## Definitions of adapted, alternative and inclusive assessments

In all cases below, the maintenance of academic standards is a given. There are no circumstances where it is acceptable to change core competencies, only the means by which they are demonstrated.

An **Adapted Assessment** is where the assessment task remains the same for all students but the conditions are changed specifically for disabled students. The conditions changed might involve the location (separate accommodation, specifically located close to conveniences, a specific location within the exam room); the length (extra time, rest breaks); the means of production (amanuensis, computer); the timing (morning or afternoon); the marking (sticker system); the exam material accessibility (coloured paper, language modification); or a combination of the above conditions. (This is not a comprehensive list)

**Note:** Adapted assessments are always a reactive response to an individual student need even though there will almost always have been anticipatory systems in place to facilitate the adaptation.

An **Alternative Assessment** is where a different assessment task is prepared specifically for disabled students. The alternative is not available to any other students. The alternative must enable the student(s) to meet the same learning outcomes and be marked against the same or equivalent marking criteria. Examples might be an oral presentation instead of a written assignment or an essay plus viva voce instead of an exam.

**Note:** Alternative assessments could be created reactively to meet the needs of an individual student or proactively in anticipation of potential disabled students' needs.

An **Inclusive Assessment** is where all students take the same assessment without the need to make any adaptations specifically for disabled students. This is most likely to be a portfolio approach which enables a variety of methods for meeting the same outcomes, or a negotiated approach for each individual student, or a menu approach whereby all students can select from a limited choice of assessment tasks as in the **Alternative Assessments** above.

It is perhaps important to recognise that all three of these approaches should satisfy our duties and responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010). Furthermore, Sheffield Hallam University has a long and successful record of successfully providing these approaches to disabled students.

However, there are several key issues associated with either the Adapted or Alternative approaches that deserve mention.

1) By being specifically targeted at disabled students, adaptions and alternatives by definition, differentiate the student experience and often identify disabled students to others. This can produce uncomfortable feelings and misunderstandings for non-disabled students, disabled students and tutors alike. The outcome is often one which focuses unwanted attention on the disabled student and leads some to avoid taking up their right to a more equal assessment. Clearly, this has a potential long term impact on retention and success for both the student and the University, but can also lead to finger pointing and unintentional discrimination.

2) In producing either adapted or alternative assessments the issue of equivalence and equity becomes difficult to determine and possibly to justify for tutors. Whilst there are recognised and widespread adaptions and alternatives in operation both nationally and internationally, there remains an uncomfortable and unresolved question mark over just how far any barrier has been removed or avoided.

3) The systems and administration involved in making adaptations specifically for disabled students are resource heavy and costly. The cost is significant in monetary terms but also creates a significant and often unplanned burden on those staff involved in designing, implementing and facilitating adaptations and alternatives. This has knock on effects on the time available for other tasks and can lead to identifying disabled students as a problem. This applies to both academic and support staff alike.

On the other hand the Inclusive approach to assessment has positive advantages and avoids most of the issues outlined above.

1) Students learn and demonstrate learning most effectively in different ways. An inclusive approach to assessment can enable more students to demonstrate their learning in ways which are most suited to them. This is fairer and theoretically likely to improve success rates of students across the board.

2) By applying to all students there can be no issues of equity or of problematising or identifying disabled students.

3) Very large numbers of disabled students disclose or are identified as disabled during their period of study. Whilst the University cannot be held responsible for this fact, it is clear that those students will be disadvantaged until such time as reasonable adjustments are put in place. An inclusive approach to assessment would resolve this problem.

4) There will still be issues related to resourcing, regarding both the design and implementation of inclusive assessments. There is no research that has compared the relative burdens related to these approaches. However, although it is probable that the burdens will shift away from certain areas and be felt more keenly in others, it is equally probable that the overall burden will be less and over time considerably so. Inclusive assessments have the advantage of removing the need for an ad hoc unplanned response to student need.

5) Inclusive assessments are not a panacea for all situations and it is impossible to ensure that inclusivity is 100% universal. It is important that expectations in this respect are properly managed - a limited amount of ad hoc adaptations or alternatives will still have to be made.

**Based on:**

**Contingent Approach** (“special arrangements” such as extra time, amanuensis, own room, etc.) which is essentially a form of assimilation into an existing system;

**Alternative Approach** (e.g. a viva voce instead of a written assignment) offering a repertoire of assessments embedded into course design as present and future possibilities for a minority of disabled students;

**Inclusive Approach** (e.g. a flexible range of assessment modes made available to all) capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways.

**Waterfield, J and West, B (2006)** 'Inclusive Assessment in Higher Education: A Resource for Change' University of Plymouth: Plymouth (SPACE Project)