Guidance on Assessment for Students with Disabilities and Special Circumstances

Division of Medical and Dental Education

School of Medicine and Dentistry
Who is this guide for?

This guide is for use by University of Aberdeen staff members as well as clinical staff involved in formative and summative assessment of students enrolled in all of the undergraduate courses within the Division of Medical and Dental Education (DMDE) in the School of Medicine & Dentistry. Specifically this guide focuses on students’ special circumstances and disabilities provisions necessary for University examinations within the DMDE. It is intended that this guide would be used in conjunction with the University of Aberdeen OSCE (Objective Structured Clinical Examination) Site Co-ordinator’s Handbook for those staff members involved as site co-ordinators at special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE examinations.

Aims and Objectives of this guide

The aim is to provide guidance for all staff members involved in the preparation, administration, regulation, design and co-ordination of assessments within the DMDE. It is also intended to provide guidance for site co-ordinators on the often complex requirements needed for special circumstances / disabilities OSCE runs. This guide will enable improved planning for future special circumstances/disabilities exam provisions to allow successful and fair examinations for all students involved.

Once you have read this guide you should have met the following objectives:

1. Understand the importance of special circumstances / disabilities provisions in assessments
2. Understand the mechanism for involvement of the University of Aberdeen’s Disability Advisers and the process for deciding upon what requirements need to be provided
3. Understand the implementation of special circumstances / disabilities provisions for written examinations
4. Understand how the special circumstances / disabilities OSCE runs differ from the other OSCE runs
5. Feel more confident in being involved as site co-ordinator for a special circumstances / disabilities OSCE run and know the responsibilities pertaining to OSCE site co-ordinators involved in special circumstances / disabilities OSCE runs
6. Understand that extra resources may be needed during examinations with special circumstances/disabilities provisions
7. Know the importance of communicating the extra requirements needed in the special circumstances/ disabilities OSCE runs to both examiners, invigilators, students and volunteer or simulated patients involved.
Importance of special circumstances / disabilities provisions at University examinations

“Since the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA), Universities have had a duty not to discriminate against disabled people who they employ or to whom they provide a service.

In September 2002, the DDA was extended so that educational bodies also now have a duty not to discriminate against disabled students. 2005 saw the introduction of the Disability Equality Duty. This required us to take positive steps to ensure equality of opportunity for disabled people in all of our activities. This legislation has now been incorporated into the Equality Act 2010.”

-University of Aberdeen website [http://www.abdn.ac.uk/disability/legal.shtml](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/disability/legal.shtml)

Universities have a duty of care to provide accessible learning and teaching, as well as accessible examinations for all students. Therefore they must provide assistance and as far as possible provide adequate resources or a suitable environment to enable disabled students to fulfil all of their course requirements including assessments.

The GMC's Gateways Guidance, which is a guideline primarily aimed at undergraduate medical training, emphasises the importance of ensuring students with disabilities are given appropriate provisions to enable them to have successful University studies as well as successful careers ([www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways_guidance.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways_guidance.asp)). This guidance clearly defines reasonable adjustments to examinations and latter working environments. It provides applicable information for anyone involved in undergraduate assessments within the DMDE at the University of Aberdeen. This document links the relationship of disabled students to the other important GMC documents: Tomorrow's Doctors; Good Medical Practice and Fitness to Practice; Medical Students: Professional behaviour and fitness to practise. An important difference between medical students and working practitioners is quoted below:

“Anyone can graduate if they meet all the outcomes and curricular requirements set out in Tomorrow’s Doctors and meet the university’s regulations. On graduation, they will obtain provisional GMC registration, subject to the GMC being assured about their fitness to practise. Many students with a wide range of impairments, illnesses and health conditions successfully achieve the required standards of knowledge, skills and behaviours to become a doctor and practise at the high level required to ensure patient safety. Some prospective medical students and some existing students may not be able to progress with their studies, even with an appropriate range of adjustments and support in place.”

- GMC Gateways Guidance

([www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways_guidance.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways_guidance.asp))

The University has a duty to ensure that reasonable adjustments are in place to enable a disabled student or a student in special circumstances to achieve the requirements as set out by Tomorrow’s Doctors 2009 – and similar criteria for PA (Physician’s Assistants) and dental qualifications. A student’s ability to thereafter practise as a practitioner is assessed by the postgraduate deanery and the GMC and similar bodies for dentistry and the PA students. Of note, “The GMC has no legal ability to grant a
conditional, restricted or limited licence to practise at the point of initial registration and the medical schools are not empowered to grant students dispensation from the requirements set in Tomorrow’s Doctors.” – GMC Gateways Guidance


Who decides upon what extra disabilities provisions are required at the University of Aberdeen?

The University of Aberdeen’s Disability Advisers meet with students to provide support and assessment of required provisions in a confidential manner. Students can self-refer and book an appointment for an assessment with a Disability Adviser in the University of Aberdeen’s Student Advice and Support Office, which is widely advertised to students. The Disability Advisers then communicate each individual student’s needs and necessary extra provisions to Ms. Penny Linemann (Student Support Officer, Division of Medical and Dental Education). The provisions required for individual students are specifically stated regarding the type of examination such as written or OSCE examinations. Occasionally requirements may be different depending on the examination type. The personal or health reasons for the provisions are not supplied by the University’s Disability Advisers and remain confidential unless the student themselves discloses this information to DMDE staff. For more information on the support available for disabled students see www.abdn.ac.uk/disability

How do the special circumstances /disabilities provisions affect the marking in examinations?

Adjustments are provided as per the advice given by the University of Aberdeen’s Disability Advisers. Therefore, the provisions are put in place to allow a disabled student to undertake the tasks within the OSCE station or written examination paper. Marking of individual stations and exam papers should therefore remain consistent for all students and no extra or reduced marking regimes should be provided for students with disabilities provisions. Where a particular skill cannot be performed to any degree, usually the mark cannot be given, however some marks will be allocated if the explanation of the skill is explained and the rest of the marks within that station will be judged as per normal procedure for any station. It is not an individual examiner’s role to make decisions on marking schemes, if there are concerns or queries please contact the OSCE site co-ordinator, the Phase co-ordinator or OSCE co-ordinator for clarification.

Written examinations – Considerations for special circumstances / disabilities provisions

Disabilities provisions for written examinations often involve the following:

1. Students may be entitled to extra time to sit the written examinations, often due to dyslexia or other visual or reading or physical difficulties. The exact extra time requirements will be indicated following assessment by the University of Aberdeen’s Disability Advisers. Usually, the extra time will be expressed by the University’s Disability Advisers as a unit of time per hour e.g. Extra 10 minutes per hour
Extra 15 minutes per hour

Extra 20 minutes per hour

If possible, it is strongly recommended for students with extra time to sit the examination in a different room from the rest of the students to reduce disruption to the students with extra time when the rest of the students complete the examination. However, this may not always be possible due to staff or room availability. In that case, it is important the exam invigilators know the students who are entitled to extra time and ensure that there is minimal noise when the rest of the students leave the examination room.

2. A scribe or reader may be required for students with specific difficulties related to reading the exam paper or writing their answers. In this situation, the student will require a private room to ensure they are able to communicate with their scribe / reader whilst minimising disruption to other students. The scribe or reader should not be able to provide help with the content of the exam paper – i.e. no explanation of the question is given, no other factual help or advice is provided and the scribe writes exactly what the student dictates.

3. Students may require a private room to sit examinations – without any, or with a reduced number of other students in the same room. Where this is stipulated by a Disability Adviser, this must be adhered to. They may also require a specific environment – such as specific seating, desk or writing equipment.

4. Students may be required to use a computer to either read the examination paper or provide their answers. It is usually advisable for this to be carried out in a private room also where possible to avoid excessive disruption to other students.

5. Students may need access to food or drink throughout the examination and again this should be accommodated. A private room may be advisable if it is felt that this provision would cause disruption to other students.

6. Students may require the written examination papers to be produced with specific fonts, font size or coloured paper as per the Disability Advisers’ instructions and this should be accommodated where possible.

Special circumstances / disabilities provisions for written examinations often require separate and even individual student rooms for students to sit the examination. Therefore there must be an invigilator in each of the rooms at all times. These provisions must be prepared for in advance given the potential demand for available rooms, invigilators and scribes.

Further information on reasonable adjustments can be found in the GMC Gateway Guidance http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/appendix.asp
OSCE examinations - Considerations for special circumstances / disabilities provisions

General considerations

Special circumstances / disabilities provisions for OSCE examinations may mean that the timings may need to be different from other sites if students require either extra time inside or outside of the OSCE stations. It may mean that extra equipment is required, more space is required within the station or that a student may need help with performing particular tasks within the station. Therefore the site used for the special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE runs often needs to be run separately and set up differently from the rest of the OSCE sites. As such the Special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE runs may not fully synchronise with other OSCE sites, hence it is generally a good idea for that site to be separated geographically from other OSCE sites, ideally such as located on a different floor, or alternatively at an opposite area of the same floor or separated using corridor doors where possible.

As the special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE runs may finish later or start earlier than other sites, it is a good idea, where possible, to accommodate fewer runs or fewer students on the special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE site.

Depending on how many students require special circumstances, it is generally a good idea to have all of the students with extra provisions to be placed on the same OSCE run. If there are many students with extra provisions there may be occasions where several runs are special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE runs.

Ideally, examiners and volunteer/simulated patients/actors should be made aware in advance of their placement on a site with a special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE runs only if this will affect the proposed start or end time to ensure that adequate transport or clinical commitments can be accommodated.

Some students may require specifically either morning or afternoon examinations and this should be accommodated where possible.

Timings / bell ringing

Some students may be entitled to extra reading time, often due to dyslexia or other visual or reading difficulties. The exact extra time requirements will be indicated following assessment by the University of Aberdeen’s Disability Advisers. Because of the possibility of extra reading time outside the station or potentially inside the station if it is a written OSCE station or a combined OSCE station with a reading / writing component. Usually, the extra time will be expressed by the University’s Disability Advisers as a unit of time per hour e.g.

Extra 10 minutes per hour

Extra 15 minutes per hour

Extra 20 minutes per hour
Division of Medical and Dental Education

Standard Operating Procedure/Guideline

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It is important to convert the per hour extra time provision given by the Disability Advisers to a relevant time provision for the OSCE station as that is what the student is entitled to have extra per OSCE station. If you are unsure about how much extra time a particular student or group of students on a special circumstances / disabilities OSCE run should have please discuss at the Site co-ordinators meeting or contact the OSCE co-ordinator or Disability Advisers for clarification.

For example:

If a student is entitled to an extra 15 minutes per hour, that is an extra 15 seconds per minute. Therefore the usual one minute reading time outside of the station would become 1 minute 15 seconds. Similarly, for 20 minutes extra per hour, the extra time would equal 1 minute 20 seconds reading time outside each OSCE station.

Furthermore, if an individual student requires extra time inside a station for a communication or other issue, whereas the rest of the students within the same OSCE run do not, it may be prudent to place gaps (no students) on either side of the student who will be speaking/interacting in the stations before the remainder of the students. This means the remaining students are less likely to be able to hear inside the OSCE station and the student(s) with extra time inside the station can feel less conspicuous.

Student order

In some circumstances individual students with disabilities provisions may need to be placed within a strategic starting, mid or end point within the OSCE run (without the student knowing exactly what the stations involve before the examination) where possible. For example, if a student has diabetes, students prone to fainting or with a fatigue disorder, placing a rest station or reading station half way through their OSCE run may be desirable to allow for snacking, self-medicating or blood glucose monitoring. Alternatively, students with neuromuscular, fatigue or other physical conditions may be advised to start with any OSCE stations which require physical movements such as clinical examination stations or resuscitation stations, and therefore where possible have OSCE stations where the student can sit (such as history or written stations) towards the end of their OSCE runs.

By proxy / physical assistance required

Students with physical medical conditions, particularly neuromuscular disorders, arthropathies, fractures, soft tissue injuries or fatigue-related conditions, may require extra space within the station (and therefore the special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE sites are often better on an upstairs floor where there is generally more space to set out OSCE stations) or provisions such as an extra chair so that they may sit during some or all of the station in stations where students are not usually sitting (such as CPR, clinical examinations). Examiners and patients need to be aware of this requirement before the run commences.

Some students due to physical medical conditions may have been deemed unable to perform particular clinical tasks or procedures. CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation) is often a station where this problem is frequented. It must be made clear and clarified where necessary from the University of Aberdeen’s Disability Advisers and on discussion with the student what the student will be capable of performing within the affected station and ensuring that they perform all of the tasks which they are capable of.
and exclude only those tasks which they have been deemed completely unable to do for whatever reason. For example, in the CPR stations it may be that the student can perform everything except chest compressions. In that event, the student can perform and should be expected to perform and communicate appropriately for the rest of the station, however could be allowed to carry out chest compressions by proxy – i.e. the student should instruct the examiner how to perform chest compressions. It is vitally important that the examiner offers no help, and the student must instruct correctly on how to perform chest compressions in order to be allocated the correct marks. Another example could be that a student cannot perform CPR on the floor, and in those circumstances for example the CPR mannequin could be placed on a table or bench to allow the student to carry out the procedure whilst standing. Again, it is extremely important that the examiner and any volunteer/simulated patients or actors involved are aware before the special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE run begins of the changes to normal procedure. For further information on specifically resuscitation stations and for advice for students requiring to perform CPR or other critical care aspects of a station by proxy, Mr Jerry Morse (Clinical Skills Centre Manager at the Suttie Centre, Foresterhill) can be contacted.

If a student has broken or injured their dominant (writing) hand (i.e. following an acute injury and does not have a chronic condition), discussion should take place between the student and Phase / OSCE co-ordinators to decide whether they are fit to participate in the OSCE, and the student should be offered training where possible on using the opposite hand for clinical tasks. The examiner must be made aware in advance of the student entering their station of the special circumstances.

**Extra equipment / space requirements**

Students may require extra time or help at OSCE stations which involve equipment. Particularly, stations with gloves may mean that students require assistance. Gloves may be provided before entry to the station, or extra time allowed to enable the student to sufficiently don the gloves or other necessary personal protective equipment. Students with physical conditions may require extra space or provision to be seated during some or all OSCE stations.

**Miscellaneous**

Students may require a scribe or a reader for OSCE stations. In this event, discussion would need to be had regarding disruption to other students within the OSCE runs. Students may require overlays to read written instructions or written stations – this should be accommodated at OSCE examinations. Students may need provisions such as specific fonts, font size or coloured paper for reading or written tasks within OSCE stations as per the Disability Advisers’ instructions for students with reading or visual difficulties.

Where there are large numbers of students with extra reading and writing time requirements, written OSCE stations can be conducted immediately before or after the rest of the stations for the special circumstances / disabilities OSCE run as a group (similar to a written examination) with an invigilator present at all times. Further information on reasonable adjustments can be found in the GMC Gateway Guidance [http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/appendix.asp](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/appendix.asp)
Example of previously used OSCE site running plans from complex special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE runs

**Student group requiring mixture of extra time in & out of stations**

*E.g.* 6 students require 1min 15s extra OUTSIDE each station & IN WRITTEN STATION for reading issues

(Labelled OUTSIDE STUDENTS in this document)

1 student requires 1min 15s extra time INSIDE station due to speech issues (Labelled INSIDE STUDENTS in this document)

OUTSIDE students – 2min30 to read instructions for clinical station, 6min15 to do written station

INSIDE student – 5min written station; 1min 15s to read all instructions, 6min15s INSIDE each station

Students & examiners all briefed beforehand of special procedure. Examiners in each station told to expect 1 student to enter before the bell, except written and to expect prolonged reading time outside station for rest of students.

Ideally, plan gap before and after INSIDE student as that student will be speaking in station when rest of students & examiners remain silent.

Site co-ordinator 1 based at written station.

Site co-ordinator 2 based at opposite end but following INSIDE student throughout

Bells at: 2min 30s & 5min

**INSIDE STUDENT** begins at written station, 2min30s to read (same as OUTSIDE students), enters at bell for 5min written station

**INSIDE STUDENT** 1min 15s outside each subsequent station to read instruction – enters BEFORE bell at 1min 15s on site co-ordinator2’s instruction for 6min15s inside each remaining station

OUTSIDE students Given 2min30s to read instructions outside all stations – enter station at bell at 2min30s for 5min inside each station except written station

OUTSIDE students written station: when each outside student approaches written station, given 1min15s to read instructions (written Q only) enters BEFORE bell at 1min15s on site co-ordinator1’s – to given 6min15s inside written station.
Responsibilities of the site co-ordinator at the special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE

- Make sure all site co-ordinators have regular breaks
- Ideally, have a minimum of 2 site co-ordinators for special circumstances / disabilities provisions OSCE runs
- Communicate any disabilities provisions to examiners and volunteer or simulated patients
- Alert administrative and OSCE Co-ordinator if examiner or volunteer/simulated patient unable or unwilling to remain at station for extra time or if other difficulties encountered
- Make sure that students know their own extra provisions and are aware of any differences to normal OSCE practice (such as if different sounding, or extra bells are being used)

Suggestions for further reading

GMC Gateways Guidance (www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/gateways_guidance.asp)

- Gateways Guidance on OSCE Reasonable adjustments (http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/undergraduate/appendix.asp)

University of Aberdeen’s Disabilities information (http://www.abdn.ac.uk/disability/)

GMC Tomorrow’s Doctors 2009 document – Assessment in undergraduate medical education


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