Learning Support SOP

SOP Number:
202-09-2015

Academic Year:
2026/2027 ONWARDS

Date Of This Issue:
June 2026

Responsible Owner:
Head of Learner Welfare

Summary of Contents

- Learning Support Services and Additional Support Funds for Further Education (FE) students, and
- Learning Support Services for Higher Education (HE) students and Training for Success (TFS) trainees.

Review Information (Responsible Owner):
First Created: November 2015
Last Reviewed: June 2026
Next Review: May 2027

Change Type at last Review: Minor

Approval/Noting By:
CMT: 9 May 2025

Previous Reference (for control purposes):
082-01-2014 Learning Support Services for FE SOP
083-01-2014 Learning Support Services for HE SOP
084-01-2014 Learning Support Services for TFS SOP
111-04-2014 Additional Support Funds SOP
010-2014 Disability (Student) Policy

Date of Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations Screening (Section 75):
October 2016

Date of Last Accessibility Screening:
January 2025

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1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, you can click here to view the change history.

2.0 Background

Article 13(2) of the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 requires that "the Governing Body of an Institution of Further Education shall have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age, who have learning difficulties". FE Colleges are required under The Special Educational Needs and Disability (Northern Ireland) Order 2005 to make reasonable adjustments for Students with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities (SLDD), so that they can access provision.

This means that wherever possible disabled people should have the same opportunities as non-disabled people to benefit from whatever education or other related provision is available.

In addition, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 imposes statuary duties on Public Bodies to promote the equality of opportunity between the nine equality categories of person, including between persons with a disability and persons without.

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3.0 Purpose and Scope

SERC acknowledges that people with disabilities have the right to equal access to its courses and facilities and to be provided with reasonable resources and adjustments to cater for their needs. The College is committed to supporting enrolled students who have a recognised disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition and ensuring that appropriate support is in place as soon as is practicable by reviewing information provided by those applying to the College.

SERC defines a disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition as stated in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as, "a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial (more than minor or trivial) and long term (12 months or more) adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".

This document outlines the procedure for ensuring that appropriate arrangements are provided for students who meet this definition. In doing so it is essential to note that the College can only support students where:

- The student, their parent or carer has disclosed an additional need.
- Appropriate evidence (usually medical) has been provided to support the student's disclosure condition.

It should be noted that failure to disclose an additional need in a timely manner means that the College may not be able to support that student appropriately.

4.0 Learning Support

The College maintains a dedicated unit, Learning Support, whose role is to:

- Review applicants and students who potentially have an additional support need, during Open Days and other promotional events; through dialogue with the Education Authority (EA) Transition Department, tutor feedback, case conferences etc.
- Meet with the student, their parent/ carers as appropriate and assess their needs, explore potential reasonable adjustments/support options both internally and with external agencies as necessary.
- Agree potential support solutions with a view to enhancing the student's independence both in terms of their learning and their personal development.
- Advise teaching staff of an individual student's needs and possible support strategies for use in the classroom.
- Implement and review the effectiveness of support arrangements.
- Liaise with the examination unit to ensure that appropriate access arrangements are in place for those students doing examinations and other assessments.
- Provide more general information to assist staff to support learners.

5.0 Procedure in Arranging Support for Students

The following process will be followed in arranging support for students with disabilities,

learning needs and long-term medical conditions.

The key steps are:

- Student Disclosure
- Assessment
- Reasonable Adjustments
- Support Needs Recommendations
- Examination Access Arrangements
- Review

6.0 Learning Support Procedure

6.1 Student Disclosure

There is no duty on a student to disclose a disability, and some students may prefer not to disclose a disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition for their own reasons.

Failure to disclose a condition that is subsequently identified as impacting on the safety or wellbeing of the student, or others (including other students and staff) could result in a student's enrolment being cancelled. This action may only be taken after a full review of the options available, discussion with relevant parties and consideration of the SERC Safeguarding, Care and Welfare procedures.

It is in a student's best interest to disclose a disability or other learning support need so that the College can make adequate reasonable adjustments as soon as possible. The College therefore strongly encourages students and those applying for courses at the College to disclose any disability as early as possible in the application process.

Early disclosure and engagement with the Learning Support (LS) staff will help to ensure that all appropriate arrangements and reasonable adjustments are in place as the student commences their course.

It should be noted that the College can only confirm the implementation of a “reasonable adjustment” upon the receipt of appropriate evidence of the applicant’s or student’s condition. This evidence will normally be provided by a medical practitioner or other professional e.g. Educational Psychologist.

The College may request information about a student’s disability or other learning need during the application process so that it can adequately identify appropriate reasonable adjustments in a timely fashion. Should the student not proceed to enrol at the College this information will be deleted.

Students are encouraged to declare any additional support need during the enrolment process, and the Learning Support Staff will monitor applicants with a view to identifying those who have declared a Learning Support need.

The Learning Support staff also work with the EA Transition staff to identify students progressing to SERC who may require additional support arrangements and will request a copy of any Transition Plan that has been prepared if appropriate.

Throughout the academic year any student may approach the Learning Support unit and disclose any support need or concern. Any member of staff, in particular Teaching staff or other curriculum support staff may also suggest that, in the light of student progress or otherwise, that they should consider self-referral to Learning Support. This can be done either in person or through the Learning Support App.

The names and contact details for the Learning Support Unit are displayed prominently at each Campus.

6.2 Student Assessment

The Learning Support team will endeavour to provide a student assessment as soon as possible after they disclose their disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition. Such an assessment will involve a careful and sensitive screening of the needs of the individual, discussion on adjustments that have previously been helpful (e.g. at school), diagnostic tests as appropriate, and if necessary, referral for further assessment to other specialists. Students, parents/carers may request that other relevant parties attend this assessment meeting e.g. social worker, interpreter, disability advocate.

A Statement of Special Educational Needs as provided by EA to school children ceases validity when a young person leaves school. Learning Support staff may on occasion use a former statement as guide in identifying appropriate reasonable adjustments.

The scope of this assessment is to identify educational need; it does not include assessments that would constitute a diagnosis of any disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition.

In doing this assessment the following issues will be addressed with appropriate information being recorded on the Learning Support Information System, both for College purposes and to comply with Department of the Economy requirements or with the requirements of other funding bodies eg Disabled Students’ Allowance:

- The extent/history of the disability presented.
- The impact the disability will have on the student’s College experience/learning.
- The reasonable expectations of achieving the outcomes of course participation.
- The identification of progression routes for the student.
- The type and likely duration of any additional support to be implemented.
- Advice and guidance for the teaching team.

- Additional information required by DfE for monitoring purposes.

All students will be advised by the Learning Support Staff as to the type of evidence that is required to ensure that appropriate adjustments can be put in place.

The responsibility for providing appropriate evidence lies with the student and their parents or carers.

6.3 Reasonable Adjustments

While it is not possible to identify all possible reasonable adjustments Learning Support staff will consider as appropriate, solutions that may include one or more of the following:

- Detailed advice to the student's teaching team that will identify how best that student can be supported during class activities.
- The provision of resources to assist the student e.g. orthopaedic chair, access to study aids e.g. coloured overlays.
- The provision of software or other computer/technical equipment to assist with notetaking and assignment writing.
- The provision of 1:1 support with a Learning Support Assistant to assist with managing their own learning, which may be provided through a Learning Support Hub.
- The provision of a Learning Support Assistant while they attend classes.
- Being supported on a programme or in a class that has full time support assigned to it.
- Demonstration of relevant assistive technology and training on how to use it.
- Being accommodated to address learning outcomes and qualifications over a longer time period.
- Sign Language interpreter.
- Examination Access Arrangements.

In identifying appropriate reasonable adjustments, the College is committed to making reasonable adjustments for learners, while at the same time accepting that some limitations may apply. This means that as far as is reasonably possible, a student with additional needs has the same access to the curriculum and College services as other students. The following factors will be taken into account when considering adjustments:

- The need to maintain academic standards.
- Health and Safety.
- The relevant interests of other stakeholders including other students.
- Practicality.
- The effect of the impairment on the individual student.
- Cost of the reasonable adjustment.

Should the member of Learning Support staff identify that in their opinion it is not possible to facilitate an appropriate "reasonable adjustment" then the case will be referred to the Head of Learner Welfare for review in conjunction with the relevant curriculum Head of School or their nominee.

Risk Assessments for students with complex needs

Where it is identified that a student has a complex medical condition or other social or behavioural issue which could present significant risk to the student, other students, staff or have significant impact on the delivery of the programme, a formalised risk assessment of

their complex needs will be carried out. This will be conducted by a member of Learner Welfare in conjunction with the teaching team using information from all relevant sources eg the individual, their parents/guardians as appropriate, medical professionals.

The risk assessment will identify any risks and impacts associated with the particular need while attending College and the actions or adjustments that would be required to accommodate the student's attendance/enrolment to ensure they receive the appropriate care and support. This risk assessment allows for an overall assessment of the risk to be made so that the College Management Team can determine whether or not they can accept the level of risk attached to the student's attendance and put in place the necessary adjustments.

6.4 Support Needs Recommendation

Upon completion of the student assessment the Learning Support staff will complete a Support Needs Recommendation. This document will provide information about the student's need and the proposed reasonable adjustments which have been discussed and agreed with the student prior to it being forwarded to their teaching team. A copy will also be sent to the student (parent/carer as appropriate). The teaching team will retain the document in a confidential manner. Should there be a significant change in the students circumstances this document will be modified accordingly.

6.5 Examination Access Arrangements

When undertaking external examinations some students may require some form of "Access Arrangement". For example, this may allow them additional time or supervised rest breaks. However, it is important to note that:

- Students with special educational needs do not automatically qualify for examination access arrangements.
- Students must meet with Learning Support Staff to discuss appropriate examination access arrangements.
- The provision of access arrangements must not give a student an unfair advantage.
- Some students may need to undertake diagnostic assessments to justify an access arrangement.
- Final decisions on special examination arrangements are the responsibility of the awarding body.
- Access arrangements may not carry over into a new academic year, or new course and therefore must be reviewed at the commencement of each year or course.

Further details are provided in **Section 10.0** of this document.

6.6 Review of Support Needs

Learning Support will endeavour to arrange two formal reviews of the support arrangements during the academic year and record these on the Learning Support Information System, however any student who is being supported through the Learning Support unit can arrange to meet the Learning Support staff at any time to identify and discuss any concerns that they may have in relation to their support and its effectiveness. An outcome of this review may be to adapt the Support Needs Recommendation and adjust current arrangements to better reflect the evolving needs of the student.

Students should note that failure to engage with any learning support service that has been provided (without due reason) may result in that support service being removed.

7.0 Accountability Reporting for FE

SERC is expected to submit an annual evidence-based report to the Department for the Economy (DfE) for the preceding academic year that details the value and effectiveness of the student support that has been provided. The format of the report is set out by DfE in the Interim Policy for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (SLDD) in Further Education (FE) NI. Appendix 4 details the requirements of this report**.**

8.0 Learning Support Arrangements for Training Programmes

Those enrolling on Training Organisation programmes, including Skills for Life and Work, Apprenticeship and Higher-Level Apprenticeship programmes may also be able to avail of additional support as they complete their programme within the College.

The process will mirror that outlined above, with the following points being important:

- The applicant will need to declare any disability, learning difficulty or long-term medical condition when registering for one of these programmes at the Careers Office. This will ensure that they are coded correctly to allow the College to provide them with the appropriate additional support.
- Given the practical content of these programmes the nature of any "reasonable adjustment" may vary to those for a student on an FE programme. For example, one to one support in a training environment e.g. workshop, kitchen or salon is not normally provided. Support arrangements for theory classes and examinations etc are however likely to be similar to those for FE students.
- Under the terms of the Training contract the College may use the services of approved external agencies. Appropriate data sharing arrangements will be established in such situations to comply with GDPR guidance.

9.0 Learning Support Provision for Higher Education (HE) students

For HE students any extra costs of studying, arising from a disability, such as travel costs, additional non-medical support and equipment are funded by Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) provided by the Education Authority www.studentfinanceni.co.uk

DSA is not based on financial circumstances and there is no age limit. Part-time HE students are also eligible for DSA.

To have support funded through DSA a HE student must first apply to the Education Authority (EA).

The Learning Support Unit will assist HE applicants and students to apply to the EA for the DSA. HE students are therefore strongly advised to make contact with staff from the Learning Support unit as soon as possible so that this process is instigated in good time to ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place for the commencement of the student's course.

Further details relating to the provision of support arrangements for HE students is provided in Appendix 1 of this document.

The College will provide an annual return to the Department for the Economy (DfE) detailing the levels of activity within the College under the Disabled Students' Allowance provision in relation to the previous academic year.

10.0 Examination Access Arrangements

Examination Access Arrangements may allow a student with a disability, learning difficulty or long-term health issue to avail of special arrangements when undertaking an examination. Such arrangements must be agreed by the relevant awarding body, in line with their stated requirements prior to the examination taking place. Such access arrangements could involve a student being provided with:

- Extra time.
- A room with a limited number of students.
- A reader or a scribe.
- A computer or specialist software.

All such arrangements invariably require that additional resources are available, and adequate time is required to put such arrangements / resources in place. To ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place in as timely a fashion as possible all requests must be raised with Learning Support (with the appropriate evidence) at least 5 working weeks prior to an examination.

A range of staff have a role to play in ensuring the effective delivery of examination access arrangements.

10.1 Learning Support Staff are required to:

- Liaise with student and their parents.
- Assess student needs.
- Collect evidence as required.
- Prepare recommendations i.e. Support Need Recommendations.
- Ensure that information about student support requirements is recorded on the Learning Support Information System (LSIS).
- Liaise with the Examinations Unit to ensure that the relevant information to facilitate the approval of the examination access recommendations is available on LSIS.

10.2 Examinations Staff are required to:

- Ensure that exam access arrangement requests and the associated evidence is presented to the Awarding Body for approval as necessary.
- In co-operation with others put the necessary arrangements in place for the student.
- Confirm with Learning Support Staff that the Access arrangements have been put in place or otherwise.
- Provide learning support with information about the results of those who have had additional access arrangements for monitoring purposes.

10.3 Lecturing Staff are responsible for:

- Providing lists of candidates to the examinations unit.
- Ensuring that any student who may be eligible for examination access arrangements has been directed to Learning Support as it is only Learning Support Staff that can request an examination access arrangement. Ideally this should be done as soon as possible following commencement of the course.
- Liaising with Learning Support to encourage that student to attend Learning Support for an assessment, in a timely fashion.
- Assisting with the collection of appropriate evidence of additional support needs, if

necessary.

- Implementing the actions listed in the Support Need Recommendation document.
- Complete the “Normal Way of Working” template (Appendix 2) in a timely fashion and ensure that it is returned to Learning Support.

10.4 Students

To ensure that students can avail of appropriate examination support arrangements, they, their parents/carers are requested to:

- Identify themselves to Learning Support as soon as possible so that assessment and evidence gathering can take begin as soon as possible.
- Forward any requested evidence to learning support as requested.
- Accept that their “normal way of working” will be the basis on which examination access arrangements are recommended for approval.
- Acknowledge that all records are held in secure databases in line with GDPR arrangements and policies, and as detailed in the Learning Support Privacy Notice (available to view on the SERC website).

Note

Examination access arrangements will be put in place for formal examinations as approved by an awarding body. To ensure that approvals are in place it is necessary that the evidence and supporting documentation is submitted to Learning Support as soon as possible after the beginning of the academic year.

If the appropriate evidence and supporting documentation is not made available to the Learning Support at least 5 working weeks before the examination, then the College does not guarantee that the appropriate Access Arrangement will be in place for that examination.

The College will provide appropriate examination arrangements for formal examinations. Access arrangements for informal / mock / practice examinations will not be provided by the Examination unit or Learning Support. Such arrangements may be provided the course team at their discretion.

11.0 Communication Plan

This Procedure will be uploaded to the College intranet and referred to in staff induction and training.

12.0 Review

This procedure will be reviewed annually, or when the need for change has been identified.

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.0	Nov 2015	First created
1.2	March 2024	Transferred to new Accessibility Template
1.3	January 2025	Cover sheet updated 6.1 reference to E-ILP changed to Learning Support App 6.2 additional reference included to requirements of other funding bodies eg DSA 6.6 frequency of reviews increased from once to twice during the academic year
1.4	May 2025	6.3 where necessary, cases relating to reasonable adjustments which are referred to the Head of Learner Welfare will be reviewed in conjunction with the relevant Head of School or nominee 6.4 additional clarification on who the Support Needs Recommendation is sent to 10.3 additional clarification for lecturing staff that students eligible for exam access arrangements are directed to Learning Support

Appendix 2: Normal Way of Working

Normal Way of Working

TO: Exams and Learning Support

FROM: *lecturer/co-ordinator*

RE: Student Name: *insert student name*
Student Number: *insert student number*

DATE:

I can confirm that *insert student name* has persistent difficulties and requires additional support in class. In addition *insert student name*:

Please delete/retain bullet points below, as appropriate

- normally requires more time than their peers to comprehend and complete work, both in and outside class, to a standard that reflects their ability.
- negotiates extensions to complete coursework, on an assignment-by-assignment basis, with the teaching team.
- frequently needs me to read complex or unfamiliar words, phrases and concepts to ensure understanding.
- produces work to a standard that best reflects their ability when using a PC or laptop as opposed to producing handwriting work.
- *Please include any other reasonable recommended adjustment for examination access, e.g. scribe, prompter, enabling technology, enlarged papers, separate room etc*

I can further confirm that the above is this student's normal way of working and that they would be substantially disadvantaged if they were unable to avail of the above recommended adjustments to examinations.

Appendix 3: Monitoring and Reporting Requirements

A report will be provided by each College on an annual basis which will be structured as outlined in the table below.

Outcome

That all students with learning difficulty or disability are provided with appropriate additional support, while studying to help them to achieve to their full potential by progressing to suitable education/training or employment.

Indicator 1 The effective uptake of the services provided	**Relevant Data** Number of Students with Learning Difficulties / Disabilities enrolled in: • Discrete Provision • Mainstream Provision	**Summary of activity during the reporting period** Promotion and engagement activities including those that relate to: • Raising awareness of the support arrangements that are available • Transition planning with schools, EA other providers • Assessment of needs and reasonable adjustments • Resource issues • Parental / carer engagement
Indicator 2 Effectiveness of the additional support arrangements that have been put in place	**Relevant Data** Relevant Dat availing of support Numbers availing of examination access arrangements Achievement • of full qualification • of partial qualification Progression statistics • Numbers progressing to additional training / education • Numbers progressing to employment / voluntary work • Student Feedback • Data from student surveys	**Summary of activity during the reporting period** Summary of the type and nature of support arrangements that have been arranged to support students Other achievements

	• Information from student focus groups • Other feedback	
Indicator 3 Ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) activities to enhance staff capability in supporting those students with learning difficulties and disabilities.	**Relevant Data** Numbers participating in relevant CPD activities Annual expenditure on CPD activities	**Summary of activity during the reporting period** Details of professional development activities to enhance skills in supporting students with learning difficulties and disabilities.