Guidance on assessment of student work, and reasonable adjustments on recognised programmes

Flexible approach to delivery and assessment

The Engineering Council is not prescriptive about delivery or assessment approaches, does not mandate use of any particular approach (such as use of projects or examinations), and welcomes innovation in programme delivery and assessment.

The Engineering Council Standards and recognition processes support innovation in both the delivery and content of engineering programmes. Awarding organisations are encouraged to develop innovative programmes in response to industry needs, and to make use of a range of assessment types, including authentic assessment (assessment that reflects industry practice). Innovative programmes may include a range of providers, the involvement of several departments within a provider, or a specific approach to and/or industrial engagement or curriculum delivery and/or assessment.

Awarding organisations may find it useful to contact the relevant PEI for advice on meeting recognition requirements at an early stage when developing a programme, particularly when planning something new and innovative or if they do not currently have programmes recognised by the PEI.

Reference to a learning outcome or competence in the Standards does not mean that it has to be the focus of an entire module or assessment, so long as it can be demonstrated that all students or apprentices who complete the programme will be assessed against the learning outcome or competence.

Assessment should be designed to support a diversity of learners whilst maintaining academic integrity. Wherever possible, a suitable variety of delivery and assessment methods should be used to allow students a range of opportunities to build and demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills.

It is recognised that different assessment approaches may suit some students better than others, and that delivery and awarding organisations should have arrangements for reasonable adjustments in place where appropriate, to ensure that students with particular needs are not unfairly disadvantaged during teaching and assessment in comparison with other students.

Minimising risks of academic misconduct

Whatever assessment methods are used, academic integrity must be promoted and upheld with appropriate quality assurance arrangements in place.

Policies and procedures relevant to academic integrity should be clear, accessible, and actively promoted rather than simply made available.

Recognition panels must assure themselves that robust systems are in place to confirm the identity of students completing assessments.

Reasonable adjustments and extenuating circumstances

Providers have a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled and neurodivergent students and employees are not discriminated against. The Equality Act 2010 requires reasonable adjustments to ensure that disabled students can fully participate in their education. The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as: “a physical or mental impairment … [that] has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [their] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

Providers should have a person responsible for ensuring fair treatment of disabled and neurodivergent students and that reasonable adjustments are being made.

Reasonable adjustments may include adjustments to the recruitment processes (as well as avoiding discrimination and unconscious bias during the process), provision of extra support or aids, and/or reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment. All universities and higher education colleges should have a person responsible for ensuring fair treatment of neurodivergent and disabled students and that reasonable adjustments are being made.

Some disabilities and/or neurodiversity can make it harder for students to show what they know and can do in an assessment than it would have been had the student not been living with that condition. Reasonable adjustments may include changes to an assessment or to the way an assessment is conducted that reduce or remove such a disadvantage.

Although not covered by the Equality Act, providers may also make reasonable adjustments in extenuating circumstances for example if a student’s study is disrupted by an illness, accident, period of mental health, or a bereavement.

Some examples of adjustments may include:

- Modified exam papers (for example, large print or braille exam papers, word-processing rather than hand-writing answers).
- Screen and presentation adjustments for hue, font etc.
- Access to assistive software (for example, voice recognition systems or computer readers) or other equipment.
- Help with specific tasks (for example, another person might read questions to the student or write their dictated answers).
- Provision of alternative assessment formats (for example, a closed oral assessment instead of a presentation in front of peers).
- Extra time to complete assessments, and/or regular breaks in invigilated assessments.
- Exemptions from an assessment (if an assessment addresses learning outcomes and/competences required for programme recognition an alternative assessment will be required).

It is important to understand that effective adjustments for an individual student will depend on how – and by how much – their disability and/or neurodiversity affects them when taking a particular assessment. It is not uncommon for a neurodivergent individual to have two or more diagnoses, but it is also not uncommon for an individual to be neurodivergent without diagnosis, and two individuals with the same diagnosis may have very different needs. Reasonable adjustments should be tailored to the individual’s needs whilst maintaining academic integrity.

That means:

- Different students with the same disability or neurodiversity won’t always benefit from the same adjustments.
- The same student might benefit from different adjustments for different assessments.
- Some individuals may not want any adjustments, although this may change in time.

- If a student's disability or neurodiversity doesn't affect their ability to participate in student life and education, or to demonstrate what they know and can do in an assessment, it is unlikely that they will benefit from any adjustments.

The awarding organisation and provider should decide, based on each student's circumstances and in consultation with the student concerned, which (if any) adjustments are reasonable. Factors they should consider when making that decision include:

1. How (and by how much) a student's disability and/or neurodiversity affects their ability to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in the assessment. This is particularly important for assessments addressing learning outcomes or competences required for programme recognition. Adjustments that do not allow the student to demonstrate their capabilities are unlikely to be reasonable in this context
2. How well an adjustment helps a student deal with the difficulties their disability and/or neurodiversity causes when taking their assessment. An adjustment that works well is more likely to be reasonable than one that doesn't really help. It is therefore helpful to discuss with the individual what adjustments might help them, rather than making assumptions.
3. How much the adjustment would cost. A significantly more expensive adjustment is less likely to be reasonable than a cheaper one.
4. How difficult it is to make the adjustment. A complicated adjustment is less likely to be reasonable than a straightforward one.
5. Whether (and by how much) the adjustment could compromise the validity of the assessment. An adjustment that gives a disabled or neurodivergent student an unfair advantage isn't reasonable.
6. Whether the adjustment would have any detrimental impact on others (including teaching staff as well as other students).
7. Whether the adjustment would break any of the awarding organisation's rules and regulations. If their rules require exams, then another form of assessment is unlikely to be reasonable, but other adjustments (such as dictating answers to a scribe or using speech recognition tools) are more likely to be reasonable.

In some cases consideration of a request for an adjustment may usefully prompt consideration of adjustment to teaching and/or assessment approaches for all students. This may be particularly the case in circumstances where it is difficult to make an adjustment without impacting on other students for example in design of group work. Flexible approaches to delivery and assessment may reduce the need for reasonable adjustments.

In circumstances where the provider is not the awarding organisation and is unsure what adjustments might be appropriate, they should discuss any adjustments with the awarding organisation as early as possible. The awarding organisation will be able to provide advice about the different adjustments that are available, and the evidence that will be needed to support the application. Some adjustments take time to arrange, and early notice helps the exam board or approval panel provide the adjustment in time.

Providers are responsible for making sure that any adjustments agreed with the awarding organisation are put in place and are used properly when students take their assessments.

The awarding organisation and/or provider should have a policy/procedure framework covering reasonable adjustments and extenuating circumstances, and this should be considered during the recognition process.

PEIs should review policies relating to academic misconduct, reasonable adjustments, and extenuating circumstances at the point of programme recognition. Where these policies are not considered sufficiently robust and fair, programme recognition should not be confirmed.

In recognised programmes, these policies should allow providers to make reasonable adjustments and apply extenuating circumstances policy without consulting PEIs on a case-by-case basis. Consequently neither providers nor awarding organisations should use programme recognition as an excuse not to make reasonable adjustments.