of students with a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia or dyscalculia) or a hearing impairment should be identified by a sticker, and marked according to the guidelines enclosed with the scripts.

The table below provides a more comprehensive list of all **standard reasonable exam accommodations**. Please note that this list is subject to regular change, whereby exam accommodations are removed or added as agreed between the Disability Support Service and the Examinations Office.

Adjustable chair	A chair with an adjustable height/back
Area surrounding desk to be cleared	Student needs area around desk cleared
Close to bathroom	Exam venue with easy access to bathroom
Dragon software	Specialist speech-recognition software that converts speech to text
Enlarged Paper A3	Exam paper enlarged onto A3 paper
Extra time 10 mph	Student is allowed 10 minutes extra per hour
Extra time 15 mph	Student is allowed 15 minutes extra per hour
Food & Drink	Student allowed to bring food and drink into the examination

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

Height adjustable desk	Student requires a height adjustable desk
HI Sticker	Student requires the Hearing Impairment (HI) sticker and marking guidelines to be included with the script. Ensure student has access to instructions.
JAWS software	Student will be using JAWS - screen reading software - to read the exam paper and type their script. Digital copy of exam paper required
Larger desk	Student requires a larger desk
Lectern	Lectern to allow student to stand for the exam
Magnification hardware	Special device used by student to read exam paper and script
Medical Alert	Contact the health unit if student becomes unwell or distressed
Medical Device Epi Pen	Student allowed to bring an Epi pen into the exam room
Medical Device Glucometer	Student allowed to bring a glucometer device into exam room
Must have window	Student requires exam venue with window
Needs PA present	Student requires their personal assistant (PA) to be present with them during the exam
No accommodations	Student is registered with Disability Support Service (DSS) but has no exam accommodations
PC to type	Student requires a personal computer to type their exam script. Script should be saved to USB key and printed
Reader	Student requires the exam paper read to them by a person
Screen magnification	Student will use specialist screen magnification software
Scribe	Student requires a scribe to write up their exam script
Scribe/reader	Student requires a scribe to write up their exam script and read exam paper
Seat close to door	Student requires a seat close to a door for quicker exit
Seat close to front	Student requires a seat close to front to hear instructions better or reduce distraction
Seat facing wall	Student requires a seat facing a wall to reduce distraction
Sit near rear of hall	Student requires a seat at the rear of the hall
SLD sticker and marking guidelines	Student requires the Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) sticker and marking guidelines to be included with the script
Specialist Scribe	Student requires a scribe with a qualification in a specific area
TextHelp	Student will be using TextHelp software to read the exam paper. Digital copy of exam paper required

## QA208 Alternative Assessment

### Appendix 3: Possible options for alternative assessment

The following are some possible options for alternative forms of assessment where this has been recommended for a student registered with the Disability Support Service. Please note that the following list is not exhaustive and each case should be considered on an individual basis.

There may be situations where an alternative cannot be offered. For example, a particular form of assessment may be required in order for a student to demonstrate that they have achieved the required learning outcomes, or to meet professional or accreditation requirements.

#### Possible alternative forms of coursework (including in-class/online tests)

Coursework type	Possible/existing alternatives
Fieldwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student not penalised for issues with accessibility – may be facilitated to complete fieldwork in a different location or manner to others</li> <li>• Virtual fieldtrips</li> <li>• Student granted access to fieldwork data as appropriate</li> </ul>
Group project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student is permitted to complete work on their own</li> <li>• Student contributes to the group in a way that they can manage without undue penalty</li> </ul>
Individual or group oral presentation (to group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student presents to an individual or a smaller group</li> <li>• Student records a video of their presentation</li> <li>• Student submits a written presentation/report</li> <li>• Student is exempted from presenting within a group, but contributes to the presentation in other ways</li> </ul>
Laboratory work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative formats will depend on the nature of the laboratory work and the learning outcomes being assessed</li> </ul>
Multiple choice questions (MCQs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative question types, e.g., essay, true/false, short answer, complete the sentence, etc.</li> </ul>
Objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No viable alternative identified</li> </ul>
Oral assessment (languages)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No viable alternative identified</li> </ul>
Performance-based work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No viable alternative identified</li> </ul>
Posters and poster presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written assignment/presentation</li> </ul>

#### Possible alternatives to exams (written or computer-based)

Exam type	Possible/existing alternatives
Written/computer-based exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 24-hour or 48-hour exam (identical to standard exam and released at exam start time)</li> <li>• Take-home essay or other assignment, to be completed in a set time</li> <li>• Oral exam</li> <li>• Presentation</li> <li>• Video or practical demonstration</li> </ul>