

Initial teacher education

Guide for making reasonable adjustments

V1 draft

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1. Introduction

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Scotland is a programme of study completed at a higher education institution (HEI), combining taught components with assessed teaching practice.

ITE programmes are framed by the Standard for Provisional Registration, which sets out the professional knowledge, skills, and values that all student teachers must demonstrate before they can be recommended for registration with GTC Scotland.

Assessment across ITE programmes is used to support development and to determine whether the required standard has been met.

More information about assessment is set out in associated guidance [insert reference].

2. Purpose

The purpose of this guide is to support consistent, lawful and professionally robust decision-making about reasonable adjustments for student teachers undertaking ITE in Scotland.

It is intended to help HEIs distinguish clearly between adjustments to assessment methods, which may be required, and changes to competence standards, which are not permitted.

The guidance is grounded in the requirement that all student teachers must demonstrate that they meet the Standard for Provisional Registration in order to be recommended for registration with GTC Scotland. Reasonable adjustments should therefore enable student teachers to access learning, participate in assessment and demonstrate their competence without reducing, removing or altering the professional standard required.

This guide also aims to support greater clarity and consistency across ITE providers while recognising that decisions about reasonable adjustments must be made in context, taking account of the individual student teacher's circumstances, the nature of the programme, the placement setting and the need to ensure learner safety, professional conduct and public trust in teaching.

It should be used to inform discussions between HEIs, student teachers, disability services, and school placement partners where questions arise about how reasonable adjustments can be made while maintaining the integrity of the Standard for Provisional Registration.

3. The Standard for Provisional Registration: Requirements

The Equality Act 2010 defines a competence standard as, ‘an academic, medical or other standard applied for the purposes of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability.’ (Schedule 13, paragraph 4(3))⁹.

The purpose of the Standard for Provisional Registration is to secure safe, ethical, effective and inclusive teaching at the point of provisional registration. For avoidance of doubt GTC Scotland is a professional statutory and regulatory body, referred to as a PSRB in higher education contexts.

The accreditation process provides assurance that student teachers recommended to GTC Scotland for registration meet an agreed competence standard.

HEIs are required to ensure that in each individual student teacher’s case there is enough reliable evidence to show that the student teacher meets the required level of professional competence. This requires ITE providers to have deep knowledge and understanding of the Standard for Provisional Registration.

Teaching competence is integrated, contextual and judgement based. Assessment should therefore involve a holistic professional judgement, drawing on a range of evidence gathered over time. Assessors should consider whether the student teacher has demonstrated the professional values, professional commitment, knowledge and understanding and skills and abilities required by the Standard for Provisional Registration sufficiently and reliably in practice.

4. The legal context

A 2024 case, the University of Bristol v Abrahart is the leading recent higher education case on this issue. This involved a physics student with serious mental health difficulties who struggled with oral assessments and who tragically took her own life. The university knew she had been

unable to attend or speak in several oral assessments but did not put alternative assessment arrangements in place.

The court drew an important distinction between a competence standard and the method of assessment. The university argued that the oral presentation was itself a competence standard, but the case clarified that while a required level of academic or professional competence may not need to be changed, the way that competence is assessed may need to be adjusted where the assessment method places a disabled student at a substantial disadvantage.

As a result of this case the Equality and Humans Rights Commission issued advice emphasising that higher education providers should not wait for a formal diagnosis or for a student to complete disability-service processes where there is enough information to indicate disability-related disadvantage.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is anticipatory, meaning institutions should think in advance about barriers that assessment methods may create for disabled students.

The wider legal and sector guidance confirms the same principle: competence standards must be maintained, but assessment methods and related processes should be reviewed and adjusted where they place disabled students at a substantial disadvantage.

GTC Scotland has statutory functions under the Public Services Reform (GTC Scotland) Order 2011 in relation to teaching standards and teacher education. GTC Scotland accreditation of ITE aims to ensure compliance with these requirements and places trust in HEIs to undertake robust assessment and uphold teaching standards.

5. What is a reasonable adjustment

Under the Equality Act 2010, ITE providers are accountable for their acts and omissions in relation to disabled students. This responsibility spans policy, procedure, systems and practices. This Act places a legal duty on ITE providers to make reasonable adjustments in order to ensure disabled applicants and students do not experience substantial disadvantage in comparison with non-

disabled people. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is unique to the protected characteristic of disability.

This responsibility has 3 features which are set out in Advance HE's 2025 Competence Standards Guidance. In summary reasonable adjustments relate to changing how things are done, changing the built environment to avoid a substantial disadvantage and providing auxiliary aids and services.

6. Reasonableness

There are two key considerations of reasonableness which can help think through when an adjustment may be reasonable – is it possible and could it work?

Advance HE advises that a range of factors need to be considered:

- The views of the student
- The effect of the disability on the student
- The relevant interests of other people, including students
- The practicability of the adjustment
- The extent to which any adjustment could effectively overcome the substantial disadvantage facing the student
- The extent to which an alternative adjustment might more effectively overcome the disadvantage facing the student
- The total resources of the Provider
- The financial cost to the Provider
- Availability of financial or other assistance to the student
- Health and safety requirements

7. Context matters

The legal duty to make reasonable adjustments is fixed but the judgement about what is reasonable is context specific. It is for this reason that this guide does not and cannot seek to provide absolute sets of circumstances that would be assessed to constitute a reasonable adjustment or not.

The duty is anticipatory as well as individual. Providers should design inclusive systems in advance but also respond to the individual student's circumstances when a specific barrier arises.

Each provider needs to make this assessment in their unique set of circumstances as context helps determine what adjustment is reasonable. The same adjustment may be reasonable in one ITE setting but not in another, depending on the placement, timing, learner needs, supervision arrangements, safety considerations, available alternatives and whether the adjustment would actually remove the disadvantage.

Context is especially important in placement. Decisions need to account for the live classroom environment, pupil safety and wellbeing, professional conduct, relationships with learners and colleagues, and the practical realities of assessment in school settings.

Importantly context does not allow the competence standard to be lowered. Achievement of the Standard for Provisional Registration remains the required outcome. Context informs *how* the student teacher can demonstrate competence, not *whether* the competence must be demonstrated.

8. Managing Common Barriers

Providers should anticipate common barriers and design inclusive assessment practices from the outset. This can reduce the burden on individual adjustments. Common barriers may arise from the design of assessment tasks, the timing and environment of assessment, communication methods, placement arrangements, feedback processes, or the way expectations are explained. General examples include:

- Providing materials in accessible formats
- Providing clear rubrics, exemplars, timelines and opportunities to ask questions before assessment
- Using phased deadlines, planned breaks, flexible observation windows or adjusted sequencing where this does not reduce the standard.

- Offering pre-briefing, shorter or phased observations, agreed observation focus, familiarisation with the observer or opportunities to evidence competency across more than one occasion.
- Using assistive technology, captions, microphones, interpreters, written follow-up notes or agreed communication protocols.

9. Adjustments that are not allowed

Mentors should be supported through clear expectations, dedicated time, relevant training, access to ongoing professional development, and regular guidance from both schools and ITE providers.

- Exempting a student teacher from assessed teaching practice where teaching practice is required to demonstrate the Standard for Provisional Registration.
- Removing the requirement to plan, teach and assess learning, even if the format or support for planning can be adjusted.
- Allowing a student teacher to avoid all whole-class teaching as whole-class teaching is necessary evidence of competence.
- Permitting another person to carry out core teaching responsibilities on the student teacher's behalf, such as leading learning, managing the class or making professional judgements.
- Reducing expectations for safeguarding, learner wellbeing or professional conduct, as these are core professional requirements.
- Lowering expectations for classroom management, for example by accepting unsafe or persistently ineffective management where the standard requires the student teacher to organise and manage learning appropriately.
- Removing the requirement to communicate effectively with learners, colleagues or families, although the method of communication may be adjusted.
- Accepting incomplete evidence for a required area of the Standard
- Reducing expectations for subject knowledge or curriculum understanding, where these are required for safe and effective teaching.
- Ignoring serious concerns about fitness to teach, professional values or conduct on the basis that the student has a disability.

- Guaranteeing a pass or progression outcome because adjustments were in place, rather than assessing whether the standard has been met.
- Changing the competence standard itself, for example redefining what counts as sufficient professional judgement, classroom responsibility, safeguarding awareness or inclusive practice.

The boundary is that reasonable adjustments may change how a student teacher accesses learning, participates in assessment or demonstrates competence, but they must not remove, reduce or alter the competence required. The Standard for Provisional Registration remains the required outcome for all student teachers.

10. Process for deciding on a reasonable adjustment

Step 1: Identify barriers

Identify the specific point at which the student teacher may be placed at a substantial disadvantage. This should draw on disability declarations, needs assessments, previous adjustment plans, placement information, observation feedback, discussion with the student teacher and, where appropriate, advice from disability services or occupational health. Providers should not wait for a completed formal process where there is already enough information to indicate a disability-related barrier. The focus should be on the barrier created by the programme, assessment method, placement arrangement or environment, not on requiring the student teacher to prove difficulty repeatedly.

Step 2: Check whether the need relates to the competence standard – the Standard for Provisional Registration

Consider whether the issue relates to the competence that must be demonstrated, or to the way that competence is taught, supported, evidenced or assessed. If the requirement is part of the Standard for Provisional Registration, the standard itself cannot be reduced, removed or altered. If the barrier arises from the method, format, timing, communication, environment, documentation, observation arrangements or support process, the provider should consider reasonable adjustments to those aspects. This distinction should be made explicitly so that decisions are transparent and defensible.

Step 3: Agree appropriate adjustments

Agree adjustments that are likely to remove or reduce the identified disadvantage while preserving the integrity of the competence standard. Adjustments may relate to the process, environment, timing, sequencing, communication, use of assistive technology, format of evidence, preparation arrangements, feedback mechanisms or observation structure. The student teacher's views should be considered, alongside practicability, learner safety and wellbeing, placement context, available alternatives, impact on others and whether the adjustment will actually enable a reliable judgement of competence. Where there is more than one possible adjustment, the provider should consider which option is most effective and proportionate.

Step 4: Document and communicate the adjustment

Record the decision, the reason for it and how the adjustment will operate in practice. The record should make clear the barrier identified, the adjustment agreed, who is responsible for putting it in place, what information needs to be shared and when it will be reviewed. Information should be shared only with those who need it to implement the adjustment, including relevant placement colleagues where necessary. Clear documentation helps avoid inconsistent, informal or ad hoc decision-making.

Step 5: Review during the placement

Review adjustments at planned points and whenever circumstances change, particularly during placement where the classroom context, timetable, learner needs or assessment demands may shift. Review should consider whether the adjustment is being implemented, whether it is effective, whether any unintended issues have arisen and whether further or alternative adjustments are needed. If concerns about competence remain, these should be addressed through the normal assessment and support processes, with a clear distinction maintained between the effectiveness of the adjustment and the judgement about whether the student teacher has met the required standard.

11. Illustrative examples

The examples below are intended to support discussion and engagement with the principles set out in this guide. They are illustrative only and should not be applied automatically to individual student teachers or specific placement circumstances. In practice, decisions about reasonable adjustments must be made case by case, taking account of the individual student teacher's circumstances, the identified barrier, the requirements of the standard for provisional registration, the assessment or placement context, learner safety and wellbeing, and whether the proposed adjustment would effectively reduce disadvantage without lowering the Standard for Provisional Registration.

Barrier 1: Anxiety disorder affecting observed teaching

Not allowed: Fewer aspects of the standard to meet

Allowed: Observations broken into shorter segments; pre-briefing with observer

Barrier 2: Dyslexia affecting written lesson planning

Not allowed: Removal of planning requirement

Allowed: Submission in alternative formats (e.g. audio planning), use of assistive technology

Barrier 3: Hearing impairment impacting facilitation of class discussion

Not allowed: Exemption from facilitating discussion

Allowed: Use of amplification technology or interpreters; changing seating arrangements

Barrier 4: Autism affecting sensory processing in placement

Not allowed: Exempting the student teacher from working in busy classroom environments

Allowed: Adjusted seating or room positioning, advance information about routines, a quiet space for breaks, agreed communication protocols and predictable review points.

Barrier 5: ADHD affecting organisation and sequencing of placement tasks

Not allowed: Removing the requirement to plan, assess or meet placement deadlines

Allowed: Structured planning templates, checklists, staged deadlines, calendar reminders, agreed weekly planning meetings and clearer written expectations.

Barrier 6: Mental health difficulty affecting oral presentation or professional discussion

Not allowed: Removing the requirement to explain professional reasoning

Allowed: Alternative formats such as a recorded presentation, smaller assessment setting, written prompts, advance questions or phased professional discussion.

Barrier 7: Physical impairment affecting movement around the classroom

Not allowed: Removing responsibility for monitoring learning, managing the classroom or responding to learner needs.

Allowed: Adjusted room layout, accessible positioning, use of digital tools to monitor work, planned movement routes, or support with non-teaching physical tasks.

Barrier 8: Visual impairment affecting access to written materials or pupil work

Not allowed: Exempting the student teacher from assessing learner progress or engaging with learner evidence.

Allowed: Accessible formats, screen reader-compatible materials, enlarged text, digital submissions, assistive technology or additional time to review learner work.

Barrier 9: Speech, language or communication difficulty affecting classroom instruction

Not allowed: Removing the requirement to communicate effectively with learners.

Allowed: Use of communication aids, visual instructions, written reinforcement, planned routines, assistive technology, or adjusted communication methods that still allow effective teaching.

Barrier 10: Long-term health condition affecting stamina during placement

Not allowed: Removing required placement evidence or accepting insufficient teaching evidence.
Allowed: Adjusted sequencing of teaching load, planned rest breaks, phased increase in teaching responsibility, timetable adjustments and review points.

Barrier 11: Specific learning difficulty affecting reflective writing

Not allowed: Removing the requirement to reflect on practice, evaluate impact or evidence professional learning.

Allowed: Reflective audio logs, structured reflection templates, mind maps, assistive software or oral discussion supported by written notes.

Barrier 12: Anxiety affecting feedback meetings

Not allowed: Removing the requirement to engage with feedback or professional dialogue.

Allowed: Written feedback before the meeting, agreed agenda, option to bring a supporter where appropriate, processing time and a follow-up written summary.

Barrier 13: Medical appointments affecting attendance at taught sessions or placement days

Not allowed: Waiving required attendance, placement time or assessment evidence where these are necessary to meet programme and professional requirements.

Allowed: Adjusted timetable, planned absence management, catch-up materials, rescheduled assessment opportunities and placement planning that still secures required evidence.

Barrier 14: Difficulty with handwriting affecting classroom recording or board work

Not allowed: Removing the requirement to model, explain or record learning where this is necessary for effective teaching.

Allowed: Use of typed materials, visualiser, slides, tablet, pre-prepared resources, voice-to-text or alternative recording methods.

12. Summary

Reasonable adjustments are an essential part of ensuring that disabled student teachers can access ITE fairly and demonstrate their professional competence without unnecessary disadvantage. The duty to make reasonable adjustments requires providers to identify and address barriers in learning, assessment and placement processes, including where those barriers arise from the way competence is evidenced or assessed.

At the same time, reasonable adjustments must operate within the boundary of the Standard for Provisional Registration. They may change the method, timing, format, support, communication or environment through which competence is demonstrated, but they must not lower, remove or alter the professional standard itself. All student teachers recommended for registration must have demonstrated the professional knowledge, skills, values and conduct required for safe, ethical, effective and inclusive teaching.

Decisions should therefore be made through a transparent, documented and context-sensitive process, informed by the student teacher's circumstances, the identified barrier, the placement setting, learner safety and wellbeing, and the need for reliable evidence of competence. The aim is not to create exceptions to professional standards, but to ensure that assessment and placement arrangements enable fair, lawful and robust judgements about whether those standards have been met.

References

Advance HE. (2026). [*Competence standards guidance*](#).

Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2024). [*Advice note for the higher education sector from the legal case of University of Bristol v Abrahart*](#).

Equality and Human Rights Commission. (2024). [*Clarifying responsibilities around reasonable adjustments in higher education*](#).



The General Teaching Council for Scotland

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