

# SUPPORTING STUDENTS TO SIT REMOTE ASSESSMENTS UNDER SPECIAL CONDITIONS

## *Purpose*

This paper outlines the University's approach to managing special conditions for students sitting remote assessments in Semester 1, including final assessments that replace exams in June and July. Student Disability Services and the Examinations Office are seeking assistance from faculties to support the provision of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities so that the University can meet students' support needs when sitting remote assessments.

For consistency of student support, we ask that course coordinators or directors do not liaise directly with students about their special conditions this semester, but to work through the Examinations Office about special conditions for final assessments, and with Student Disability Services for replacement tests and timed quizzes.

## *Background*

In accordance with the [University of Auckland Policy on Special Conditions for Written Tests and Examinations](#), the University provides appropriate special conditions to students with a permanent or temporary impairment for written tests sat under examination conditions and for examinations.

The policy refers to the following special conditions:

- Extra time for rest breaks
- Additional writing time
- Access to a reader and/or writer
- Access to a stand-alone computer, without internet or network connectivity
- Examination venue with fewer or no other students present

The University's [COVID-19 Revised Assessment Approach to Facilitate Online Delivery](#) has been developed with inclusive learning principles in mind. An overarching principle is that changes to online delivery must avoid creating barriers to learning for students with disabilities, and must align with the University's [Inclusive Learning and Teaching of Students with Impairments Guidelines](#).

Accordingly, a significant proportion of the special conditions ordinarily provided on campus for students are accommodated under the revised assessment approach, including the following conditions:

- Additional writing time and rest breaks

The 24-hour assessment window will accommodate students who are usually granted additional time to complete an assessment. Assessments (above 5% weighting) will still be written to the length and complexity of a timed assessment (e.g. two or three hours); however, students will not have a time limit within the 24-hour period to complete and

submit their work. This untimed approach has been put in place to remove time pressures and constraints.

The only exception is timed quizzes worth 5% or less for which any additional time is added for individual students.

- Use of a computer

Students approved to ordinarily use a computer to sit a paper-based on campus assessment will not require additional support to sit remote assessments as all assessments will be completed on computers/devices. The University has made available a number of loan laptops for all students based on need.

- Individual rooms and rooms with fewer people

Students approved to ordinarily sit on-campus assessments in individual exam rooms or rooms with fewer people will also be accommodated under the remote assessment approach by completing their assessment in their home environment. For students without a suitable environment at home to take their assessments, consideration is being given to appropriate study spaces on campus.

#### *Additional student support needs*

There remain students with additional support needs when sitting remote assessments that are not easily met by the 24-hour assessment window. This applies particularly to students with physical or learning disabilities that affect their ability to sit assessments without a reader and/or writer.

Given that reader/writers cannot be available for the full 24-hour assessment period, Student Disability Services have been working with students and course coordinators or directors to find alternative solutions where a reader/writer is not suitable for replacement tests. These have included:

1. As an alternative to a **reader**, course coordinators or directors have provided a copy of assessments in a format that is suitable for students' usual screen readers or as an audio file. This approach offers several advantages over readers in remote assessments:
  - Students can access the assessment at any time in the 24-hour period unlike readers who can only be available for a shorter time period (e.g. 4-5 hours)
  - Students can pause and repeat parts of the assessment as many times as they wish
  - Students can adjust volume of the audio to meet their support needs
2. As an alternative to a **writer**, course coordinators or directors have accepted oral submissions by students instead of written responses to an assessment. There is also the option of oral submissions being transcribed prior to submission for marking.

Students have also been encouraged to try speech-to-text solutions, although many students remain cautious about using unfamiliar technology for their assessments. It is our view that students must feel confident that they are receiving appropriate support to

reach their potential, so assistive technology will be recommended only for students who are confident users of accessibility tools.

Where an assessment (or a part of) is not suitable for alternative formats (e.g. a diagram, graph, computer coding or table), options include:

- Agreement with the course coordinator or director about those parts of an assessment that the student needs to read themselves or with the help of a reader
- The submission of separate written replies by the student with the help of a writer
- Different but equivalent assessment options in accordance with the University's [Inclusive Learning and Teaching of Students with Impairments Guidelines](#)

#### *Student communications*

Currently, students have been reassured [here](#), by email and phone that their special conditions still apply in remote assessments, and to liaise with Student Disability Services if their support needs are not met by the 24-hour window for remote assessments.

We also have prepared a list of FAQs for students, which have been published at:

<https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/on-campus/student-support/personal-support/students-with-disabilities/wondering-how-COVID-19-will-impact-SDS-services/faqs-about-special-conditions.html>

As noted above, and for consistency of student support, we ask that course coordinators or directors do not liaise directly with students about their special conditions this semester, but to work through the Examinations Office about special conditions for final assessments, and with Student Disability Services for replacement tests and timed quizzes.