

# QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK

2019 Edition – Part B

Section 4: Programme Participation

2019

## Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Programme Participation</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4.1 Attendance Policy</b> .....	<b>5</b>
4.1.1 Policy Overview .....	5
4.1.2 Policy Statement.....	5
4.1.3 Compulsory Attendance .....	6
4.1.4 Attendance Requirements for International Learners .....	7
4.1.5 Learner Entitlements .....	9
4.1.6 Learner Responsibilities .....	9
4.1.7 College Responsibilities .....	10
4.1.8 Advance Information to Learners .....	11
4.1.9 Recording Attendance .....	11
4.1.10 Implications of Absence.....	12
4.1.11 Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs) Impacting Attendance .....	13
4.1.12 Failure to Respond to Communication from DBS .....	13
<b>4.2 Deferral Policy</b> .....	<b>15</b>
4.2.1 Policy Overview .....	15
4.2.2 Policy Statement.....	15
4.2.3 Procedures for Seeking a Deferral .....	21
4.2.4 Returning to Study Post Deferral .....	24
<b>4.3 Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMC) Policy</b> .....	<b>26</b>
4.3.1 Policy Overview .....	26
4.3.2 Policy Statement.....	27
4.3.3 Extension Request: Personal Mitigating Circumstances Preventing Completion or Submission of a CA .....	28
4.3.4 Personal Mitigating Circumstances Impacting Performance during an Assessment (excluding examinations).....	29
4.3.5 Personal Mitigating Circumstances Impacting Performance during an Examination .....	30
4.3.6 Academic Judgement and the Assessment Process.....	32

4.3.7	<i>Personal Mitigating Circumstances Preventing a Learner Sitting an Examination</i>	32
4.3.8	<i>Limitations of PMCs</i>	32
4.3.9	<i>Retrospective PMC Applications</i>	32
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Support for Learners with Additional Needs (Need Extra Provision) Policy</b>	<b>34</b>
4.4.1	<i>Policy Overview</i>	34
4.4.2	<i>Policy Statement</i>	35
4.4.3	<i>Request for Disability Supports</i>	37
4.4.4	<i>Extra Provision for Specific Disabilities and Additional Needs</i>	39
4.4.5	<i>Practical NEP Arrangements</i>	41
4.4.6	<i>Additional Information</i>	45

AS of AQR 2023

## Programme Participation

*Student assessment procedures are expected to have clear regulations covering student absence, illness and other mitigating circumstances.*

QQI (2013)<sup>1</sup>

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This section of the *Quality Assurance Handbook* sets out expectations for learner engagement with programmes of study. Above all, DBS wishes its learners to be able to complete their studies successfully and to support you in so doing. DBS is aware that learners will from time-to-time experience circumstances whereby they need to take time out from studies or have other circumstances that need to be accommodated. This section therefore lays out the policies associated with engagement and participation on a programme, including:


- Attendance Policy
- Deferral Policy – what to do if you need to take time out
- Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMC) Policy – what to do if something happens that affects your studies
- Support for Learners with Additional Needs

Assessment-specific regulations are set out in Part B Section 5 of the QAH.

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<sup>1</sup> QQI (2013) *Assessments and Standards, Revised 2013*, Section 2.2.10  
[https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment\\_and\\_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf).

## 4.1 Attendance Policy

<b>Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part B</b>		
<b>Document Name</b>	Attendance Policy	
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	015	
<b>Version Reference</b>	v2.0	
<b>Document Owner</b>	QA Officer	
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	Registrar, Assistant Registrar, Heads of Department, Academic Directors	
<b>Applicability</b>	All programmes: NFQ L6-9, Professional Programmes, Study Abroad, DBS Online	
<b>Approved by</b>	Academic Board & QQI	
<b>Approval date</b>	23/07/19	
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<b>Revision Cycle</b>	A minimum of every five years	
<b>Revision History/ Amalgamation History</b>	N/A	
<b>Additional Information</b>	Active date will be following approval by QQI	
<b>References/ Supporting Documentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ENQA (2015) <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</i>, Standard 1.3 'Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment'. Standard 1.7 'Information Management'.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>INIS (2011) <i>Guidelines for Colleges Offering Courses to Full-Time Non-EEA Students</i>.<sup>3</sup></li> </ul>	

### 4.1.1 Policy Overview

Regular and punctual attendance is correlated with successful academic achievement.

Each learner is responsible for managing their time to ensure satisfactory attendance is achieved.

DBS considers satisfactory attendance as being attendance that is 85% or above.

Non-EU learners on student visas must maintain this level of attendance under the terms of conditions for visas.

### 4.1.2 Policy Statement

DBS recognises that specific circumstances may prevent learners from consistently maintaining attendance rates at 80% or greater. However, attendance that is less than 60% of the potential attendance for any given module is considered to be a cause for concern.

<sup>2</sup> [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.inis.gov.ie/en/inis/guidelines%20for%20colleges%20-%20august%202011.pdf/files/guidelines%20for%20colleges%20-%20august%202011.pdf>

Learners are also responsible for all work from the first day of class and must notify the College regarding any anticipated absences. Learners who do not maintain a satisfactory level of attendance are hindering their overall academic performance. In addition, where applicable, there may be specific compulsory requirements for a specific programme or component of a programme, or minimum requirements of regulatory or statutory bodies which recognise programmes for professional purposes.

Priority for the provision of further support to learners will always be given to those learners with a strong attendance record, including those with authorised absence.

In order to encourage high attendance levels and in keeping with best practice, the College invests substantial time and resources in collecting, analysing and following up on poor attendance. Attendance records are kept for all classes. It is each learner's responsibility to comply with attendance monitoring processes and procedures, including electronic or paper-based systems.

When absence from assessment or examinations is caused by illness or other personal mitigating circumstances (PMCs), the Programme Coordinator should be informed in writing and documentary evidence (e.g. a medical certificate) should be provided. Time limits for presentation of medical certificates apply. See Section 4.3 below, the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Policy, for full information on requirements.

#### 4.1.3 Compulsory Attendance

Some aspects of College provision dictate a compulsory attendance requirement, e.g. professional practice placements. In such instances, a specific policy is drawn up to manage this. The attendance policy and the consequences of failure to comply with the requirements of this policy are brought to the learners' attention in advance.

Where a learner fails to attend a compulsory element of a course/programme, there will be no requirement of DBS to offer the learner a further opportunity to undertake the compulsory element. Non-attendance by a learner may result in their failure of that course/programme or the corresponding element of the course/programme.

It is the responsibility of the Academic Director to develop, communicate and implement any such compulsory attendance policy. Where practical, learners must be advised of any such requirements from the outset of the programme. The policy must include details of any potential consequences on a learner's enrolment status or their entitlement to an award should they failed to satisfy the specific attendance requirements.

#### 4.1.4 Attendance Requirements for International Learners

There are strict regulations regarding the class attendance of non-EU students. These regulations have been set by the Department of Justice and Equality, and are enforced by The Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS).

All International Students are required to attend a minimum of 85% of classes, and student attendance is recorded electronically by class. Daily reports on each student are generated from this system identifying non-attendance and students with punctuality issues. All students are required to scan their student card at the beginning of each class or session using the electronic reader in each classroom. Student attendance figures are then available through their personal Moodle page. If the student does not scan in, the attendance will not be recorded.

If a student has concerns that there is an issue with recording attendance, they must speak to their lecturer for that class in the first instance, who will instruct Academic Operations to amend the record if an error has been made. Student Services and International Student Services have no power to amend attendance.

If any student has a poor attendance rate, DBS is required to inform the Department of Justice and the GNIB. Action may be taken by these organisations which could result in the cancellation of the student's study visa.

If an International Student requires a letter it must be requested through the Student Self Service Portal <https://students.dbs.ie/dbs-student-services/international-office>. It is a requirement for letters to list attendance which is reflective of the system and this cannot be changed retrospectively.

#### **Sanctions for conduct relating to attendance, up to, and including Expulsion**

It is an offence to do any of the following:

- Scan a student card and then not attend the lecture.
- Scan someone else's card.

DBS regularly carries out spot checks on classes to ensure that these instances do not occur. If any such instances are identified all students involved are called to a disciplinary meeting.

Failure to adhere to the attendance requirements constitutes a breach of College Regulations and is dealt with by the Disciplinary Committee. Where a student is found guilty of an offence, the Disciplinary Committee is empowered to impose the following penalties:

- Expulsion from the College.
- Suspension from the College for a stated period, or until such time as any requirements laid down by the Committee, such as payment of a fine or the restitution of damage or loss, are fulfilled.

### **Punctuality**

Students are required to be in attendance at the timetabled hour and remain in class throughout that time. Persistent breach will result in a formal disciplinary meeting and a warning will be issued. Students arriving 15 minutes after the scheduled start of class or leaving 15 minutes before the end of a scheduled class are marked as absent.

### **Absence due to illness**

If an international learner is ill for more than two days, they are required to submit a medical certificate from a qualified registered medical practitioner. This will be taken into account when calculating their attendance rate. The medical certificate must be provided within 5 working days of the period of absence. Failure to do so may have implications for the learner's status with INIS.

Absence from assessment or examinations caused by illness or other special circumstances is covered under the DBS Personal Mitigating Circumstances Policy in Section 4.3 below.

### **Uncertified and Unexplained Absences**

Learners are required to attend meetings arranged by the College to investigate poor attendance records.

Students are issued with a verbal warning. If a second offence is found of unsupported non-attendance, a warning letter is issued. Third and subsequent events are reported to the Registrar as a disciplinary matter.

### **Student Visa Work Hours Regulation**

Under the study visa regulations, international learners are permitted to work for up to 20 hours per week. Working more than 20 hours per week can affect a learner's ability to maintain a good attendance rate and their academic performance may suffer, and is in contravention of the study visa regulations. Learners are permitted to work up to 40 hours per week during academic vacation periods only.

Students undertaking a Dissertation or Research Project are expected to engage in the same number of academic hours as during their standard taught semester, and therefore are only permitted to work for up to 20 hours per week.



#### 4.1.5 Learner Entitlements

Learners are entitled to the appropriate opportunities to enable them to succeed in their studies. DBS ensures the appropriate teaching, learning and support facilities are in place to satisfy this. However, it is each learner's responsibility to avail of these. Attendance is a key contributor to learner success.

Whilst DBS does not impose compulsory attendance, except where specified or where an external agency imposes specific regulations, attendance is monitored and will be followed up where there is cause for concern.

It is acknowledged that it is each learner's responsibility to notify the College of any circumstances impacting upon their programme of study. However, where the College observes attendance levels that give cause for concern, efforts will be made to contact the learner concerned. In the case of personal mitigating circumstances (PMCs) affecting attendance, DBS will seek to support the learner and identify the options available to them.

Learners are entitled to classes and tutorials which start and end punctually and last for the duration of the time scheduled. In the event of a lecturer's absence, DBS will make every effort to arrange an alternative lecturer. Where this is not possible, the class will be rescheduled.

#### 4.1.6 Learner Responsibilities

Learners are required to arrive for classes punctually and remain present for the duration of the class. Learners are required to actively participate in the class and follow the reasonable instructions of their lecturer. Learners should not miss class except in extenuating circumstances such as illness or bereavement. In the event of any absence, the learner is required to notify the Programme Coordinator via e-mail.

In the event of any absence, it is each learner's responsibility to make arrangements to catch up on work missed.

If a learner is absent without explanation for a period greater than one calendar month and there has been no attempt to contact the College, and/or no reasonable explanation for the learner's absence, the learner will be deemed to have withdrawn from the programme and will be notified of this.

If a learner's pattern of attendance or participation gives cause for concern, and the absence has not been recorded as authorised through the submission of a PMC form and supporting documentation, the learner may not be entitled to progress on their chosen programme of study. DBS reserves the right to prevent a learner from progressing where it is felt they are not sufficiently and appropriately

engaging with the programme. The specific requirements will vary depending on the nature and level of the programme concerned.

It is each learner's responsibility to ensure accurate and honest recording of their attendance. Attendance is recorded on Moodle. This affords each individual learner the opportunity to view their record. This attendance record should be regularly checked by the learner, ideally on a daily basis, and any discrepancies should be brought to the attention of the relevant lecturer and/or the Programme Coordinator.

Any attempts to falsify attendance records, including but not restricted to scanning a card or cards belonging to others, or requesting someone to scan a card when absent, is considered a disciplinary offence and will be referred to the Disciplinary Committee where penalties up to and including dismissal from the College may be applied. The College is obliged to provide reports to INIS regarding international students with visa requirements.

#### 4.1.7 College Responsibilities

In this context, the responsibilities of the College are carried out by different members of the College including academic lecturing staff, administrators and managers.

The College is required to:

- Ensure classes begin and conclude punctually and last for the scheduled duration.
- Provide learners advance notice, where feasible, of a class venue change, or inform learners in good time that a class has been cancelled or rescheduled. This is managed through the use of e-mails and/or text alerts to learners from the Academic Affairs Department.
- Ensure effective attendance monitoring and recording arrangements are in place.
- Notify learners, through the Academic Affairs Department, of its attendance policy including attendance monitoring and any compulsory attendance requirements.
- Ensure Programme Coordinators monitor learner attendance and attempt to contact those absent without notice/explanation.
- Record learner attendance either through the electronic recording system provided or, in the event of a system failure, via paper-based recording overseen by the lecturer.
- Notify learners of the potential implications of their poor attendance or their failure to satisfy specific attendance requirements.
- Ensure lecturers and Programme Coordinators provide advice and guidance to those learners who give evidence of personal mitigating circumstances (PMCs) impacting on their attendance and participation.

- Ensure that the International Office notifies the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) of any visa-holding learner who fails to satisfy the attendance regulations as stated.

#### 4.1.8 Advance Information to Learners

From the outset of their studies, as part of orientation and induction, learners should be alerted to the attendance policy and informed of the recording and monitoring arrangements in place.

Visa-holding learners should be notified of the specific requirements for their attendance and the communication of their attendance to INIS, as well as the requirement for College to notify INIS where attendance falls below the required level(s).

All learners should be provided with access to their timetable for the semester ahead. This should detail all classes including the location. Further to this, learners should be notified of other key programme activities/dates, including examination periods, etc.

Learners are advised that timetables are intended to run as drafted but schedule changes may occur at times due to unforeseen circumstances. In the event of a timetabling change, and where practicable, the learners will be notified at the earliest opportunity by text and/or by e-mail to their DBS account.

#### 4.1.9 Recording Attendance

The academic systems team will provide each lecturer with details of all learners registered to attend their class. Each learner is required to use their student card and the scanning device located in each classroom to scan in for each class that they attend. In the rare instance of a fault with the scanning device or a student card, the learner must notify the lecturer immediately so that attendance can be recorded manually.

The learner is responsible for monitoring their attendance record on Moodle and must immediately notify the relevant lecturer where there is an error in the recording of their attendance. Where the lecturer is able to verify an inaccuracy, the attendance record will be updated.

The lecturer should make all reasonable attempts to ensure the accuracy of attendance records. This includes reminding learners of the requirement to sign in and ensure that they scan their student card. Depending on the size of the class, additional checks may include ensuring the class count correlates with the attendance register.

DBS recognises that there may be instances where a learner is unable to attend class. The learner is required to notify the Programme Coordinator of this by e-mail at the earliest opportunity. DBS reserves the right to request evidence justifying a learner's absence, e.g. medical certificate.

Where the Programme Coordinator is notified of absence, he/she will record the reason for absence and date of notification on the student information system.

#### 4.1.10 Implications of Absence

Programme Coordinators will initiate contact with any learner where the system indicates their unauthorised absence for a period in excess of one week.

Where the record identifies ongoing or recurring absence without notification, a member of the academic support team will attempt to contact the learner concerned to establish:

1. Whether the learner intends to continue on their programme of study, and
2. Whether or not there are any circumstances which may be preventing improved attendance.

Attempts will be made to support the learner to improve their attendance, or alternatively, appropriate options such as deferral, programme change or transfer of study mode may be discussed.

The learner may be asked to attend a meeting to discuss the implications of their non-attendance or non-participation. All absentee learners will be advised that continuous or recurring absence may impact on their potential to succeed and could prevent their progression on the programme. Where the requirements of a professional body, academic validation, or government agency regulations have implications for a learner's potential progression, enrolment, award, or residency status this will be communicated to the learner. Visa-holding learners will be advised of the intention to notify INIS and the potential implications this may have on their residency status.

Where applicable, DBS reserves the right to prevent a learner undertaking a professional practice placement where it is felt that poor attendance or participation is demonstrating a lack of commitment to the programme or has prevented the learner from being adequately prepared for the placement requirements.

While a learner may be withdrawn for non-attendance without communication for a duration greater than one calendar month, a learner will not be withdrawn for poor attendance in itself. However, if a learner fails an assessment, a module, a stage or a programme and has a track record of poor attendance, without accepted mitigating circumstances, this apparent lack of commitment to the programme will be a factor taken into account in the event of any appeal.

#### 4.1.11 Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMCs) Impacting Attendance

Where PMCs are impacting on a learner's attendance DBS will advise the learner of options available to them including but not limited to:

- Additional learner supports that are available to the learner
- Deferral
- Extension requests
- Change of programme
- Transfer of mode of study

Should the learner opt for one or more of the above options, the learner will be required to follow the associated procedure with each instance outlined above and the associated policy will apply.

#### 4.1.12 Failure to Respond to Communication from DBS

Learners who are absent for an extended period, and in excess of one calendar month, and who fail to respond to a minimum of two attempts by DBS to make contact, will be deemed to have withdrawn from their programme of study. The final attempt at communication will notify the learner of their imminent withdrawal and the requirement to make contact within 5 working days in order to avoid this step.

Visa-holding learners will further be notified of the intention to advise INIS of their absence and their non-engagement in their chosen programme of study. Such learners will also be notified of the implications for their residency status.

Should the learner fail to respond to the communications by the fixed deadline, the Programme Coordinator will confirm the withdrawal of the learner and will issue a withdrawal letter to the learner. The student information system will also be updated to reflect the learner's withdrawal.

In the event of a learner withdrawal, the Assessment and Regulations Manager will ensure any completed modules are referred to the Examination Board as scheduled, and that a transcript of results will be issued to the learner if applicable.


A learner will have no entitlement to a refund of fees paid where the College is obliged to withdraw the learner as a result of the learner's own absence and non-communication.

Where a learner is withdrawn due to their non-attendance and failure to communicate with the College, any return to study will normally only be facilitated through the standard admissions

process at the next programme intake point. Fees paid in relation to a previous admission will not be carried forward.

AS of AQR 2023

## 4.2 Deferral Policy

Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part B	
	
<b>Document Name</b>	Deferral Policy
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	016
<b>Version Reference</b>	v2.0
<b>Document Owner</b>	Registrar
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	Assistant Registrar, QA Officer, Assessment and Regulations Manager, Academic Directors
<b>Applicability</b>	All programmes: NFQ L6-9, Professional Programmes, Study Abroad, DBS Online
<b>Approved by</b>	Academic Board & QQI
<b>Approval date</b>	23/07/19
<b>Date Policy Becomes Active</b>	18/09/19
<b>Revision Cycle</b>	A minimum of every five years
<b>Revision History/ Amalgamation History</b>	N/A
<b>Additional Information</b>	Active date will be following approval by QQI
<b>References/ Supporting Documentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• QQI (2013) <i>Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013</i>. Section 3, 'Sectoral Conventions for Assessment'.<sup>4</sup></li> </ul>

### 4.2.1 Policy Overview

A deferral refers to a break or delay in the completion of a programme of study or a component thereof. These delays can happen for a series of legitimate reasons.

This policy details all available avenues available to learners when coming to a decision to defer either a module or programme stage.

Learners are responsible for their registration status and maintaining communication with the College in relation to any factors that may impact that status. DBS provides clear guidance and opportunities for learners to communicate any circumstances that are impacting upon their studies at the time they arise and/or in the immediate period following same.

### 4.2.2 Policy Statement

Deferral applications can be made for a variety of reasons which may include any one of the following:

- A pre-registration deferral of an offer.
- A pre-programme deferral of a place, within 2 weeks of registration.
- A full programme deferral, during the programme of study.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment\\_and\\_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf)

- A module deferral, during the programme of study.

When considering any deferral request, DBS will take into account the best interest of the learner but will only implement decisions that ensure the academic integrity of the programme and the College. DBS cannot provide personalised learning arrangements for individual learners nor introduce arrangements that either create, or create an impression of, an unfair advantage for an individual learner. The completion of a programme through its natural progression is paramount, and DBS will not facilitate the accelerated completion of a programme beyond what the programme validation permits.

DBS will seek to consider and respond to deferral requests as quickly as possible. Learners are advised that a deferral should not be assumed and therefore, wherever practicable, learners should continue to actively participate in their chosen programme of study, including with the completion of any and all assessments, until the deferral outcome has been decided. Where there are extenuating circumstances that prevent this, the deferral will be backdated to the date of first notification to the College or, alternatively, to the date indicated on any supporting evidence provided.

Deferral may result in the need to repeat course/programme components that have not previously been entered on the system and ratified. The failure to repeat course/programme components, as required by the College, can constitute the failing of an assessment attempt and will be subjected to the implications this carries in line with *QQI Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*.

DBS reserves the right to impose a programme deferral on a learner where it is felt it may be detrimental to the learner, the College, or the individuals or groups with whom the learner is required to engage to complete their studies should DBS not do so.

DBS will retain all records confidentially in line with data protection requirements and will only share information on a need-to-know basis.

### **Pre-Registration Deferral of an Offer of a Place**

A pre-registration deferral of an offer of a place on a DBS programme is available to all applicants in receipt of an offer of a place. In such cases the applicant may defer the offer for a maximum of two years. Requests for a pre-registration deferral should be submitted to the Admissions Team.



### **Conditions relating to the Deferral of an Offer of a Place**

Deferral of an offer is accepted and confirmed subject to conditions which the Admissions Team must communicate to the applicant at the time of the request to defer. The following conditions apply:

- The deferral will be granted for a maximum period of two academic years.
- The deferral will be granted subject to the programme continuing to be offered and in its current format and structure. DBS reserves the right to amend the programme format and structure without notice and further reserves the right to no longer offer the programme without notice.
- DBS reserves the right to amend the entry requirements and standards without notice and all deferred offers will be subject to these revised requirements which may result in the offer being withdrawn.
- Deferred applicants will be subject to the fees applicable at the time they commence the programme of study (and not those fees that applied when an offer of a place was made).

### **Pre-Programme Deferral of a Place (within 2 weeks of registration)**

Pre-programme deferral is only available to those learners who, once commenced, are within 2 weeks of having completed registration. In such cases the applicant may defer for a maximum of one academic year subject to specific conditions. Requests for a pre-programme deferral must be submitted to the Programme Coordinator.

### **Conditions of Pre-Programme Deferral of a Place (within 2 weeks of registration)**

A pre-programme deferral is accepted and confirmed subject to conditions which the Programme Coordinator must communicate to the applicant at the time. The following conditions apply:

- The deferral is granted for a maximum of one academic year at a time, for up to two consecutive years.
- The deferral is granted subject to the programme continuing to be offered and in its current format and structure. DBS reserves the right to amend the programme format and structure without notice and further reserves the right to no longer offer the programme without notice.
- DBS reserves the right to amend the entry requirements and standards without notice and all deferred learners will be subject to these revised requirements which may include the offer being withdrawn.

- Deferred learners will be subject to the fees applicable at the time they commence the programme of study (and not those fees that applied when an offer of a place was made).
- Fees paid before the deferral will be considered as frozen and will be deferred for the duration of the deferral (for up to two years).
- There is no entitlement to a refund of fees paid in the event of the learner no longer wishing to pursue the programme of study or in the event of programme changes made by DBS, following a deferral.
- It is the learner's responsibility to contact DBS in order to recommence their studies at the end of the deferral period. Where a learner fails to return at this point, and after a maximum 30-day grace period following the expiration of the deferral period, the learner will be deemed to have withdrawn. In such cases return to DBS will only be facilitated through the standard admissions process at the next programme start point.

### **A Full Programme Deferral During a Programme of Study**

A full programme deferral is an option available to learners who are undertaking a programme of study at DBS and who, for reasons beyond their control, can no longer commit to completing the programme in the original intended timescale. DBS does not encourage learners to defer their studies except in extenuating circumstances that provide no other option. Learners are advised to speak with their Academic Director in the first instance to establish alternative arrangements that may suit their needs. Where a full programme deferral is required, the learner should submit their request to the Programme Coordinator.

A full programme deferral may also be imposed on a learner where the College believes that their continuation may be detrimental to the learner, to the College, or to the individuals or groups with whom they must work in order to complete their studies. In such cases the Academic Director will discuss the concerns and the recommendations with the learner concerned. The additional requirements to confirm fitness to return will also be outlined to the learner.

### **Conditions of a Full Programme Deferral during a Programme of Study**

A full programme deferral is only granted to those learners who are able to evidence extenuating circumstances which prevent them from completing their programme of study in the intended original timescale. Full programme deferrals are only normally offered at a completed stage point in the programme. Where learners are authorised to defer mid-stage, they may be required to repeat modules and/or assessments previously completed and recommence the stage on their return. Where a full programme deferral is granted it is subject to conditions which the Programme

Coordinator must communicate to the learner at the point of the deferral being confirmed. The conditions apply as follows:

- The deferral is granted for a maximum of one academic year at a time, for up to two consecutive years.
- DBS reserves the right to discontinue the programme without notification to deferred learners.
- DBS reserves the right to change the format and content of the programme without notification to deferred learners.
- A deferral may result in a learner being required to undertake additional modules and or assessments upon their return.
- A deferred learner will be subject to the fees applicable to the academic year into which they return.
- Fees paid up to the point of deferral will be considered frozen (on a pro-rata basis subject to the stage within the programme at which the deferral is made), and will be deferred for the duration of the deferral.
- There is no entitlement to a refund of fees paid in the event of the learner no longer wishing to pursue the programme of study or in the event of programme changes made by DBS, following a deferral.
- It is the learner's responsibility to contact DBS in order to recommence their studies at the end of the deferral period. Where a learner fails to return at this point, a period of up to one month's grace will be applied, after which they will be deemed to have withdrawn. In such cases return to DBS will only be facilitated through the standard admissions process at the next programme start point.
- The College is not responsible for student visa extensions in the event of a deferral. It remains the responsibility of the student to manage their visa arrangements and requirements with the appropriate national services. While deferred, students cannot be considered as Active students undertaking their studies, and so may not be eligible for a study visa during this period. The College is required to report to INIS regarding visa-requiring students who are no longer active on their programmes.

## **A Module Deferral During a Programme of Study**

DBS operates on the principle of fit-to-sit or -submit and therefore does not normally facilitate the deferral of an individual module or modules (where these have been signed up to at the point of registration), including the deferral of a module assessment, whilst other modules are being undertaken, except in extreme extenuating circumstances. In such cases DBS is entitled to apply discretion. This does not remove the right of part time learners to deviate from the recommended learning route.

Submitted independent evidence alone, e.g. a medical certificate, is not sufficient to warrant a module deferral. DBS will always recognise the expertise of independent third-party specialists/medical practitioners in the evidence that they provide, but all deferral decisions will be made based on the requirements of the programme and the need to maintain the highest academic standards and integrity. DBS reserves the right to deny a module or assessment deferral request where it is felt that this may negatively impact upon the academic integrity of the programme or the individual learner experience and/or requirements. A full programme deferral may be offered as an alternative. All such deferral decisions are made by the Academic Director.

### **Conditions of a Module Deferral, Including Assessment Only**

In the rare and extreme circumstances where DBS approves a module deferral, including an assessment only deferral, the conditions of the deferral must be communicated by the Programme Coordinator to the learner at the point of acceptance. The following conditions apply:

- The deferral is granted until the next sitting only.
- DBS reserves the right to discontinue the module without notification to deferred learners.
- DBS reserves the right to change the format and content of the module and assessment without notification to deferred learners.
- A deferral may result in a learner being required to undertake an alternative module and/ or assessment.
- A deferred learner will be subject to the fees applicable to the academic year in which they undertake the module.
- Fees paid will be deferred for the duration of the deferral. There is no entitlement to a refund of fees paid in the event of the learner no longer wishing to pursue the programme of study or in the event of programme changes made by DBS.
- It is the learner's responsibility to contact DBS in order to recommence their studies at the end of the deferral period. Where a learner fails to return at this point, after a maximum 30-day grace period following the expiration of the deferral period, the learner will be deemed

to have withdrawn. In such cases return to DBS will only be facilitated through the standard admissions process at the next programme start point. The student information system will also be updated to reflect the learner's withdrawal.

### **Timescales**

It is the applicant/learner's responsibility to submit a request for a deferral in a timely manner. Delays in submitting a valid deferral request may result in DBS assuming that the learner has withdrawn due to non-communication and failure to engage with the College.

Where a deferral request is submitted through the proper channels as outlined, the applicant/learner may reasonably expect a response within 10 working days.

Where an appeal is submitted through the proper channels (see the QAH Part B Section 3.5), the applicant/learner may reasonably expect a response within 20 working days.

### **Fees**

Learners availing of a whole programme deferral and who are on payment schedules (agreed upon acceptance of their place on the programme) are entitled to defer their scheduled payments during the deferral period.

Learners withdrawing from a programme of study have no entitlement to a full or partial refund of fees paid as per the terms and conditions outlined at the point of payment.

#### **4.2.3 Procedures for Seeking a Deferral**

Applicants and learners wishing to apply for a deferral must follow the appropriate procedure for the deferral type being sought. Where required, independent supporting evidence must be provided as part of the deferral request. Where evidence is required and not provided the deferral request will be rejected.

#### **Requesting a Deferral of an Offer of a Place**

An applicant wishing to hold an offer of a place may do so by applying to the Admissions Office.

An appeal must be submitted within 10 working days of the date of the decision being communicated. An appeal submitted beyond this point will not be considered. Disagreement with the original decision is not considered grounds for an appeal. The outcome of the appeal is final and there is no further right of appeal.

### **Requesting a Pre-Programme Deferral (within 2 weeks of registration)**

A learner wishing to defer their place on a programme within two weeks of the registration may do so upon applying to the relevant Programme Coordinator.

The Programme Coordinator will consider the request and confirm approval of same, except where it is known to be the final intake of a programme.

Where it is known to be the final intake of the programme, the Programme Coordinator must refer the learner to the Academic Director to discuss alternative programmes they may defer on to. The Academic Director will notify the Programme Coordinator of the appropriate programme alternative in order to facilitate the deferral offer.

In confirming agreement of the deferral, the Programme Coordinator must advise the learner of the relevant conditions. Where a deferral is denied, the learner must be advised of the rationale for the decision. An appeal against the deferral decision may be made in writing to the Quality Assurance Officer (refer to QAH Part B Section 3.5 for the Appeals Policy). All such appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of the decision being communicated. Any appeal submitted outside this timeframe will be denied. Disagreement with the original decision is not considered grounds for an appeal. The outcome of the appeal is final and there is no further right of appeal.

The following are the only grounds for appeal:

- Failure on the part of the College to consider information made available to the College that would have influenced the deferral outcome.
- An irregularity in the application of the procedure for considering a deferral.

### **Requesting a Programme Deferral**

A learner wishing to defer their place on a programme must submit a formal request to the relevant Programme Coordinator.

A learner wishing to defer a programme should normally have completed a stage and be in good academic standing, i.e. be up to date with all assessments. It is expected that there are circumstances present which prevent the learner from progressing as part of the programme as scheduled.

The Programme Coordinator will draw the request to the attention of the Academic Director who will consider the request and confirm approval of same, except where it is known to be the final intake of a programme.

Where it is known to be the final intake of the programme, the Programme Coordinator must advise the learner and discuss the implications of possible changes that might be made to the programme construct as a consequence of Programme Review.

In confirming agreement of the deferral, the Programme Coordinator must advise the learner of the relevant conditions.

Where a deferral is denied, the learner must be advised of the rationale for the decision.

An appeal against the deferral decision must be submitted with regard to the Appeals Policy outlined in the QAH Part B Section 3.5.

All such appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of the decision being communicated. Any appeal submitted outside this timeframe will be denied.

The following are the only grounds for appeal:

- Failure on the part of the College to consider information made available to the College that would have influenced the deferral outcome.
- An irregularity in the application of the procedure for considering a deferral.

Disagreement with the original decision is not considered grounds for an appeal. The outcome of the appeal is final and there is no further right of appeal.

### **Requesting a Module Deferral**

DBS does not encourage deferring individual modules when continuing studies of other modules. Such requests will only be accommodated in exceptional circumstances. Deferral of assessment for a module or modules will normally be denied except where there are extreme extenuating circumstances beyond the learner's control. Scheduling of assessments over a longer period of time to the specified learning route may provide an unfair advantage and impact on the academic integrity of the programme.

Module deferrals, including assessment only, will only be considered where it is evidenced that the learner is unable to participate or that their ability to perform to their academic potential is diminished due to circumstance beyond their control. Such circumstances are expected to be beyond the normal stress associated with the completion of assessments and programmes of study. Such circumstances include illness and bereavement, and in both cases, DBS reserves the right to request evidence.

Employment demands or commitments are not normally considered as grounds for deferral, including assessment only deferrals. Learners are reasonably expected to manage their employment commitments to facilitate the completion of their studies.

Where appropriate evidence of extenuating circumstances is submitted to the Programme Coordinator, this is brought to the attention of the Academic Director who may:

1. Approve the request
2. Deny the request
3. Deny the request but recommend a full programme deferral.

DBS operates on the principle of 'fit-to-sit' or 'fit-to-submit', and therefore reasonably expects that learners are fit for all assessments or for no assessments. As a result, deferral of modules or assessments will normally be denied but may result in a programme deferral being offered.

In confirming a deferral, the Programme Coordinator must advise the learner of the relevant conditions. Where a deferral is denied, the learner must be advised of the rationale for the decision.

An appeal against the deferral decision may be made in writing to the Quality Assurance Officer (please refer to the QAH Part B Section 3.5 for the Appeals Policy). All such appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of the decision being communicated. Any appeal submitted outside this timeframe will be denied.

The following are the only grounds for appeal:

- Failure on the part of the College to consider information made available to the College that would have influenced the deferral outcome.
- An irregularity in the application of the procedure for considering a deferral.

Disagreement with the original decision is not considered grounds for an appeal. The outcome of the appeal is final and there is no further right of appeal.

#### 4.2.4 Returning to Study Post Deferral

It is the learner's responsibility to return to College at the expected time. Learners are required to contact their Programme Coordinator to confirm their intent to resume their studies, and re-register for the new academic year. All learners who defer are required to familiarise themselves with the DBS academic calendar, and the examination timetables where applicable, as published, and make themselves available for their return to study and or assessment.



Failure to return to study within one month of the expected return date will result in the learner being withdrawn. The Programme Coordinator will notify the learner of the withdrawal. In such cases fees paid will not be refunded.

Returning to a programme of study at DBS following a withdrawal will only be facilitated through the standard admissions process for the next programme start point. In such cases any fees previously paid will no longer be available as deferred payment and the learner will be liable for all fees applicable to a new learner.

Failure to return to complete an assessment, including examinations, at the scheduled return point will be considered as an assessment attempt having been offered to the learner. A mark of 0% will be recorded. The implications of this are as outlined in QQI's *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*, and specifically Sectoral Convention 3, which outlines that learners who fail an Award Stage module at the first attempt (including where the opportunity provided was not attempted) will no longer be entitled to an honours award:

*'Honours classification, or any classification higher than 'Pass', shall be made based on first-attempt grades. Necessary procedures to allow consistent treatment of a repeat grade as a first attempt grade, where exceptional mitigating circumstances exist, shall not compromise this principle.'*


QQI (2013)<sup>5</sup>

Depending on the reason for deferral, a learner might be required to provide the College with documentation on return to the programme that confirms their suitability and or fitness to return, in line with the deferral offer, before recommencing the programme.

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<sup>5</sup> QQI (2013) *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*, Sectoral Convention 3, [https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment\\_and\\_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf](https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf)

## 4.3 Personal Mitigating Circumstances (PMC) Policy

<b>Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part B</b> 	
<b>Document Name</b>	Personal Mitigating Circumstances Policy
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	017
<b>Version Reference</b>	v2.1
<b>Document Owner</b>	Assessment and Regulations Manager
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	Registrar, Assistant Registrar, QA Officer, Heads of Department, Academic Directors
<b>Applicability</b>	All programmes: NFQ L6-9, Professional Programmes, Study Abroad, DBS Online
<b>Approved by</b>	DBS Academic Board
<b>Approval date</b>	23/07/19
<b>Date Policy Becomes Active</b>	18/09/19
<b>Revision Cycle</b>	A minimum of every five years
<b>Revision History/ Amalgamation History</b>	N/A
<b>Additional Information</b>	Active date will be following approval by QQI
<b>References/ Supporting Documentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ENQA (2015) <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</i>, Standard 1.6 'Learning Resources and Student Support'.<sup>6</sup></li> <li>QQI (2016) <i>Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines</i>, Section 2.5.2, 'A Provider Ethos that Promotes Learning' and Section 2.7, 'Supports for Learners'.<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>

### 4.3.1 Policy Overview

Undertaking a programme of studying and completing all attendance and assessment requirements is physically and mentally challenging for many learners and can result in feelings of increased stress. This policy outlines the available mechanisms that are available to learners who present with a mitigating circumstance that precludes participation with given elements of a programme and at certain point in time.

**Personal mitigating circumstances are always outside of the normal stresses that are expected as part of normal participation on a programme of study.**

This policy is applicable to all QQI accredited, and all non-accredited, programmes.

<sup>6</sup> [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf>

There is a strong correlation between attendance and achievement and therefore DBS encourages all learners to attend all of their classes in order to assist them in succeeding in their studies and in receiving the maximum support available to them.

#### 4.3.2 Policy Statement

This policy is not for the purpose of taking into consideration a diagnosed medical condition, disability or specific learning need. Learners who wish for such circumstances to be considered in order for appropriate reasonable accommodations to be made for teaching, learning and assessment should consult the Section 4.4 below, Support for Learners with Additional Needs (Needs Extra Provisions).

Learners who feel under pressure as a result of their studies and/or their preparation for assessments should continue to make all reasonable efforts to meet the programme requirements and deadlines and should avail of the support provided by the lecturers, programme leader, DBS Library Service and/or DBS Student Services.

Learners who feel this way whilst preparing for or undertaking assessments should make all reasonable effort to comply with programme assessment requirements. Symptoms typically associated with assessment stress are not normally considered to be extenuating circumstances warranting a learner's absence, nor their failure to submit work, nor their underperformance in an assessment or examination.

DBS does recognise that circumstances can arise in a learner's life that may diminish their ability to satisfy programme requirements or to achieve their academic potential. These are known as personal mitigating circumstances and a learner can request that these circumstances be taken into consideration when seeking an extension to a submission deadline or when the learner's performance in an assessment is being assessed.

Examples of Personal Mitigating Circumstances can include, but are not limited to, short term illness or injury, the short term illness or injury of a learner's dependant, bereavement (loss of family, kin or close friends), and unavoidable travel requirements (holidays booked once Academic Calendars are made available cannot be considered as PMCs).

Whilst this policy also applies to learners who require a short-term extension to a submission deadline for an assessment, a student cannot normally request and obtain an extension and subsequently ask for the same extenuating circumstances to be taken into account after the fact.

### 4.3.3 Extension Request: Personal Mitigating Circumstances Preventing Completion or Submission of a CA

When, owing to personal mitigating circumstances (PMCs), a learner is unable to complete or submit a piece of continuous assessment (CA), the learner must complete the Extension Request form and submit it to the relevant Programme Coordinator.

The form is available on the student website and must be submitted electronically. The form should normally be submitted at least 3 days in advance of the CA submission date or in class assessment. Where it is not practicable to do so, the Extension Request Form may be submitted up to 7 calendar days after the submission deadline or date of in class assessment.

The Extension Request Form should normally be supported with independent documentary evidence, e.g. medical certificate, bereavement notice, travel advisory.

All records are retained confidentially in accordance with data protection requirements and information will only be shared on a need to know basis.

The Programme Coordinator will forward the extension request to the Academic Director who will review the form and supporting evidence and will determine an appropriate decision.

The decisions available are:

1. Deny the request (usually due to absence of evidence or insufficient cause)
2. Approve the request
3. Request further information

The Academic Director will notify the learner and the Programme Coordinator of the outcome.

Should the extension request be denied, the learner will be notified of the outcome and the reason for same. The Academic Director will also advise the learner of the penalties and implications of failing to meet the required deadline or complete the assessment concerned.

Should the extension request be approved, the learner will be notified of the outcome and the revised arrangements for completion or submission of the CA. It should be noted that any period of extension will not normally be for greater than 10 working days and will typically reflect the period of the duration of the PMCs, i.e. a 3-day illness will warrant a 3-day extension.

Should further information be required, the Academic Director will contact the learner for further information in order to facilitate a fully informed decision being made.

Should an extension be approved, or an alternative date be approved for the sitting of an in-class assessment, the Programme Coordinator will advise the learner that their failure to submit by the revised deadline or attend on the date of the rescheduled in-class test will result in appropriate penalties being applied.

It is the learner's responsibility to ensure that they satisfy the assessments arrangements following the granting of an extension. Failure to do so may have implications for their enrolment and entitlement to an award.

**Learners are advised not to assume that PMC will be accepted and/or an extension granted.**

DBS reasonably expects that learners who encounter PMC close to the assessment submission deadline would normally have the significant majority of the assessment completed, and therefore only a minimal extension period would ordinarily be granted.

**Learners are advised to be aware of penalties for late submission should an extension not be granted or should the extended submission date be missed thereafter.**

Where an extension is granted the Academic Director needs to ensure the relevant lecturer is notified and that the necessary arrangements are made on Moodle to facilitate the extended submission date.

#### 4.3.4 Personal Mitigating Circumstances Impacting Performance during an Assessment (excluding examinations)

DBS operates the fit-to-sit or -submit principle which means that learners who undertake an assessment declare themselves fit to take that assessment. Normally, any subsequent claim for personal mitigating circumstances in relation to that assessment will not be considered. The exception to this is in the case of a learner who becomes unwell during the course of an assessment such as an in-class assessment or professional practice placement. In this instance, independent evidence must be communicated to the College within five working days in order to be considered.

The PMC form is available on the DBS Student website and must be submitted electronically.

The PMC form should normally be submitted to the relevant Programme Coordinator supported with independent documentary evidence, e.g. medical certificate, but may also refer to College-based evidence such as a report from the relevant lecturer, exam invigilator, Academic Director or member of Student Support Services.

All records are retained confidentially in accordance with data protection requirements and information will only be shared on a need to know basis.

Where the PMC form and evidence submitted relates to an in-class assessment or professional practice placement, the Programme Coordinator will notify the Academic Director and a decision will be reached to determine whether or not the learner should be afforded a further assessment opportunity as the current attempt and the arrangements for this.

The Academic Director will advise the learner and the Programme Coordinator of the decision and of the implications of this in respect of their enrolment status and entitlement to an award.

### **Right of Appeal**

An appeal against a PMC decision must be submitted with regard to the Appeals Policy outlined in the QAH Part B Section 3.5.

All such appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of the decision being communicated. Any appeal submitted outside this timeframe will be denied.

The following are the only grounds for appeal:

- A failure on the part of the College to consider information made available to the College that would have influenced the deferral decision.
- An irregularity in the application of the procedure for considering a deferral.

Disagreement with the original decision is not considered grounds for an appeal. The outcome of the appeal is final and there is no further right of appeal.

The Appeal Committee is not a re-hearing of the original PMC submission but determination of whether there was a procedural irregularity or information not considered. In determining the presence of either circumstances, the Appeal Committee may make a revised decision which can be applied retrospectively if applicable.

### **4.3.5 Personal Mitigating Circumstances Impacting Performance during an Examination**

DBS operates the fit-to-sit or -submit principle which means that learners who undertake an examination declare themselves fit to do so. Normally, any subsequent claim for personal mitigating circumstances in relation to that examination will not be considered. The exception to this is in the case of a learner who becomes unwell during the course of an examination. In this instance, independent evidence must be communicated to the College within five working days in order to be considered.

**The PMC form is available on the student website and must be submitted electronically.**

The PMC form should normally be submitted to the relevant Programme Coordinator with independent documentary evidence e.g. medical certificate, but may also refer to College based evidence such as invigilator's report.

All records are retained confidentially in accordance with data protection requirements and information will only be shared on a need to know basis.

The Programme Coordinator will notify the Assessment and Regulations Manager who will conduct a review of the PMC application and any information arising out of the exam sitting, including the invigilator's report, in advance of the relevant Board of Examiners meeting.

The Assessment and Regulations Manager will determine whether or not there is evidence that PMCs are present. This will be determined on the evidence submitted. The Assessment and Regulations Manager does not determine the impact of PMCs.

The Internal Examination Board will be notified of which learners have PMCs approved for which examinations, through notation of a deferred opportunity on the Exam Board Reports. The Board will not be notified of the nature of the PMCs but may be required to determine if there is evidence that learner performance has been impacted.

In determining evidence of impact, the Board is required to consider the learner's overall profile and compare performance in other modules and assessments in that programme stage. Particular consideration should be given to similar assessment types i.e. examinations.

Upon reaching a decision, the Internal Board is required to make a recommendation to the External Board of Examiners. Where the decision is that there is evidence of performance being impacted i.e. the percentage of marks out of sync with the profile of performance, it is reasonably expected that the evidence will also indicate the extent of the impact and therefore the grade increase to be recommended. Where the Board feels there is no evidence of impact, this should also be recorded with a recommendation that the grade remains unchanged.

The External Board of Examiners will be asked to ratify the recommendation.

The decision of the Board of Examiners will be communicated to the learner 5 working days after the Board.

### **Right of Appeal**

An appeal against a decision of the Board of Examiners must be submitted with regard to the Appeals Policy outlined in the QAH Part B Section 3.5.

#### 4.3.6 Academic Judgement and the Assessment Process

The following provisions apply to the exercise of academic judgement in relation to the assessment process:

- The assessment of a learner's work is a matter of judgement, not simply of computation.
- Marks and percentages are not considered definitive absolute values but rather they enable an examiner to communicate their judgement on various aspects of a learner's work, in addition to determining the learner's fulfilment of programme outcomes.
- The academic judgements of examiners cannot, in themselves, be questioned or overturned.

The PMC process may result in an amendment to the decision of an examiner. It does not in any way reflect on the soundness of the initial academic judgement. It is rather a recognition that extraneous or disclosed circumstances make it appropriate to change the final decision in respect of a particular learner's performance.

#### 4.3.7 Personal Mitigating Circumstances Preventing a Learner Sitting an Examination

In line with the fit to sit principle, learners are reasonably expected to sit all exams or defer all exams as opposed to selective sitting of some and not others.

A learner who is unable to sit an examination is required to request a deferral. Deferral of selected exams in a sitting will not normally be allowed, unless specific supporting documentation is provided. Learners should consult the Deferral Policy in Section 4.2 above and follow the relevant procedure.

#### 4.3.8 Limitations of PMCs

When instances arise where a learner's performance has potentially been impacted during an examination or assessment, in order to determine the impact of PMCs on learner performance it is necessary to compare performance in affected assessments and modules with unaffected assessments and modules within a programme stage. Therefore, DBS will not accept PMCs for a complete programme or stage. It is understood that completion of the assessments and continuation of the programme is a declaration of fitness to do so.

#### 4.3.9 Retrospective PMC Applications

DBS recognises that instances arise where learners fail to notify the College of PMCs until such a time as the learner is notified of their failure and withdrawal. It is essential that learners notify DBS of the circumstances within 7 working days following the release of their results. Failure to do so may result in all fail grades standing and the withdrawal status of the learner being considered final. DBS provides sufficient opportunity to communicate PMCs and therefore will not normally accept




post failure or post withdrawal PMC applications except in extreme cases where the evidence itself provides justification for previous non-communication.

For a claim of valid reasons for non-disclosure to be accepted, it is normally expected that the circumstances themselves were exceptionally serious, or had an exceptionally serious impact on the learner's academic performance or ability to engage with the College, or there were substantial and grave reasons why the learner was unable or unwilling to disclose them at the time. Simple unwillingness to disclose or lack of appreciation/awareness of potential impact of personal circumstances is insufficient for acceptance of late submission of extenuating circumstances.

Learners who are deemed to have failed and withdrawn are entitled to avail of the Academic Appeals process.

## 4.4 Support for Learners with Additional Needs (Need Extra Provision) Policy

<b>Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH) Part B</b> 	
<b>Document Name</b>	Support for Learners with Additional Needs (Need Extra Provision) Policy
<b>Policy Document Number</b>	018
<b>Version Reference</b>	v2.2
<b>Document Owner</b>	Head of Student Services
<b>Roles with Aligned Responsibility</b>	Assessment and Regulations Manager, Registrar, Assistant Registrar, QA Officer, Disability and Inclusion Officer
<b>Applicability</b>	All programmes: NFQ 6–9, Professional Programmes, Study Abroad, DBS Online
<b>Approved by</b>	DBS Academic Board & QQI
<b>Approval date</b>	23/07/19
<b>Date Policy Becomes Active</b>	18/09/19
<b>Revision Cycle</b>	A minimum of every five years
<b>Revision History/ Amalgamation History</b>	N/A
<b>Additional Information</b>	Active date will be following approval by QQI
<b>References/ Supporting Documentation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AHEAD &amp; HEA (2009) <i>Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning</i>.<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• ENQA (2015) <i>Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</i>, Standard 1.6 ‘Learning Resources and Student Support’.<sup>9</sup></li> <li>• QQI (2016) <i>Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines</i>, Section 2.5.2, ‘A Provider Ethos that Promotes Learning’ and Section 2.7, ‘Supports for Learners’.<sup>10</sup></li> </ul>

### 4.4.1 Policy Overview

DBS adopts an inclusive approach to teaching, learning and assessment to enable all learners to fully participate in its education programmes as far as practicable. The purpose of this policy is to provide assurance to potential applicants and learners with additional or specific needs (identified as Need Extra Provision, NEP) that DBS will seek to provide reasonable accommodations to support them in their application and their studies, where this is possible. DBS will provide learners with a disability or specific learning needs with the information required to enable them to seek assistance and arrange for reasonable adjustments where required and appropriate, including in assessment.

This policy details the range of learner supports available to learners enrolled on a programme in DBS. This policy applies to learners with permanent or long-term disabilities or health conditions or

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files//documents/Charter\\_4\\_Inclusive\\_Teaching\\_&\\_Learning\\_Online\\_Version.pdf](https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files//documents/Charter_4_Inclusive_Teaching_&_Learning_Online_Version.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf>

specific learning difficulties requiring facilities and/or arrangements that would enable them to participate in a programme of study and or demonstrate their ability in assessment.

This policy does not apply to learners with an illnesses or temporary injuries or conditions. These are addressed in the Personal Mitigating Circumstances Policy in Section 4.3 above. This policy is based on the principles of inclusion, accessibility and the promotion of equality along with the College commitment to compliance with legal and professional requirements. Where necessary, the College will see additional professional advice.

DBS adopts the AHEAD *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*<sup>11</sup> and reflects this in the teaching, learning and assessment practices of the College and the support services provided.

The following policy takes into consideration the legal requirement for providers of services to make reasonable adjustments for those with a disability. It is important to note the term 'reasonable' here. DBS commits to providing the resources and accommodations it deems to be reasonable. What is considered reasonable for DBS will vary according to a range of factors and will depend on the circumstances of the individual case. Any excessive cost or adaptations will be deemed unreasonable.

#### 4.4.2 Policy Statement

DBS is committed to promoting inclusion in all aspects of College life. The College supports all learners and specifically enables the participation of learners with additional or specific learning needs. Need Extra Provision (NEP) supports are provided to enable engagement in and successful completion of programmes of study, as far as is reasonably practicable and within any wider constraints laid down by QQI or other professional bodies.

In promoting inclusion, DBS:

- Encourages applications from people with additional needs.
- Seeks to provide information in suitable formats to accommodate individual needs, where possible.
- Assesses applications from those who disclose disabilities or specific learning needs, solely on the basis of their capacity to successfully meet the learning outcomes of the programme.
- Provides a learner support service and invites all applicants and learners with additional needs to contact the service to discuss how their requirements may be accommodated.

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<sup>11</sup> AHEAD & HEA (2009) *Charter for Inclusive Teaching and Learning*, AHEAD, [https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files//documents/Charter\\_4\\_Inclusive\\_Teaching\\_&\\_Learning\\_Online\\_Version.pdf](https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files//documents/Charter_4_Inclusive_Teaching_&_Learning_Online_Version.pdf)

- Provides additional support or resources at the application stage to enable the applicant to complete the application process including attending interview where applicable.
- Works towards the earliest possible assessment of needs and offers of reasonable adjustments where required.
- Makes reasonable adjustments for the provision of teaching, learning, assessment and examinations where applicable and without impacting the learning outcomes to be assessed.
- Provides learning support services for all learners.
- Promotes an inclusive environment and attitude amongst the whole College community and endeavours to provide appropriate training to staff and faculty where required.

### **Assessment of Additional Support Needs**

Any assessment of additional support needs will be based upon an appropriate report from a relevant expert such as a medical consultant or educational psychologist. Please refer to the AHEAD & Dawn Evidence of Disability Form 2018/19<sup>12</sup> for the list of suitable professionals and documentation. Note that some categories of disability require a report that is no more than 5 years old<sup>13</sup>.

All such reports must:

- Be original
- Be provided on headed paper
- Include recommendations from the relevant expert on the types of adjustments that would be required.

DBS is not qualified to determine the impact of a disability or learning need on any individual learner and therefore requires the above information. The provision of additional supports or reasonable adjustments to learners who do not provide an expert opinion may be deemed as providing an unfair advantage and therefore is not normally permitted.

The Disability and Inclusion Officer is the relevant contact for all learners wishing to discuss learner support needs. The Disability and Inclusion Officer is located in Student Services, and can be contacted at [student.services@dbs.ie](mailto:student.services@dbs.ie) . Any learner who wishes to avail of such supports is strongly

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<sup>12</sup> AHEAD & DAWN (2018), *Inclusive Learning and the Provision of Reasonable Accommodations to Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in Ireland*, AHEAD Educational Press,

<https://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/files/roadmap/Inclusive%20Learning%20and%20RA%20-%20final.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.ahead.ie/ra\\_appendix\\_evidenceofdisability](https://www.ahead.ie/ra_appendix_evidenceofdisability)

encouraged to speak in confidence with the Disability and Inclusion Officer, by appointment, at the earliest opportunity.

DBS will not discriminate against any learner who makes such a disclosure and will seek to meet all support requirements that are deemed reasonable.

Disclosure is a personal decision and it is the right of the learner not to disclose this information if they so choose. Where a learner chooses not to disclose, DBS is not liable for the provision of additional supports, and the impact this may have on learner performance in assessment cannot normally be taken into consideration retrospectively in any appeal.

Where a learner opts not to disclose their additional support requirements until they commence their studies but wish to avail of such supports, they should contact the Disability and Inclusion Officer not later than 6 weeks after the start of their programme.

If required, DBS may discuss specific access and inclusion matters with a third party in order to secure appropriate professional expertise. Discussions will not include disclosing the identity of the individual applicant or learner unless express written consent has been secured from the applicant or learner in question.

Any information relating to the specific learning difficulties, disability or health of an individual applicant or learner will be retained and shared in accordance with the consent provided and in line with Data Protection legislation.

In addition to personalised specific learner supports and reasonable accommodations, DBS Library Service provides a range of services to assist all learners in the development of study skills and examination preparation. Further information can be obtained from the Library Service or on the Library website.

#### 4.4.3 Request for Disability Supports

Each individual learner is responsible for communicating their request for additional support or reasonable adjustments in assessment.

##### **Applicants**

Normally a learner should outline their additional requirements at the admissions stage so DBS can make an early and informed decision as to whether or not the additional support requirements can reasonably be provided. The applicant will be kept informed throughout the assessment of need being completed and advised of the accommodations implemented. Applicants are reminded that admission to DBS programmes remains on academic grounds and suitability for the programme only.

However, where the accommodations required are not considered reasonable for DBS to implement, the applicant will be advised of this. Attempts will be made to ensure suitable reasonable accommodations can be implemented.

### **Existing Students**

Requests for additional supports should be made to the Disability and Inclusion Officer: [student.services@dbs.ie](mailto:student.services@dbs.ie).

Requests for additional supports or adjustments for assessments or exams must be made at least six weeks in advance of the scheduled assessment. DBS may not be able to accommodate late applications where specific arrangements and resources are required.

Enrolled learners should make their request for additional support to the Disability and Inclusion Officer and include the report of the relevant expert or specialist. The Disability and Inclusion Officer will consider the application and approve additional support and reasonable adjustments as appropriate based on the evidence submitted.

Upon confirming entitlement to additional support, the Disability and Inclusion Officer will make a note on the learner record and advise the relevant academic and support staff on a need-to-know basis.

The note on the learner record should set out the nature of the proposed supports for the duration of their programme of study with DBS or until such time as supports are not required.

All appropriate assessment arrangements should be made on an individual basis depending on the learner's abilities such as to minimise any possible advantage or disadvantage to the learner.

Arrangements put in place must be achieved in consultation with the learner. Any nominal costs incurred in regard to approved arrangements will be borne by the College.

Failure to contact the Disability and Inclusion Officer within the 6-week timeframe prior to assessments/exams may result in the required supports not being provided in a timely manner. DBS may be unable to accommodate adjustments where their requirement is not brought to the College's attention through registration through the Disability and Inclusion Officer within a timely fashion, i.e. 6 weeks prior to the assessment concerned.

DBS will ensure that all learners are informed of their right to request appropriate assessment arrangements.

#### 4.4.4 Extra Provision for Specific Disabilities and Additional Needs

Outlined below are some of the main areas where arrangements and procedures have been identified.

##### **Hearing Impairment**

The extent of the challenges faced by a learner with a hearing impairment will vary depending on the degree of impairment and also the first language of the learner.

Support arrangements should allow for appropriate means of ensuring effective communication. This may include the provision of information in written form, use of amplified sound or arrangements for seating the learner at the front of the class for example.

Within an assessment setting, arrangements may or may not be required. The assessment procedures should allow for extra time during which instructions may be given so that any misunderstandings with regard to the phrasing or vocabulary of the questions can be clarified, if necessary, via a sign language interpreter. A learner is reasonably expected to understand the technical language of the subject but not necessarily the language or phrasing of the question itself. Partially/profoundly deaf learners may lip-read or require amplified sound during the instructions being given by the invigilator in an examination. It is essential that the invigilator is aware of the need for clear speech and arrangements are made to seat a learner who lip-reads at the front of the examination room. Alternatively, any instructions may be made available in written format. Where necessary a separate room should be provided.

##### **Visual Impairment**

Arrangements for visually impaired learners will vary according to their level of vision, the subject under assessment, the nature of the programme or the assessment and the learner's chosen work methods. Accommodations made for visually impaired learners may include:

- Providing written materials in a medium appropriate to the learner's needs, for example, increased font size or audio recording.
- Avoiding the use of diagrams in questions and answers or providing a clear means of presenting these that will be visible to the learner or clearly describing them in words in a manner that will be understandable and not inhibit the learner from completing the question to their full potential.

In addition to the above, provision of a reader and scribe during assessment activities may be required and will involve the need for a separate room and invigilation, where examinations are held on-site.

### **Physical Disability**

Learners with physical disabilities may require specific supports related to the physical access of the learning environment. Additionally, consideration may need to be given to the nature and format of teaching and learning activities.

Many physically disabled learners may need use of a laptop, to use a scribe or require extra time when undertaking examinations or in-class tests. Where the assessment relates to the completion of physical activities, alternative arrangements should be made to accommodate the needs of the learner. Again, the learner should not be disadvantaged or advantaged as a result of any such accommodations.

### **Dyslexia**

Learners with dyslexia may require support relating to the format in which information is provided. This may include changing the font size and type, changing the colour of the paper or using strategies that are not text dependent.

Appropriate arrangements should be made so as to minimise the effects of dyslexia in assessment arrangements in a way that enables the learner to demonstrate attainment of minimum learning outcomes without being disadvantaged or advantaged.

NEP arrangements may differ from learner to learner and should be based on the specified recommendations of an appropriately qualified specialist's report and may include:

- Application of a spelling and grammar waiver in all assessments.
- Extra time to allow the learner to read and understand the question and to plan, structure and check the answer, or a scribe to write on behalf of the learner.
- Use of particular fonts, font size, background paper colour, use of a reader and so on.
- Opportunity for the learner to sit an exam in a separate room (where examinations are held on-site) if the extent of their anxiety in a shared environment is likely to significantly exacerbate the effects of their dyslexia and prevent them from presenting an accurate reflection of their knowledge.

### **Other Disabilities**

Learners with other disabilities will be accommodated according to their particular situation. This may require special arrangements regarding the use of electronic equipment, breaks during class time, recovery time, arrangements for self-administering medication, etc.



Learners with non-visible disabilities should have the option of taking their examinations in separate, appropriate accommodation if there is a possibility that a symptom of the illness may interrupt the examination sitting.

Where a medical recommendation is that a significant break is provided for a learner, this should be accommodated, and arrangements made for the learner to sit the examination (where examinations are held on-site) in a separate room with individual invigilation.

### **Mental Health**

Where evidence of a long-term mental health condition is provided, appropriate adjustments should be made in line with those recommendations received from the qualified specialist. This may include:

- Provision of a separate room and invigilator, where examinations are held on-site.
- Provision of additional time to complete exams or continuous assessments.

This does not apply to short-term mental health issues where the regulations relating to extenuating circumstances (PMC Policy) should be referred to.

### **4.4.5 Practical NEP Arrangements**

#### **Extra Time for Examinations and In Class Tests**

Where an expert recommendation identifies the requirement, extra time is given at a rate of 10 minutes per hour.

#### **Dedicated Rooms**

Learners granted additional time for an Assessment must attend a dedicated examination room, where examinations are held on-site. The Examinations Team will contact learners by e-mail with the room location and the dedicated room will also be shown on the examination timetable. Some learners in the dedicated examination room will be using laptops to write their examinations and so it is acceptable for a learner to bring ear plugs into the exam room where that learner is sensitive to noise.

#### **Extra Time in In-Class Tests**

Where exams are hosted on-site, learners will either sit the test in a separate room with an invigilator along with any other class members entitled to additional time, or alternatively they will be accommodated in the same room as the rest of the class and given the additional time after the other learners have left the class.

Where exams are hosted online, the additional time will be provided through the online exam platform.

To avail of the additional time for an in-class test, learners must notify the lecturer **at least 3 weeks in advance**. On the day of the class test, learners must introduce themselves to the lecturer at the start of the class test to let them know that they are to receive additional time.

### **Rest Breaks during Exams and In-Class Tests**

Where an expert recommendation identifies the requirement, extra time is allocated to the learner to be used for rest breaks at a rate of:

- 1 hour test                      10 minutes
- 90 minute test                15 minutes
- 2 hours or longer              30 minutes

Learners may choose when to take their breaks. During rest breaks learners may move around the room as they wish. Should they wish to leave the exam room to access toilet facilities or any other facilities they must be accompanied by an invigilator, where the examination is held on-site.

During rest breaks learners may not read the exam paper, read their answers or write or prepare answers.

### **Spelling and Grammar Waiver**

Learners who are entitled to a spelling and grammar waiver will be given 'S&G' stickers to stick onto their submitted work and exam papers. They will also be given an electronic version to attach to work submitted online. The onus is on the learner to ensure that they have enough stickers for all of their exams and coursework. Stickers can be collected from the Disability and Inclusion Officer at any time during working hours.

The 'S&G' sticker should be placed on either the first or second page of a piece of coursework or exam paper. The stickers will alert lecturers marking the work that they must apply the spelling and grammar waiver. Please note that lecturers double check the learner's eligibility before applying the waiver. Anyone found to be passing stickers to other learners or using stickers without permission from the Disability and Inclusion Officer will face disciplinary procedures.

### **Alternate Exam Papers Format**

Where an expert recommendation requires that a learner receive their assessment paper in a different font, with differing font sizing, on different coloured paper or with the use of a coloured overlay, learners will sit the exam/in-class test in the same exam room as the rest of the class.

Learners should make themselves known to the lecturer or invigilator at the start of the examination/ in-class test, so that the lecturer or invigilator knows who is to receive the adapted examination paper/ in-class test paper.

Where examinations are hosted on-site, learners who have been assessed as entitled to use assistive technology for assessments will have examination papers/ in-class tests provided as a Microsoft Word document on a memory stick. They will sit the exam in a dedicated examination room with up to 15 learners who are also having special assessment arrangements. An Exams Office representative will contact learners by e-mail with the room location and the dedicated room will also be shown on the exam timetable.

### **Provision of a Reader**

DBS does not at this time use text to speech technology or recordings. Where learners are entitled to use a reader for exams and in-class tests, and examinations are hosted on-site, they will be working with a human reader. The learner will be given a private room for the exam/in-class test. Present in the room will be the learner, the reader and an invigilator. Alternatively, the reader may also be the invigilator so only the learner and the reader will be present.

The reader will read the questions, as written on the exam paper, to the learner. They will not explain or paraphrase the question or give the learner any other information. The reader will read the questions in any order that the learner chooses, allowing the learner to attempt the questions in their preferred order, and can re-read the questions as often as the learner wishes. The reader can also read back the answers that the learner has written if requested by the learner.

### **Using a Reader for In-Class Tests**

Where an individual reader has been approved for use in an in-class test, learners will be accommodated in a separate room. Importantly, again the learner must make contact with the lecturer at least 3 weeks in advance to allow for the Reader arrangements to be made.

### **Provision of a Scribe**

DBS does not use text-to-speech technology nor recordings. Where a learner has been assessed as entitled to a scribe for examinations and in-class tests, and the assessments are hosted on-site, they will be working with a human scribe. The learner will be given a private room for the examination/in-class test. Present in the room will be the learner, the scribe and an invigilator. Alternatively, the scribe may also be the invigilator and so only the learner and the scribe will be present.

The scribe will transcribe the learner's dictation of answers by hand or using a computer, depending on the scribe's own preference. If separate marks are given for spelling or punctuation, these will not be credited to a learner using a scribe.

The learner will be assessed on the content of their answer only.

The scribe will not advise, explain or discuss answers with the learner. They will write the learner's answers accurately without paraphrasing the content. Scribes can, at the learner's request, read back what has been written.

Additional paper will be available for the learner to use for any rough work, for planning their answer or in case they wish to submit handwritten material in support of their answer, in addition to the work produced by the scribe.

### **Scribe for In-Class Tests**

Where a learner has been assessed as entitled to the use of a scribe, to avail of the scribe for an in-class test the learner must make contact with the lecturer to arrange this at least 3 weeks in advance. Learners will be accommodated in a separate room for the in-class test.

### **Using a Reader and a Scribe**

Where a learner has been assessed as entitled to the use of both a reader and a scribe, the same person may perform both functions. In this case present in the exam room would be the learner, the Scribe/Reader and possibly a separate invigilator.

### **Provision of a Laptop**

Where learners have been assessed as entitled to use of a laptop for exams and in-class tests, where examinations are hosted on-site, a laptop will be provided for the learner's use on the day. The learner will be given a memory stick to save their answers on and submit both the laptop and the memory stick at the end of the exam. Exam answers will be written in MS Word. It is the responsibility of the learner to be proficient in the use of the computer and the appropriate software.

Learners who use an assistive technology for exams may be given permission to use their own equipment in exams if it is not practical to transfer the technology to a College laptop.

### **Using a Laptop in Exams**

Where examinations are hosted on-site, learners will go to a dedicated exam room with other learners using laptops. The Examinations Team will contact learners by e-mail with the room location and the dedicated room will also be shown on the exam timetable.

### **Using a Laptop in In-Class Tests**

Learners will either be given the test in a separate room with an invigilator along with any other class members entitled to use a laptop or alternatively they will be accommodated in the same room as the rest of the class.

To avail of the laptop for an in-class test learners must contact the lecturer 3 weeks in advance. On the day, learners must introduce themselves to the lecturer at the start of the class to let them know that they are the learner who will be using a laptop.

### **Alternative Assessment Methodology**

Where the assessment methodology itself is deemed to be the barrier, this should be discussed between the lecturer and the Disability and Inclusion Officer. An alternative assessment methodology may be approved in such cases where it is possible to assess the attainment of learning outcomes through another means and where an unfair advantage is not being provided. DBS encourages lecturers to consider automatic use of assessment methodology that is as inclusive as possible. Where recurring barriers to assessment are identified as a result of the chosen methodology it is reasonably expected that the methodology will be revised and replaced with a more inclusive one.

#### **4.4.6 Additional Information**

The learner support page on the DBS website provides further information:

<https://students.dbs.ie/dbs-student-services/disabilities-support>

[END OF PART B SECTION 4]

AS of AQR 2023