

Examinations and assessments

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Introduction

Applications for adjustments to assessments and mitigating circumstances

A Student Support Plan provides recommendations for exam adjustments only and a formal application must be made, in collaboration with the student, to actually put the adjustments in place.

There are two types of application that can be made to put adjustments in place:

1. Alternative arrangements to examinations. Alternative arrangements are changes to the conditions under which an examination takes place.
2. Major course adjustments (dispensation from the regulations). Major course adjustments should be considered when a candidate's disability-related needs cannot be met by alternative examination arrangements, when dispensation from the regulations may be required. This can include, for example, reduced rates of working (with the course taken over a longer period) or alternative assessments (for example a take-home essay to replace a timed examination).

Identifying needs

Identifying the need for reasonable adjustments to examinations

Reasonable adjustments are made to examinations and assessments for disabled students to mitigate or remove barriers and are a statutory duty as set out in the [Equality Act 2010](#). It is crucial that reasonable adjustments to examinations and assessments are considered, and put in place if needed, from the outset of a student's course, or as soon as possible after a diagnosis or registration with DAS.

It is worth being mindful of the distinction between a temporary illness or injury (where applications for alternative arrangements can be made by obtaining a medical certificate), and [a disability](#), which is likely to significantly impact on a person's day to day activities for at least a year.

The process for arranging for reasonable adjustments to assessments starts with the student or prospective student informing the University of a disability, either on a UCAS form or subsequently on e-Vision, or via the college or department. The student then registers with the Disability Advisory Service (DAS). DAS will collect [medical evidence](#), and evidence of prior access arrangements to school examinations (access arrangements is the term used for reasonable adjustments to exams in the school system). DAS will then give recommendations for exam adjustments in the Student Support Plan (SSP). New diagnostic assessments may be required for students with an SpLD, and DAS will advise students on these requirements. DAS will complete an [EAP12\(b\) form](#) for SpLD students which sets out recommendations for exam adjustments.

Students may well have received adjustments to exams and assessments whilst at school, but whether or not this was the case, the potential need for alternative arrangements will be considered by the doctor granting the medical certificate and subsequently by the student's disability advisor at DAS.

Alternative arrangements

Alternative arrangements to examinations can include:

- Hearing loops and/or materials provided in written format
- Question papers and materials provided in enlarged and/or coloured formats
- Access to medicines, food and drink in exams
- Access to bathrooms outside of the usual non-permitted periods

- Typing rather than handwriting exams
- Use of assistive software or support worker to aid reading and/or writing
- Changes to the scheduling of exams
- Extra rest or writing time to accommodate other adjustments or slower pace of work
- Use of ergonomic equipment, such as ergonomic keyboards and mice or adjustable desks and chairs

What is appropriate as an adjustment is likely to be unique to each student. It may not be possible to accommodate some of these arrangements in the main exam room, where arrangements may cause disturbance to other candidates.

Application process

Colleges are responsible for making applications to the Examinations Schools for adjustments to University examinations, for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught students.

Departments are responsible for making adjustments to assessment for research students and for non-matriculated students. An application should usually be made for on-going adjustments, which apply for the duration of the course. Students whose condition fluctuates significantly may apply for temporary exam adjustments that apply for a year or the specific exam period.

Detailed guidance on the application process for undergraduates (which is made via SharePoint) is available in the [Examinations and Assessments section](#) of the Academic Support website, including details of the deadlines for the process.

For research students, applications for adjustments to their transfer and confirmation assessments, and final viva, can be made using the [Application for Adjustments to Assessment Arrangements form \(GSO.19\)](#). Further guidance on this process can be found in [Applying for adjustments for disability: process for research students and staff \(GSO.19c\)](#). There is also guidance available for Directors of Graduate Studies on promoting inclusive practice in oral examinations, and guidelines for considering alternative arrangement requests. This can be found in [GSO.19b](#).

[Students' responsibilities](#) in the application process can be found on the Oxford student webpages.

Implementing alternative arrangements

Once alternative arrangements have been granted, departments should ensure any alternative formats required for exam scripts and related materials are created in a timely manner.

Departments and colleges also need to ensure any agreed alternative arrangements for University exams are replicated in any departmental and college exams.

There are three types of exam room at the Examinations Schools:

Main examination hall (may be a large room like North School at Exam Schools or Ewert House in Summertown, seating 200-350 candidates, or may be one of the smaller rooms seating 30-50 candidates)

WP suite (at Exam Schools, small to medium sized room containing PCs and laptops for those with permission to type examinations, some of whom may also have extra time)

Extra time room (at Exam Schools, small to medium sized room for those with extra time who are handwriting their examinations)

There is guidance about making arrangements for individual (college) sittings in the [alternative arrangements section](#) of the examinations and assessments website, including the appropriate set up of the room and IT equipment.

Major dispensations

If it is thought that dispensation from regulations may be needed in order to mitigate the barriers experienced by a student in the assessment process, serious consideration should be given to an application at an early stage.

Dispensations can include:

- A student being allowed to extend the overall period of time within which a course is normally taken, e.g. to spread assessment for a Final Honour School across three rather than two years.
- A revised assessment schedule being approved for a student requiring extra time to complete submitted work.
- An alternative method of assessment being permitted for one or more assessment items. This often entails finding alternatives to

unseen written examinations, such as extended essays, take-home papers or an additional dissertation.

- An alteration to the timing or duration of an assessment being permitted e.g. splitting an examination over more than one session.
- A student being exceptionally permitted to omit one or more papers from the normal assessment requirement. This can be done on the basis that the examiners are content that they will have sufficient material on which to reach a classified outcome. Further details are available in the [Exams and assessment framework](#), Annex F.

Application process

Applications to Education Committee should be made as early as possible. Generally applications should be submitted by the student's college for undergraduate students and from the department/faculty for postgraduate students. It is normally expected that the college and department or faculty will have liaised regarding the proposed adjustments before it is sent to Education Committee. In most cases the college, department or faculty should also have discussed the application with DAS.

[Detailed guidance on the application process](#) is available.

The requirement when considering applications for major adjustments is to identify what would be fair and reasonable for the student concerned in their individual circumstances, while maintaining the academic standards of the course. Approval for a particular application should not therefore be taken as providing an automatic precedent for another student. Each case is considered on its merits.

Fairness to other candidates is ensured by taking very seriously the requirement not to compromise the competence standards of the course. The identification of a course's competence standards is therefore key to avoiding unlawful discrimination and enabling the University to meet its anticipatory duty to make reasonable adjustments (see Annex B: Competence standards for further guidance).

Supervisory bodies are urged to make explicit the competence standards of their courses in order to be better prepared for applications for major adjustments to the mode of assessment.

Extensions to summative assessments

If the impact of a student's disability means that they are unlikely to be able to meet a deadline for a specific summative assessment, extensions must be applied for on a case-by-case basis by the student's college (or the department, for non-matriculated students) well in advance of the deadline. An application will need to be made for each extension. Requests for extensions to deadlines for work already submitted should be made to the Proctors' Office at examinations@proctors.ox.ac.uk, where this is due to a sudden flare up in the student's condition. Revised extension schedules (including extra time for assessed essays) are dealt with as a dispensation by Education Policy Support.

Extensions to summative assessments should not be confused with the 'flexibility with formative deadlines' recommendation sometimes given in SSP, which is intended to support disabled students in managing their term-time workload. Extensions to assessed essays will only be granted on a case by case basis.

Mitigating circumstances

Where a student feels that, despite alternative arrangements being put in place, these were not sufficient to mitigate disadvantages relating to their disability during an examination, they should discuss this with their college. Full details about the application process can be found on the [mitigating circumstances notice to examiners page](#). Careful thought should then be given to further adjustments (including major adjustments) that may be needed for future exams such as to more effectively mitigate the disadvantage.

What do I do if a student ...?

... wants to make an application for alternative arrangements that are not included in the SSP?

Alternative arrangements requested due to a disability should be recommended in an SSP. If the student wants to apply for an arrangement that is not covered, DAS will need to be consulted so that

they can judge whether the suggested arrangement is likely to be a reasonable adjustment. If this is the case, the SSP will be adjusted.

... decides they do not want the alternative arrangements to be put in place. What should I do?

If a student communicates to you that they would prefer not to have the alternative arrangements put in place that are recommended in the SSP, then there is no need to make the application. However, do let the student know that if the arrangements are put in place in good time, they can 'try out' the arrangements during [mock examinations](#) or in collections, and make a decision then, but only if the alternative arrangements application has been made and approved.

... wants to apply for alternative arrangements as a result of a long term medical condition or disability, but they haven't registered with DAS?

Whilst it is technically possible to make arrangements in this way, a student should be strongly advised to engage with DAS, as if alternative arrangements to examinations are needed, students are also likely to benefit from other reasonable adjustments to study (e.g. permission to record teaching sessions, or extended library loans) that can be facilitated by DAS.