Student Needs Analysis
ASSESSMENT
INCLUSION
UNIVERSAL DESIGN
Evidence. Inclusion. Better Learning for All.

Trinity College Dublin · Teaching and Learning · disAbility Service

Research project · 2026/27

How do disabled students experience assessment at Trinity?

Trinity's Student Needs Analysis asks where barriers arise in exams, assignments and practical assessments, and what would give students a fair opportunity to show what they have learned.

What gets in the way?

The question grew out of Trinity's work with students with ADHD. The study looks more broadly at disabled students' experiences across Schools and programmes, from preparing for an assessment to submitting their work.

Consider a timed exam. Extra time may help a student complete an answer, but an ambiguous question can still make it difficult to know what the examiner is asking. The wording of the question and the time allowed deserve separate attention.

- Which barriers do students encounter in different assessment formats?
- When an accommodation has been agreed, how consistently is it delivered?
- Where could a change to instructions, timing or format remove a barrier while preserving the learning outcome?

How the study will work

Review the records and survey disabled students

The first phase will review disability and reasonable accommodation data alongside the types of assessment used in modules and the share of the module mark each carries. A survey will ask disabled students which formats they have encountered, where difficulties arise and whether agreed supports help.

Trinity Teaching and Learning's guide groups digital assessment into 17 formats. These include written and reflective work (annotated bibliographies, blogs, essays, journals and literature reviews), collaborative and portfolio work (discussion forums, wikis and ePortfolios), practice-based work (clinical practice, fieldwork, laboratory assessments, performances and visual artefacts), and open-book assessments, oral examinations, presentations and tests or quizzes.

Explore the survey findings with students

In follow-up interviews and focus groups, disabled students will discuss the survey findings, explain why particular assessments present difficulties and suggest changes. For example, if students report difficulties with presentations, the team can ask whether the barrier lies in preparing slides, speaking to an audience or answering questions under time pressure.

Assess the proposed changes

The team will consider students' suggestions alongside input from Schools, Academic Registry and Trinity Teaching and Learning. Each proposal will be considered against the Trinity Assessment Framework, academic integrity requirements and the learning outcomes the assessment is designed to measure.

Project lead · Fionn O'Sullivan, Declan Treanor and Prof Conor Mc Guckin, School of Education

What the study will produce

Trinity commissioned this research for 2026/27. The team is seeking research ethics approval from the School of Education. The student needs analysis will bring together the records review, survey results and findings from interviews and focus groups. A dashboard will support ongoing monitoring of assessment practices and demand for reasonable accommodations.

The final report will identify the barriers students describe, the assessment formats in which they arise and the changes students believe would help. It will bring recommendations to the relevant University committees so Schools and services can decide which changes to explore within programme requirements.