

# Alternative Routes to Progression and Graduation for Students with Complex Disability Related Needs

## 2023/24

Version	Update and Reason	Author and Title	Date of Academic Board Approval	Effective Date	Review date
1.0	New document	Nerys Evans Registrar, Rebecca Wombwell, Deputy Registrar, Steve Short, LWB			September 2024

<b>Contents</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Institutional Duty</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Legal Context</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>RVC Context</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Alternative Routes to Progression and Graduation Process</b>	<b>3</b>

## **1. Institutional Duty**

- 1.1 The RVC has a duty to make reasonable adjustments where a student is placed at a substantial disadvantage because of their disability compared with people who do not share that disability. Whilst most reasonable adjustments are straightforward and are implemented as part of our business-as-usual processes there are an increasing number of complex cases where students present with severe allergies/disabilities/health conditions during their degree programme. These need to be appropriately considered in line with our responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments whilst ensuring that students are able to meet the competence standards of the programme. Whilst these cases are rare it is important the RVC has a clear process for managing them. This policy sets out how the RVC will implement such adjustments.

## **2. Legal context**

### **2.1 Definition of disability**

The Equality Act says that a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a long term (12 months or is expected to last for 12 months or more) and substantial adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Substantial here is defined as more than a minor or trivial adverse effect.

### **2.2 Our legal responsibilities**

The Equality Act outlines the need to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities. The duty to make reasonable adjustments comprises three requirements for higher education providers:

- Where a provision, criterion or practice puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with those who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage.
- Where a physical feature puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with people who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to avoid that disadvantage or adopt a reasonable alternative method of providing the service or exercising the function.
- Where not providing an auxiliary aid or service puts disabled students at a substantial disadvantage compared with students who are not disabled, to take reasonable steps to provide that auxiliary aid/service.

The duty to make reasonable adjustments is an anticipatory one owed to disabled people and disabled students generally.

- 2.3 If a student discloses a disability to anyone within the institution the whole institution is 'deemed to know'. It is therefore essential that staff direct students to the Advice Centre to discuss support and identify the reasonable adjustments that should be made for that student and ensure we meet our legal obligations.

## 2.4 What is a competence standard

The Equality Act defines a 'competence standard' as an academic, medical, or other standard applied for the purpose of determining whether or not a person has a particular level of competence or ability.

There is no duty to make reasonable adjustments to the application of a competence standard, however, such a duty does apply to the process by which competence is assessed. Therefore, although the RVC has no duty to alter a competence standard, it needs to consider whether a reasonable adjustment could be made to some aspect of the process by which it assesses a competence standard.

## 3. RVC Context

### 3.1 RVC students are given multiple opportunities to disclose a disability. These include:

- on application to the RVC
- during the Occupational Health clearance process
- during the AHEMS/EMS and Rotation administrative processes

Students are encouraged to disclose a disability at the admissions stage so that the RVC can prepare and assess the relevant support appropriate to the student in advance of commencing their course. An Occupational Health referral may be part of the admissions process depending on the declaration received (please see the Admissions Policy and Process for further information).

Students who disclose a disability once enrolled are directed to the Disability Adviser in the Advice Centre to discuss and agree the reasonable adjustments that they will need. Most reasonable adjustments are straightforward and are routinely implemented for students as part of our business-as-usual practices. Where additional expertise is required to identify reasonable adjustments in the clinical environment students may be referred to Occupational Health and/or Health and Safety for further assessment. Senior Tutors and Advice Centre staff routinely meet with students to discuss reasonable adjustments in the clinical environment through business as usual and the SPD process.

### 3.2 Practices assessed in OSCEs may well be a competence standard that is not subject to reasonable adjustment, however reasonable adjustments may be made to the way those standards are assessed.

## 4. Alternative Routes to Progression and Graduation Process

### 4.1 All Programmes are included in this process.

### 4.2 Support can only be given to students who disclose a disability. Reasonable adjustments for support cannot be given to students who do not disclose a disability, or that their disability has worsened.

### 4.3 Step by step process:

**Step 1:** Advice Centre to refer student for an Occupational Health assessment, if one has not already been conducted.

**Step 2:** Deputy Director of Learning and Wellbeing (or nominee) to convene a case review meeting between relevant parties. These meetings may include:

- Registry
- Appropriate senior member of the rotations or clinical team
- Learning and Wellbeing
- Senior Tutor

The review meeting will consider the student's disability/health condition, existing medical evidence, occupational health reports, competence standards of the programme, and provisional recommendations from support and academic staff. Other factors, including those as set on in 7.61 of the [Equality Act 2010](#) will also be considered.

Cases will be considered on a 'case by case' basis.

The review meeting will consider any reasonable adjustment which can be made.

Recommendations on any proposed assessment programme will be made, ensuring compliance with the RCVS Competency standards.

Possible recommendations for alternative routes to progression/ graduation may include (not an exhaustive list):

- To eliminate risk of exposure and manage the assessment by alternative routes
- Use of digital/ online materials for student to assess
- Use of manikins
- Consider assessment of other elements that would still result in achieving a specific learning outcome which would still meet the RCVS competency standards.

**Step 3:** Course Director and relevant Vice Principal(s) sign off on the recommendation.

**Step 4:** Once approved, the proposal would be communicated to the student along with an agreed period of time for them to accept.

**Step 5:** The final decision and copy of the decision letter will be placed on the students file on SITS.

- 4.4 Where reasonable adjustments cannot be identified, the student will be informed and supported to withdraw from the programme. If the student does not accept the proposal, the student can follow the [RVC Student Appeals Procedure](#). The student may be expected to withdraw from the programme. The student may potentially exit with an exit award if they had met the requirements.
- 4.5 If a student has not declared a precondition, but documentary evidence provided informs that it was known and should have been declared, the RVC will consider withdrawal/ exit regulations and the student may be removed from the programme.
- 4.6 A proportion of students present with manageable allergies to animals often through the use of medication or PPE etc. These students will continue to be managed under the reasonable adjustments process.