

# University Centre Colchester

## Code of Practice on Learning Support and Reasonable Adjustment

Details			
Owner	UCC Academic Services		
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<b>Version Number</b>	<b>Changes from previous 12 months policy</b>
6	Minor updates to job titles and names of validating partners
	<b>Changes to policy in year</b>

**Equality Impact Assessment Tool:**

UCC Code of Practice on Learning Support and Reasonable Adjustments

		Yes/No	Comments
<b>1</b>	<b>Does the policy/guidance affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of:</b>		
	Race or ethnicity	No	
	Disability	No	
	Gender	No	
	Religion or belief	No	
	Sexual orientation	No	
	Age	No	
	Marriage and Civil Partnership	No	
	Maternity and Pregnancy	No	
	Gender Reassignment	No	
<b>2</b>	<b>Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?</b>	No	
<b>3</b>	<b>If you have identified potential discrimination, are any exceptions valid, legal and/or justifiable?</b>	N/A	
<b>4</b>	<b>Is the impact of the policy/guidance likely to be negative?</b>	No	
<b>5</b>	<b>If so, can the impact be avoided?</b>	N/A	
<b>6</b>	<b>What alternatives are there to achieving the policy/guidance without the impact?</b>	N/A	
<b>7</b>	<b>Can we reduce the impact by taking different action?</b>	N/A	

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This Code of Practice provides a framework for the implementation of learning support and Reasonable Adjustments to support students with specific learning requirements. University Centre Colchester aims to ensure that all students achieve their full academic potential and that no student is disadvantaged because of a disability in their admission to, and participation in, the learning environment of the institution and in demonstrating that they have achieved the learning outcomes of their programme of study.
- 1.2 Colchester Institute is subject to the Equality Act 2010 (“the Act”) which consolidates the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. The Act requires that the University pay due regard to the need to:
- “advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it”
- 1.3 The Act confirms that a person has a disability if:
- (a) they have a physical or mental impairment, and
  - (b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.
- 1.4 According to the Act, the effect of an impairment is a long-term effect if:
- (a) it has lasted at least 12 months;
  - (b) the period for which it lasts is likely to be at least 12 months; or
  - (c) it is likely to last for the rest of the life of the person affected.
- 1.5 The Act (section 20) confirms the following requirements for Reasonable Adjustments:
- (i) where a provision, criterion or practice of (an institution) puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter in comparison with persons who are not disabled, to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the disadvantage.
  - (ii) where a physical feature puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter in comparison with persons who are not disabled, to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to avoid the disadvantage.
  - (iii) where a disabled person would, but for the provision of an auxiliary aid, be put at a substantial disadvantage in relation to a relevant matter in comparison with persons who are not disabled, to take such steps as it is reasonable to have to take to provide the auxiliary aid.

## **2 Identification and Disclosure Process**

### **2.1 Identifying a Condition During the Application Process**

- 2.1.1 University Centre Colchester has a proactive approach to identifying students who may need additional learning support either through the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) or through Reasonable Adjustments.
- 2.1.2 University Centre Colchester encourages students to disclose any learning support needs, disability or medical conditions at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.1.3 Students who identify themselves to have either a disability, medical condition or learning support need on their initial application to study at University Centre Colchester will be contacted and requested to complete a UCC Additional Medical Information and/or a UCC Additional Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) Information form. These are available either as an electronic form or hard copy. These forms, which differ dependent on the medical or learning support need disclosed, provide University Centre Colchester with more detailed information regarding the student and informs UCC where DSA funded support or Reasonable Adjustments may be required. It is the responsibility of the student to complete and return these forms in a timely and accurate manner. Any delay or non-completion of forms may result in support not being in place for the student at the start of the academic year.
- 2.1.4 Following completion of the UCC Additional Medical Information and/or a UCC Additional Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) Information form the student may be contacted with further guidance regarding applying for Disabled Students Allowance support or a proposed reasonable adjustment plan may be generated.
- 2.1.5 Any information that is identified during the admissions process will be added to the students record, and appropriate members of staff will be informed if the student enrolls on their programme of study. Further details on the sharing of information can be found in section four.

### **2.2 Disclosures Once on Programme**

- 2.2.1 University Centre Colchester encourages students to disclose details of any disability, learning support need or medical condition at the earliest opportunity.
- 2.2.2 It is the student's right not to disclose any disability but those who choose not to disclose, or limit their disclosure, may not be able to access the full range of support available.
- 2.2.3 A student can make a formal disclosure mid-programme by approaching UCC Academic Services or their course team. They will be requested to complete the UCC Additional Medical Information and/or a UCC Additional Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) Information form as appropriate and provide appropriate evidence. Links to these forms can be found on the UCC Student Portal. Where a disclosure is made mid programme, Reasonable Adjustments are unlikely to be retrospectively applied. Work from previous academic years and work where the original submission is no longer available will not be remarked.
- 2.2.4 Late disclosure of conditions will not be accepted for Extenuating Circumstances claims, other than where a formal diagnosis has recently been made. In such cases the Extenuating Circumstances claim should be submitted within four weeks of receiving a formal report.

- 2.2.5 The institution will only accommodate requests for additional support or Reasonable Adjustments where a student formally discloses such a need as set out in sections 3 and 4.

### **2.3 Informal Disclosure of Student's Support Needs**

- 2.3.1 If a student informs a member of UCC staff that they have a disability or medical condition, the member of staff should establish if the student has already disclosed this to the institution. Under Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act it is the member of staff's responsibility to act upon their knowledge of the student's disability.
- 2.3.2 Information on all informal disclosures should be passed to UCC Academic Services. UCC Academic Services will then contact the student to verify the disclosure and provide advice regarding support via either the DSA or Reasonable Adjustments.
- 2.3.3 If the student objects to the initial member of staff informing anyone of their condition, it is advisable that they obtain this statement in writing with the student's signature for the legal protection of themselves and University Centre Colchester. It will then be permissible to treat the information in confidence. If the student is not in agreement, then confidentiality can only be broken if a Health & Safety or Safeguarding issue is at stake. If in any doubt, staff are encouraged speak to UCC Academic Services without revealing the student's identity.

## **3 Disabled Students Allowance**

### **3.1 Eligibility**

- 3.1.1 Full and part-time, undergraduate and postgraduate UK students taking eligible courses can apply for a Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). Those classed as EU students may also be eligible and will need to check current rules with DSA or speak to the UCC Accessibility Officer for more information.

**To be eligible, a course must be in the UK, be at least 25% FTE intensity and one of the following:**

- a first degree, e.g. BA, BSc or BEd;
- a Foundation Degree;
- a Certificate of Higher Education;
- a Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE);
- a Higher National Certificate (HNC)
- a Higher National Diploma (HND)
- a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE);
- a postgraduate course;
- an Initial Teacher Education course.

**To qualify, a student must provide appropriate evidence of:**

- Autism Spectrum Condition;
- Hearing impairment;
- Vision impairment;
- Specific learning difficulty (SpLD);
- Long-term medical condition;
- Multiple disabilities;
- Mobility impairment;
- Mental Health Difficulty;
- Other condition not mentioned above.

- 3.1.2 In all cases a student's condition must be long-standing (i.e. it must have lasted for 12 months or more and be anticipated to continue) and have a significant impact on the conduct of their daily life which, at University, includes an impact on academic studies.
- 3.1.3 If a student has a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, they must provide evidence in the form of a post 16 years Diagnostic Assessment from a Chartered Psychologist with a Health Professional Council (HPC) Practicing Certificate, or a specialist dyslexia teacher with a Practicing Certificate. If they have a physical disability, medical condition, mental-health condition or sensory impairment, they will need to provide 'medical evidence' of this. This can be a letter from a doctor or suitable specialist. The evidence provided in support of a DSA application must clearly show that a student's condition is disabling under the above criterion and should give diagnosis, the duration of the condition and its effects.
- 3.1.4 If a student does not have a formal diagnosis for Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) UCC Academic Services can refer them to an approved assessor for formal diagnosis if SpLD is suspected. The formal assessment costs £330, but UCC will cover £200 of this cost. If the student is diagnosed as having Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD), UCC will cover the additional £130 cost. If the student is not diagnosed, the student will be expected to pay the remaining £130 directly to the assessor. These costs are correct as of June 2024. If the assessment takes place prior to the student registering on the course and the student subsequently decides not to take up their place, the student will become liable for the full cost of the assessment and will be invoiced accordingly.
- 3.1.5 For more information about eligibility see the GOV.UK page on Disabled Students' Allowances. <https://www.gov.uk/disabled-students-allowances-dsa>
- 3.1.6 Full time students who already have a student loan approved for the year can apply for DSA using the short form or via their Student Finance online account .
- 3.1.7 Postgraduate students, part time students and those without a student loan must complete a full application form each year. Those with Student Finance accounts should indicate on their student loan application that they wish their DSA provision to continue for the next academic year. Students completing the full form who need section 5 to be completed by their institution should request this from the UCC Accessibility Officer.
- 3.2 Non-Medical Helpers**
- 3.2.1 DSA do not pay for any services funded by other bodies. For example, if you require personal care whilst you are at University Centre Colchester, funding for this has to be arranged with your local Social Services Department.
- 3.2.2 DSA do fund assistance with study-related support.
- 3.2.3 Colchester Institute is no longer a provider of Non-Medical Helpers (NMH). As a provider we are unable to recommend specific providers due to regulations, but will work with external providers to ensure students are able to access their support either on or off campus.
- 3.2.4 NMH providers will be identified on a student's study needs assessment report and also in their DSA2 Entitlement Letter along with the hourly rate that is charged. External providers must invoice directly to a student's funding body and funding must be maintained within the limits set in your approval letter.

### **3.3 How to Apply**

- 3.3.1 Students should apply to the same funding provider as their other student finance. For students from England this will be the Student Finance England. If you need help completing your application, or have questions about anything on the application form, please see UCC Academic Services who will be able to assist you. It is very helpful if you tick the boxes to give permission for your DSA information to be shared with UCC as we will then be sent copies of your Needs Assessment Report and DSA2 Entitlement Letter and can use the information in them to make Reasonable Adjustments for the needs that have been identified.
- 3.3.2 After you apply, your funding provider will contact you to give their decision on your application. If your application is successful you will be advised to attend a Study Needs Assessment. At this meeting the Assessor will discuss your situation in relation to your academic work and you will agree a report including recommendations for specialist equipment, assistive software and support that will go to your funding body. The assessment centre will ask you for a copy of your approval letter from your funding body and a copy of your evidence so that they can be prepared for the meeting with you. It is important to be honest and open with the Assessor and mention everything you feel causes you difficulty.
- 3.3.3 Study Needs Assessments are carried out by independent Study Needs Assessment centres, not by University Centre Colchester. A student can use any accredited DSA Study Needs Assessment Centre in the country. Most accredited centres can be found on the National Network of Assessment Centres website:  
<https://www.nnac.org/>
- 3.3.4 Following the assessment appointment, which usually takes up to 2 hours, the report will be sent to your funding body who will then contact you to tell you what they have agreed, and how to go about ordering equipment and arranging services. It is very helpful if you give your approval for a copy of your report to be sent to [uccsupport@colchester.ac.uk](mailto:uccsupport@colchester.ac.uk) so that we can see what University Centre Colchester is recommended to do to assist you in your studies.

### **3.4 Award of Support**

- 3.4.1 When a student is awarded DSA support, the agreement is between themselves, the DSA and third-party external providers. It is the responsibility of the student to contact all providers of the agreed support (including equipment and nonmedical helper support). This is to ensure the providers are fully aware of their commitment to the student. The providers will ask for a copy of the student's DSA2 Entitlement Letter.
- 3.4.2 If a student would like an external provider to supply support on campus they should contact UCC Academic Services to arrange access for the provider. UCC Academic Services will liaise with the provider to confirm they meet University Centre Colchester's vetting procedure and that suitable accommodation is available. Please be aware that this process can take a number of weeks due to the requirements that all providers accessing the campus are suitably DBS checked.



## **4 Reasonable Adjustments**

### **4.1 Baseline Reasonable Adjustments**

- 4.1.1 Reasonable Adjustments are not intended to deliver favourable treatment to students with disabilities in comparison to their non-disabled peers, but rather their purpose is to create a level playing field for students disadvantaged by a disability or learning difficulty and maintain equality of opportunity.
- 4.1.2 It is expected that a student requesting additional support for a disability or learning difficulty would have also applied for support from the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) if eligible.
- 4.1.3 The following would be considered standard baseline Reasonable Adjustments for all students with a confirmed diagnosis of specific learning difficulties (SpLD). Those that apply will be outlined in a student's Reasonable Adjustment Agreement
- Provision of learning material in advance. This may include outline lecture notes, copies of PowerPoint or presentation slides and reading materials 24 hours prior to the lecture via Moodle;
  - Advance provision of reading lists;
  - Extended library loans;
  - Additional 1:1 academic tutorial;
  - Utilisation of Marking Policy for Students with Dyslexia (See Appendix B);
  - Submission extensions where recommended in a DSA needs assessment report;
  - Examination Allowances;
  - Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans.

### **4.2 Additional Information on Examination Allowances**

- 4.2.1 Exams should be a fair test of a student's knowledge and abilities. For some disabled students, the usual exam format may not be suitable and, if this is the case, adjustments can be made. Typical adjustments might be:
- extra time (usually 25% but can be more)
  - rest breaks
  - personal time reminders
  - exam papers in different formats (enlarged font, coloured paper, electronic copy)
  - use of computer, software and/or hardware
  - separate room
  - use of a scribe or reader
- 4.2.2 Further information on examination allowances can be found in the Examination Procedures Regulations.
- 4.2.3 If a student has a condition that does not require extra time or any other reasonable adjustment but may affect their exam performance (such as diabetes), they should arrive early and contact the Invigilator prior to when students are filing into the exam venue, to organise any special, individual requirements.

### **4.3 Extension Requests**

- 4.3.1 Students who wish to request extensions for an ongoing disability or learning difficulty can do so through the Reasonable Adjustment process. Extensions, when agreed, will be included in the Reasonable Adjustment Agreement when it is drawn up. They must be requested at least one week prior to deadline via the method given in the agreement.

- 4.3.2 All extension requests are processed individually and should be made when negotiating Reasonable Adjustments. The request will be considered within the context of the learner's situation and previously agreed Reasonable Adjustments. Extensions recommended in Needs Assessment Reports will be considered. Extensions may be provided for a limited period as a student adapts to a recent diagnosis or new learning environment. Extensions must not be used as a long-term time management tool.
- 4.3.3 Extension requests will be considered favourably if there is evidence that submission deadlines on a programme have not been staggered appropriately throughout the examination periods.
- 4.3.4 An extension will usually be for one week and will be for a maximum of two weeks.
- 4.3.5 Extensions will not normally be granted later in the year after the Reasonable Adjustment Agreement has been agreed and signed, unless the student's situation changes during the year and this can be evidenced.
- 4.3.6 Extensions will not be granted where students have turned down previous opportunities to engage with learning support or have turned down the offer of Reasonable Adjustments.
- 4.3.7 Extensions will not be granted as a result of the student coming close to the submission deadline and being unable to submit for reasons that do not relate to their disability or due to poor planning and time management.
- 4.3.8 For situations involving circumstances beyond the student's control, they should submit an Extenuating Circumstances application along with suitable evidence.

#### **4.4 Complex Reasonable Adjustments**

- 4.4.1 For students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), with more complex needs, together with other disabilities including mental health conditions or other health conditions, Reasonable Adjustments including consideration of alternative forms of assessment will be determined on a case by case basis. In such cases, UCC Academic Services should be contacted in the first instance to discuss individual adjustments as appropriate.
- 4.4.2 In such cases University Centre Colchester will require evidence of diagnosis and student need. It is expected that a DSA Needs Assessment Report would be provided.
- 4.4.3 In certain circumstances the college may look to provide individual support in one or more of the following areas:
- Practical support assistant;
  - Library support assistant;
  - Reader;
  - Scribe;
  - Workshop/lab assistant;
  - Proof reader;
  - Study assistant;
  - Exam support worker;
  - Manual note taker;
  - Specialist transcription service.

4.4.4 This level of practical support is, however, very rare, and will be assessed on an individual basis. This level of support will be capped at a costed maximum of 25% of the actual tuition fees paid by the learner.

#### **4.5 Alternative Assessments**

4.5.1 Methods of assessment vary, although most courses are assessed on written course work such as essays as well as examinations. Some subjects also require practical and fieldwork.

If a student feels alternative assessment is necessary for one or more assignments they may request consideration of this using the following process.

4.5.2 (i) The student must submit a request for alternative assessment in writing, with the relevant information and justification to support the request, to the UCC Academic Services at [uccsupport@colchester.ac.uk](mailto:uccsupport@colchester.ac.uk). This should include:

- an explanation as to why the current method of assessment places them at a significant disadvantage,
- their preference for alternative assessment,
- details of other adjustments they have tried and, where relevant, why these have not worked for them.

(ii) UCC Academic Services will consider the case put forward and the supporting documentation. They will decide if further supporting evidence is required and may contact the student to discuss the request.

(iii) UCC Academic Services will contact the student's Course Leader to ask for information about the learning objectives of modules, the standard method of assessment, and what adjustments may be available. When this has been gathered, the request and supporting documentation will be passed to the student's Area Head.

(iv) Information about whether adjustments can be offered, and what these are, will be provided to the student. If there is more than one option, the student will be asked to confirm which assessment method they would prefer. They will also be asked to confirm that they wish to go ahead and have any approved alternative assessment put in place.

(v) The student's request, along with the proposed alternative assessment option, will then be passed to the Principal and Chief Executive for approval.

(vi) For students on University of East Anglia validated programmes the agreed alternative assessment option will then be passed to the Academic Director of Partnerships for final approval.

(vii) Modules need to be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that the alternative assessment recommended does not compromise a learning objective of any module in subsequent years.

## **5 Sharing of Information**

- 5.1 Any student who requests Reasonable Adjustments during their time studying at University Centre Colchester will be required to formally declare their disability and have their student record updated accordingly.
- 5.2 Agreed Reasonable Adjustments, and where deemed beneficial the student's Needs Assessment Report, will be shared with appropriate staff within the organisation. These include the Area Head, Programme Team and the Exams Department.
- 5.3 Reasonable Adjustments will also be logged centrally within UCC Academic Services and reported upon within the organisation's management structure. Formal reporting will be anonymised and be for governance, finance and planning purposes only. The existence of a Reasonable Adjustment Agreement will also be recorded on the Support Register for the student's course.
- 5.4 University Centre Colchester staff will endeavour not to reveal that a student has a learning difficulty to any other student. Students' needs should not be discussed in public places where other students may overhear. The same applies to facts about special provision for a student being mentioned in any situation where other students are present (for example, informing a student with dyslexia during a lecture that they can have extra time for an examination) as this will effectively reveal the special needs to other students.

## **6 Medical Conditions**

- 6.1 Any student who believes they have a condition which could be triggered within the institution's environment is strongly encouraged to disclose this information at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.2 This is important where the condition could place the student at significant risk of harm if staff are not made aware of their condition.
- 6.3 Where the information is known, and deemed appropriate, UCC Academic Services will collaborate with the student to generate a medical plan which would be passed to and held by the programme team. The medical plan template can be found in Appendix A. The medical plan would be provided to trained first aiders and members of the emergency services in the case of a medical emergency.
- 6.4 Please be aware that University Centre Colchester staff are not authorised to administer medication, with the exception of an epi-pen.

## **7 Applying for Extenuating Circumstances**

- 7.1 Students with declared long-term conditions will be eligible to apply for Reasonable Adjustments. Students will **not** be able to utilise the same conditions to apply for Extenuating Circumstances unless they can evidence time-limited exacerbation to their condition.
- 7.2 Late disclosure of conditions will not be accepted for Extenuating Circumstances claims, other than where a formal diagnosis has recently been made. In such cases the Extenuating Circumstances claim should be submitted within four weeks of receiving a formal diagnosis report, which needs to be enclosed with such a request.
- 7.3 Failure to declare a known condition, or failure to request or take up Reasonable Adjustments during the academic year, does not mean a student would be able to apply for Extenuating Circumstances for long-term conditions.

## **8 Fitness to Study Considerations**

- 8.1 All students must be able to meet ‘core competencies’ (knowledge and skills) of their chosen course of study. Disabled students (for example, those with autism spectrum disorders, sensory impairments, long-term medical conditions, specific learning difficulties, mental health difficulties, physical impairments) may meet substantial barriers to achieving those competencies. Reasonable Adjustments are put in place to address those barriers to achievement. What is ‘reasonable’ is therefore a carefully considered assessment which balances the elements in question for each individual case, including but not exclusive to the student’s course of study, their disability, their academic profile and needs, the physical constraints of buildings and estate, the relevant interests of their students and the resources of University Centre Colchester.
- 8.2 In cases where there are concerns that a student, who is embarking on or continuing their programme of study, is unable to meet ‘core competencies’ or that required adjustments to do so are considered ‘unreasonable’ the UCC Fitness to Study Policy should be referenced.

**Appendix A: University Centre Colchester Medical Support Plan**

**Confidential**



Name

DOB

Address

Course:

Course leader:

<b>Emergency Numbers</b>
--------------------------

**Learner information:**

**Support:**

Would like to make the course team aware.

**Medical contact numbers:**

**Medication:**

**Mental Health Indicators:**

**Please note: medication is not administered by college staff.**

**I agree the support plan and will inform the College immediately if there are any changes including changes in medication.**

**I agree that the support plan may be shared with college staff and medical personnel as appropriate.**

<b>Student's Name</b>	
<b>Student's Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	

**A copy of this should be given to first aiders/paramedics should they attend to STUDENT at any time.**

DATE

## Appendix B: University Centre Colchester Marking Policy for Students with Dyslexia

### University Centre Colchester Marking Policy for Students with Dyslexia



#### 1. Rationale for the Introduction of Dyslexia Assessment Guidelines

- 1.1 These guidelines serve to address recommendations within both the QAA Code of Practice and Part 4 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in Higher Education gives Higher Education institutions clear guidance on provision for students with disabilities. The object of the code is to assist institutions in ensuring that students with disabilities have access to a learning experience comparable to that of their peers.
- 1.2 Part 4 of the DDA states that discrimination against disabled applicants or students can take place by either treating them 'less favourably' than others, or failing to make a 'reasonable adjustment' when they are placed at a 'substantial disadvantage' compared to other students for a reason relating to their disability. A reasonable adjustment would involve taking action to alleviate a substantial disadvantage, which could mean adjusting standard institutional procedures.
- 1.3 University Centre Colchester's Reasonable Adjustment policy recognises the Disability Rights Commission suggestions of a number of modifications for students with dyslexia, including the use of alternative assessment tasks, deadline extensions and considerate marking.
- 1.4 As difficulties with the accuracy of grammar, spelling and punctuation are directly related to the impairments associated with dyslexia and can place the student at a substantial disadvantage, a marking policy for students with dyslexia is conducive to offering these students equality of opportunity.
- 1.5 This policy is not intended to deliver favourable treatment to students with dyslexia in comparison to their peers who do not have dyslexia, but rather its purpose is to offer a reasonable adjustment to standard assessment procedures to take account of the reality of their disability. Furthermore, this policy is not intended to enforce the lowering of academic standards within University Centre Colchester. In accordance with Part 4 of the DDA, this policy allows academic standards, in this case relating to the quality of basic skills, to be upheld where necessary. The rationale for the introduction of this policy is to maintain equality of opportunity for students with dyslexia in respect to the assessment of coursework.
- 1.6 Although this policy makes specific reference to students with dyslexia it can be applied to any student who has provided evidence of a disability which compromises their literacy skills, such as dyspraxia, hearing or visual impairment and Asperger's syndrome.

#### 2. Background Information on Dyslexia

- 2.1 Dyslexia is one of several conditions identified as a specific learning difficulty, meaning that difficulties are present in particular areas of learning but that general ability is not adversely affected.



- 2.2 Research perspectives of dyslexia emphasise underlying problems with short-term memory, information processing and phonological awareness and focuses on associated difficulties with literacy and the recall of rote information. Equally important to consider, however, are the range of strengths and sophisticated skills that an individual with dyslexia may possess, such as lateral reasoning, creative thinking, three-dimensional visualisation and an intuitive, holistic approach to problem-solving.
- 2.3 Dyslexia is best understood as an unusual balance of strengths and difficulties that will not limit the opportunities of an individual if adjustments are made to reflect their different cognitive abilities. From an equal opportunities perspective, adjustments are required in methods of teaching, learning and assessment in order to develop and maintain an inclusive learning environment for students who have dyslexia.

### 3.0 Common Errors Related to Dyslexia

- 3.1 Although the primary aim of the marking policy is to avoid penalising students for mistakes made with regard to spelling, punctuation and grammar, other dyslexia-related errors can also impair the quality of a student's written work. The main difficulties are presented here to allow staff to recognise errors that may be dyslexia-related.
- i. Spelling errors are often evident and may include: erratic and inconsistent spelling where words can be spelt in several different ways in the same document; inappropriate use of phonetic spelling choices (e.g. *eny/any ordeance/audience*); misuse of spell check facility leading to incorrectly selected words (e.g. *sublimely perception* instead of *subliminal perception*); misspelling proper names such as the names of researchers; telescoping polysyllabic words (e.g. *rembered/remembered*); misuse of homophones (e.g. *to/too*), and letter reversals (e.g. *dose/does*).
  - ii. Punctuation and grammatical mistakes can be present in written work and may include: misuse or omission of punctuation marks; failure to identify sentence boundaries with possible overuse of conjunctions; short, unsophisticated sentences lacking in complexity, and inappropriate grammatical constructions.
  - iii. General presentation skills may be poor even when work has been produced with the use of computer programmes.
  - iv. The following problems can be present with handwritten work: untidy handwriting or the inability to use cursive style; confusion of visually similar letters (e.g. *b/d, p/q*), and the misuse of capital letters which is sometimes used as a strategy to select b/d correctly (e.g. *consiDeraBle*).
  - v. Any additional pressures with time or stress, such as writing quickly in lectures or an examination situation, can cause handwriting to deteriorate further.
  - vi. There may be difficulties in expressing ideas in a conventional academic style of writing and written constructions may be unsophisticated.
  - vii. Students with dyslexia may digress from the assignment topic by either including information that is irrelevant or expanding unnecessarily on points of minor importance. Sometimes unusual links between topics are made that reflect a student's lateral and creative thinking skills but may not be directly relevant to the topic. Even though it will not be possible to award marks for such digressions, it can



be supportive to acknowledge the student's research attempts when providing written feedback.

- viii. Written work can lack structure at the level of both sentences and paragraphs leading to a repetition of information in different parts of the work and a failure to develop a sustained and detailed discussion.
- ix. A student with dyslexia may find it difficult to express their ideas in a conventional academic written format and may find it difficult to attain the recommended word limit.
- x. Students with dyslexia often spend considerably more time on assignment production than their peers who do not have dyslexia, but this effort is not always reflected in their written work. Sometimes there may be a marked difference between the student's abilities as demonstrated in oral discussions and that indicated by written expression.
- xi. Students with dyslexia can have speech and language difficulties that affect the pronunciation of words. Some experience a stammer when under pressure and this can cause high levels anxiety in formal speaking situations, such as oral presentations.

#### **4. Recommendations for Assessing Written Work and Written Exams**

- 4.1 The following guidance has been designed to assist staff marking written work submitted with a UCC Pink Cover Sheet.
- 4.2 The purpose of assessing the written work of students with dyslexia is to avoid penalising them for mistakes made with grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- 4.3 Tutors should establish the learning outcomes for the assignment in question. The work should be marked with the intention of giving credit for the student's achievements in meeting these learning outcomes by focusing on the content and understanding of the topic rather than concentrating on written expression. Reading the student's work quickly can sometimes increase the ability to focus on content rather than errors.
- 4.4 It is not necessary to proof-read and correct the student's work. However, if the spelling, punctuation and grammatical mistakes detract significantly from the content of the work, it may be appropriate to begin marking by proof-reading the assignment and making necessary corrections to spelling, grammar and punctuation. It is preferable to use pencil or black ink for these corrections. To avoid over-emphasising mistakes, repetitive errors should only be corrected for part of the work.
- 4.5 The student's work should be marked using a different colour of ink without penalising for any mistakes previously corrected in black ink or pencil.
- 4.6 If the general policy or practice within a certain course is to avoid making written comments upon a students' actual assignment, this should also apply to work submitted by a student with dyslexia.
- 4.7 It is recognised that in some instances, the grammatical construction or written style of expression may obscure the clarity of the student's ideas. In these cases, it should be decided whether the intended content is discernible and give credit accordingly for this aspect of the work.

## **5. Assessing Oral Presentations**

- 5.1 The purpose of assessing oral presentations by students with dyslexia is to avoid penalising them for mistakes made with grammar, spelling and punctuation or with speech production.
- 5.2 Establish the learning outcomes for the oral presentation in question. Mark the work with the intention of giving credit for the student's achievements in meeting these learning outcomes by focusing on the content and understanding of the topic. Avoid penalising the student for mistakes with the pronunciation of words, for misreading from the visual aids or for basic skills errors on visual aids or handouts.
- 5.3 Although some students with dyslexia favour oral presentations as an assessment method, others experience anxiety or even phobic reactions. Where these negative feelings occur, they can sometimes be linked to humiliating experiences of reading aloud at school.
- 5.4 Where a student with dyslexia has a significantly high level of anxiety over oral presentations, support and reassurance should be offered where possible. In extreme cases of anxiety or phobia, alternative methods can be explored, such as allowing the student to submit a video recording of their presentation or allowing the presentation to be made directly to the lecturer without other students present. This can be considered an interim measure if the student is willing to participate fully once their confidence has increased.

## **6. Circumstances under which special assessment guidelines should be applied**

- 6.1 This marking policy should be applied to the assessment of all submitted written work and examination or test scripts that are produced by a student who is understood to have dyslexia.
- 6.2 If a core assessment requirement conflicts with this marking policy, this should be detailed within the module specification template and both the relevant student with dyslexia and UCC Academic Services should be made aware of this circumstance. Ideally, the relevant student with dyslexia and UCC Academic Services should be made aware of a potential conflict at the time an assignment brief is issued and both parties should be made aware of which exclusions are to be applied.
- 6.3 Decisions to specify a core requirement that disallows students with dyslexia access to certain marking concessions outlined in this document should be clarified with caution. There should be clear, justifiable reasons that relate to academic standards and that could not be seen as discriminatory practice. For example, if an issue of professional training or competency is considered a reason for upholding basic skills as a core requirement, it is advisable to check that the relevant professional body actively supports this decision.
- 6.4 Written feedback provided for the assignment or examination script should clearly state why these marking guidelines were only partially applied and should clearly state the exclusions that were made in accordance with the core requirements for the assessment of the written work in question.

## **7. Rights to appeal in accordance with these marking guidelines**

- 7.1 If a student who has declared dyslexia believes their work has not been marked in accordance with the guidelines outlined in this document, they can follow the normal procedures for requesting second marking by a different member of academic staff.

7.2 A student with dyslexia will not have the right to appeal against penalisation for failing to meet core requirements that have been established as marking criteria and of which the student has been informed within the written feedback for the assessment.

## **8. Providing Feedback**

8.1 Written feedback should be provided considerately to avoid damaging the student's self-esteem. Students with dyslexia can sometimes perceive any criticism of their written work as disparaging and negative feedback provided for assignments can be more distressing to these students than the actual mark awarded for the work.

8.2 Students with dyslexia often have difficulty reading cursive script, so aim to keep handwriting as legible as possible. Alternatively, feedback can be word processed and attached to the student's work.

8.3 Certain symbols used for marking can be perceived as critical and can confuse students with dyslexia. For example, crosses, question marks and exclamation marks when used without sufficient explanations to establish the reason for their use.

8.4 If any established core requirements conflict with the ability to fully apply these marking guidelines, this should be stated in the feedback that is provided on an assignment or examination script.

8.5 Tutors are encouraged to:

- read the whole assignment first, looking for ideas, understanding and knowledge;
- make constructive comments;
- explain comments in a straightforward way;
- mark only the academic ideas not grammar etc., and inform the student using highlighting and general comments on the script;
- provide constructive feedback comments, rather than negative criticisms, so that students can understand how to correct their work and address requirements for future assignments;
- provide word processed feedback as this will be easier to read than handwriting;
- offer feedback comments via a digital recording or e-mail, as applicable;
- allow access for follow-up queries.