

PGP 3.6.1 Specific Learning Difficulties Protocol

Summary

Students with a specific learning difficulties (such as Attention Deficit Disorder, Dyslexia or Dyspraxia) often have difficulties with regards to reading and writing. This protocol outlines the process and advice to be given to examiners of research by students with Specific Learning Difficulties. Such students may have difficulty with oral fluency, word retrieval and memory, all of which are exacerbated by stress. They may not perform to the best of their abilities or express the depth and breadth of their knowledge during their examination.

Purpose

This protocol outlines the supportive and sensitive approach to examination of students who have specific learning difficulties. This protocol will support the principals of *Kia Orite: Achieving Equity New Zealand Code of Practice* which enables students with impairments to achieve fully.

Scope

This protocol is to be applied to all students with specific learning difficulties undertaking an examination of their research project.

Specific Learning difficulties is a general term that is used to describe people who may have challenges with listening, speaking, reading, writing, remembering things, reasoning or mathematics. These specific learning difficulties may include, but not be limited to:

- Attention Deficit (Hyperactivity) Disorder (AD(H)D)
- Asperger's syndrome
- Autism
- Dysgraphia (inability to write coherently)
- Dyslexia (A general term for disorders that involve difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols, but that do not affect general intelligence.)
- Dyspraxia (movement and coordination difficulties)
- Dyscalculia (Severe difficulties in making arithmetical calculations)

This protocol does not cover non-research examinations or course-work assignments.

Application

If a student has a specific learning difficulty that prevents that student from undertaking the examination within the usual timeframe and process, the student may be able to undertake their examination under the Specific Learning Difficulties Protocol. This will provide support and assist them through the examination to ensure a fair and just process.

Applying for Specific Learning Difficulties Examination Consideration

The faculty will inform the Postgraduate Coordinator (Examinations) that a student will require the support under this protocol, at the time the Appointment of Examiners (PGR11 form) is submitted to the University Postgraduate Board (UPB) for approval. A memo detailing the learning difficulty (Appendix 1) the student has been diagnosed with and the associated possible difficulties that the student may encounter.

Examination Plan Doctoral

The University Postgraduate Board, in consultation with the Faculty and supervisors, will create a plan for the student's examination. The plan may include, but not be limited to, the following:

During Examination of the written thesis

- a) Examiner awareness that :
 - i. Repeated Information or Phrases may be used – these would not necessarily be detected by the student or by a proof reader;
 - ii. Unsophisticated Language Structures – in order to avoid grammatical errors, students with dyslexia may adopt simplified language structures which do not necessarily denote unsophisticated thinking;
 - iii. A limited range of vocabulary – in order to avoid spelling errors, students with dyslexia adopt a simplified vocabulary when writing;
 - iv. Difficulties with sequencing or word-finding – may produce a stilted style of writing Open-ended time limit for oral examination; allowing plenty of time to find a section, understand the question, reread the text and formulate a considered response;
- b) Examiners are asked to focus on the content and knowledge shown in the work and the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression;
- c) Examiners are asked to approach this situation sympathetically.

During Oral Examination

- a. Provide examiners' reports two weeks prior to the oral examination instead of the one week timeframe for other examinations;
- b. Provide the student sufficient table space to be able to organise materials during the examination;
- c. Advise examiners that they are expected to assess oral presentations/viva voce for content, ideas, critical thinking and understanding without penalising for fluency (hesitations, mispronunciation, incomplete sentences) and organisation of ideas;
- d. An open-ended time limit for oral examination, allowing the student plenty of time to find a section, understand the question, reread the text and formulate a considered response;
- e. Clear and concise phrasing of questions and instructions and extra clarification of questions if needed. Ideally, questions address a single point and will not have multiple parts;
- f. Examiners remain silent whilst the student finds information or composes a response;
- g. Allow use of a range of presentation formats (e.g. bullet points, graphics);
- h. Allow the student to make brief notes on questions to avoid memory overload;
- i. Allowance for poor fluency (e.g. word finding, rambling, speed, coherence of response);
- j. Rest breaks for fatigue or attention issues;
- k. Allow use of laptop for easy access to sections;
- l. Allow use of coloured overlays to read text.

Examination Plan Masters/Bachelors with Honours

The UPB, in consultation with the faculty and supervisors, will create a plan for the student's examination. The plan may include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. Examiner Awareness that :
 - i. Repeated information or phrases may be used – these would not necessarily be detected by the candidate or by a proof reader;
 - ii. Unsophisticated language structures – in order to avoid grammatical errors, students with dyslexia may adopt simplified language structures which do not necessarily denote unsophisticated thinking;
 - iii. A limited range of vocabulary – in order to avoid spelling errors, students with dyslexia adopt a simplified vocabulary when writing;
 - iv. Difficulties with sequencing or word-finding – may produce a stilted style of writing.
- b. Examiners are asked to focus on the content and knowledge shown in the work, and the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression;
- c. Examiners are asked to approach this situation sympathetically.

Notifying Examiners

The Postgraduate Coordinator (Examinations) will notify examiners that the student under examination has a Specific Learning Difficulty and the associated possible difficulties that the student may encounter during the examination.

Outcome

This protocol will enable students with Specific Learning Disabilities to demonstrate their abilities and achieve their maximum potential by enabling the examiners to undertake a supportive and sensitive approach to the research project examination.

Review

Original Approval Date

May 2015

Version Approvals

Version 1.0 May 2015

Version 1.1 June 2017

Review Date

June 2020

Effective Date

May 2015

Appendix 1 – Memo template to Examiners



To: Examiners

From: Associate Dean (Postgraduate)

cc: Graduate Research School, AUT University

Subject: Examination of Student with Specific Learning Disability

Date:

Memorandum

At AUT University we support the principles of *Kia Orite: Achieving Equity New Zealand Code of Practice*, which enables students with impairments to achieve fully.

(NAME OF STUDENT) has been assessed as having (NAME OF LEARNING DIFFICULTY), and we request that when examining the student's thesis/dissertation, you are aware of the following issues:

We expect student to have taken all reasonable means available to make sure their written work has been checked for spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors before it is submitted for examination. However for a student with (NAME OF LEARNING DIFFICULTY), their written work may still be characterised by one or several of the following:

- Repeated information or phrases – these would not necessarily be detected by the candidate or by a proof reader
- Unsophisticated language structures – in order to avoid grammatical errors, students with dyslexia may adopt simplified language structures which do not necessarily denote unsophisticated thinking
- A limited range of vocabulary – in order to avoid spelling errors, students with dyslexia adopt a simplified vocabulary when writing
- Difficulties with sequencing or word-finding – may produce a stilted style of writing

[Please add/edit as required]

Examiners are asked to focus on the content and knowledge shown in the work, and the clarity of the argument, rather than on details of expression. However the communication itself must be effective and coherent. Examiners are asked to approach this situation sympathetically, to join with AUT University in enabling disabled students to demonstrate their abilities and achieve their maximum potential.

Sincerely