

Student Disability Policy

Policy Statement

The Gaiety School of Acting strives to be an equal opportunities institution and welcomes applications from students with disabilities. The School is committed to ensuring that students with disabilities have full access to the education and services within the School. All teaching and other staff have an obligation to ensure that the learning environment is accessible to students who have registered with the college as students with a disability. Your supports will not be based on self identification of verified disability. The Programme Co-ordinator is responsible for coordinating services and provision for students with disabilities in the School. The Programme Coordinator is a member of the Programme Board and Academic Council as such has a decision making role in policy making. In addition, the Programme Co-ordinator is responsible for admissions and coordination of the full time actor training programme on a day to day basis. In this way, they are keenly placed to effect change and respond to service requests.

The GSA Student Disability Policy intends to support students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties to deal with the impact of their disability in the school and to reach the standards of the course. The policy intends to improve inclusive practices and will clearly outline an implementation plan which states targets in terms of numbers of students with disabilities and the provision of disability support services.

Legal Compliance

The Gaiety School of Acting Student Disability Policy is compliant with legislation relating to equality for people with disabilities. Legislation has been enacted in Ireland to ensure that people with disabilities have a statutory right of equal access to the same services, building and information as other citizens. The following legislation has requirements in relation to the education and employment of people with disabilities:

- The Employment Equality Act 1998
- The Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004
- The Disability Act 2005

The Employment Equality Act 1998 (EEA) has significant implications for both providers and recipients of education. The EEA prohibits discrimination on nine distinct grounds:

1. Gender
2. Marital Status
3. Family Status

4. Sexual Orientation
5. Religion
6. Age
7. Disability
8. Race
9. Membership of the Traveller Community

The definition also provides protection for people with a history of a disability. Under the Act, discrimination is described as '*the treatment of a person in a less favourable way than another person is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation on any of the nine grounds'*

There are different types of discrimination, direct, indirect and discrimination by imputation or association. Once a person has been brought within the grounds, the legislation then prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of their disability. Direct discrimination means treating a person with a disability less favourably than a person without a disability under the same circumstances. Indirect discrimination occurs when there is an impact or effect of practices or requirements which a person cannot satisfy because of their membership of one of the nine groups. Discrimination by association occurs when a person is treated less favourably because of their association with another person.

The Act places an onus on providers of goods and services to make such reasonable changes so as to enable people with disabilities to avail of services which, without such changes, would be difficult or impossible for them to access.

The Equal Status Act 2000 extended the legislation to explicitly cover educational establishments and defines direct discrimination as treating one person less favourably than any of the nine discriminatory grounds including disability. Educational establishments are prohibited, under the Act from directly or indirectly discriminating against people with disabilities in relation to:

- Admission
- Terms or conditions of admission
- Access to any course
- Access to any benefits or facility provided
- Expulsion of a student or any other sanction against a student

In 2004, the Equality Act made amendments to the 1998 EEA, placing a higher burden on employers to provide facilities for workers with disabilities. An employer could only now refuse to provide facilities for

disabled workers if doing so would involve a 'disproportionate burden'. Establishing what a 'disproportionate burden' is, might involve examining:

- The financial and other costs entailed
- The scale and financial resources of the employer's business
- The possibility of obtaining public funding or other assistance

It has been established within the sector that a reasonable accommodation 'is any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage'.

The Disability Act 2005 is part of a framework of the Government's National Disability Strategy steps to improve the participation of people with disabilities in everyday life. The Act places a number of statutory obligations on public bodies (which includes Higher Education Institutions) to:

- Make public buildings accessible to people with disabilities
- Make public services and information accessible to people with disabilities
- Be pro-active in employing people with disabilities

It also provides for:

- Individual assessment of need and related 'service statements'
- Sectoral plans in key services areas
- Restrictions on genetic testing
- The establishment of a Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

The definition of disability used in the Disability Act is quite restrictive:

"disability", in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment'

In other words, a person must have a significant ongoing difficulty in the area of communication, learning or mobility.

Definition of Disability

For the purposes of this policy, the Gaiety School of Acting uses the definition of disability as defined by the Equal Status Act 2000 which defines direct discrimination as treating one person less favourably than any of the nine discriminatory grounds including disability. Educational establishments are prohibited, under the Act from directly or indirectly discriminating against people with disabilities in relation to:

- Admission
- Terms or conditions of admission
- Access to any course
- Access to any benefits or facility provided
- Expulsion of a student or any other sanction against a student

What kinds of disabilities are considered?

Students with a wide range of disabilities including students who:

- Have physical and mobility disabilities
- Are blind or vision impaired
- Are deaf or hard of hearing
- Have significant ongoing health issues
- Experience significant mental health difficulties
- Have specific learning disabilities or dyslexia
- Have disabilities such as ADD, ADHD or Aspergers' Syndrome

Disclosure

The School encourages students to disclose their disability through a clear and accessible admissions policy that ensures that students are clear on the routes available and the supports available in the School.

Disclosure by a student of a disability leads to support and enables the School to anticipate the support and accommodation requirements of the student. All staff are trained to ensure that the admissions process does not discriminate, directly or indirectly, against applicants with disabilities through an ongoing training and development programme.

Admission Arrangements for Students with Disability

The HEA National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2008 – 2013 aims to broaden entry routes to higher education so that students with disabilities account for 30% of all entrants by 2013. In 2010, students with disabilities made up 8% of entrants which is comparable to the 9% of all entrants to higher education currently. The Gaiety School of Acting has a proactive recruitment strategy to target prospective students with disabilities in line with the HEA plan.

Pre-Entry

Pre-entry can be described as the phase when institutions begin to liaise with groups of potential students. The aim of pre-entry activities is to identify groups of potential students and encourage them to consider third level options. Pre-entry activities at the Gaiety School of Acting include:

- Clear, accessible information on the practicalities of applying to college and on the types of supports that are available through

promotional materials, school prospectus, school website, school syllabus and admission procedures.

- Open Days
- School Visits to secondary school which includes a prospectus and information pack being sent to these schools followed by visits from the Programme Coordinator. It is possible to receive a list of secondary schools with high numbers of students with disabilities from the Department of Education and Science.
- Orientation Visits for students who have indicated on their application forms they have disabilities before the beginning of the academic year

In order to ensure pre-entry activities are successful the following are some of the actions that should be taken (as recommended by the Action on Access, Guidelines for Admissions, 2007):

- Availability of printed information in alternative formats
- Availability of disability aware staff
- Evaluation of events
- Accessibility of premises for wheelchair users and people with mobility difficulties
- Signage around the school facilities

Admissions Arrangements

The admission arrangements of the Gaiety School of Acting for the full time course is by direct entry by submission of an application form and a portfolio. Applicants are auditioned – this involves a presentation of two contrasting monologues and an interview. Students also attend a group workshop to assess their ensemble skills. Applicants may be called back for a second group workshop.

The BA (Hons) in Acting is a direct entry course, so applications are not made through the CAO system; therefore there is no points requirement, but the minimum entry requirements must be attained as follows: a minimum of 6 passes (grade D or higher) at Ordinary Level in Leaving Certificate. These pass subjects must include English.

All applicants with disability who have not achieved the entry requirements will be individually considered and that these candidates will have to produce a medical verification from a consultant, a reference from their school and a self statement. The admission routes for disability students take into account difficulties the student may have encountered because of their disability during second level education and the school will assess each application separately.

As part of the Gaiety School of Acting's commitment to broadening access, the School has reserved 25% of places on the first year BA in Acting course for students from non-traditional learning backgrounds,

students from a socio-economically disadvantaged background and mature students. The target for students with disabilities is 10%.

The Gaiety School of Acting requires that all prospective students meet the essential requirements for the course which means that they have achieved a minimum of a D in pass English in the Leaving Cert or equivalent.

The School is committed to ensuring that enrolment, registration and induction of new students should accommodate the needs of people with disabilities and in particular that open days, student orientation and induction activities should be carried out in accessible locations.

Evidence of Disability

There is a Supplementary Admissions process in place which will be assessed individually. Students with disabilities who do not reach the entry requirements will be interviewed and may need a statement from a medical consultant, a self statement and a reference from their school. The Supplementary Admission Form asks students to provide medical verification of their disability as it helps to identify the appropriate supports at the GSA.

Students who are eligible and have met the entry criteria need to produce evidence of disability from their consultant if they are going to get supports or accommodations.

For verification of disabilities which professionals/specialists are deemed acceptable?

Types of disability	Accepted
Blind / Vision impaired	Ophthalmologist
Deaf / hard of hearing	Audiologist, ENT Consultant
Physical / Mobility Disability	Orthopaedic Consultant, Neurologist
Mental health condition	Psychiatrist
Dyslexia / specific learning disability	Educational Psychologist
ADD / ADHD & Asperger's Syndrome	Psychiatrist
Head/Traumatic Brain Injury	Consultant physicians, neurologists, neuropsychologists
Other disabilities	Relevant medical consultant / specialist

Assessment of Documentation for Supplementary Admission

Disability documentation is assessed to determine if students are eligible or ineligible for consideration under the supplementary admission route. These procedures are used where students come in under the requirements only.

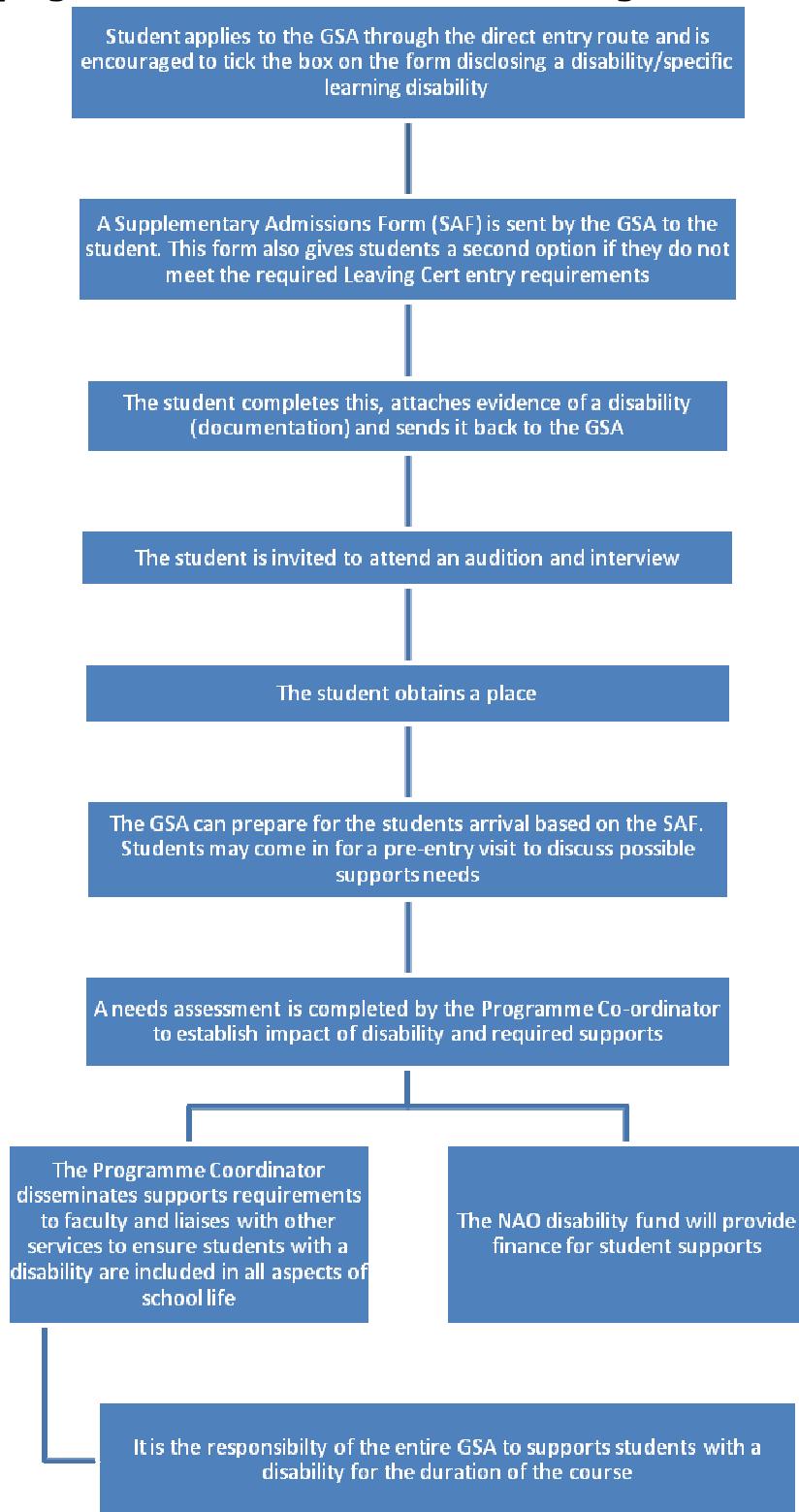
Eligible:

- Eligibility is based on the completion of the **Medical Evidence Form** by a relevant specialist or consultant (see above)
- Personal Statement completed
- Second Level Academic reference completed
- All of the above documentation is assessed to determine if there is a significant level of educational disadvantage

Ineligible:

- Medical evidence from a relevant specialist or consultant stating the student has not been, nor will be, negatively impacted
- Evidence from a G.P is not sufficient
- No medical evidence provided
- Application form is incomplete
- Assessment of all the above documentation did not determine a significant level of educational disadvantage

The following flow chart outlines the steps for students applying to the GSA in the transfer to higher education.



Confidentiality

- With the student's explicit written permission, disability-related information will be shared among appropriate staff, but only at a level of detail necessary to ensure the student's requirements are met.
- We will develop a policy on confidentiality and disclosure of information which will protect students' privacy and permit disclosure necessary for the provision of effective support and/or to ensure health and safety.

Supports Services

Designated Disability Officer

The Programme Coordinator is the designated person who has responsibility for students with disabilities. The Coordinator is the first point of call for staff and students and can play an important role as a force for change within the organisation.

Responsibilities include:

- Delivery of support services to staff and students
- Supporting the college in the development of policies and guidelines in relation to students with disabilities
- Organisation and implementation of needs assessments
- Addressing staff training and development needs in relation to disability awareness
- Production of promotional materials and guidelines for staff
- Encourage students with disabilities to act as mentors to new students and represent the services offered on the programme at talks and seminars
- Make drop-in times available to students
- Maintain contact with students using e-mail or text messaging

Staff Support

The Programme Coordinator plays a key role in advising and supporting staff in their work with students with disabilities acting as an internal consultant within the School to academic and administrative staff.

Supports include:

- Disability awareness training and seminars
- Liaison between students and staff
- Dissemination of relevant information in relation to students support requirements
- Development of training manuals and guidelines for staff
- Guidance on inclusive teaching strategies and reasonable accommodations

- Advice on alternative forms of assessment and examination
- Assistive technology demonstrations
- Guidance on access issues
- Provision of a private space for conducting student interviews

Assessment of Student Needs

A needs assessment can be described as a systematic process for the collection of information and data upon which to base an accurate description of the strengths and learning needs of a particular individual. The needs assessment forms the basis of planning the provision of reasonable accommodations and supports for students.

Stages in the Assessment Process for Students:

1. Student registers with the Programme Coordinator and provides documentation
2. Assessment Interview to identify needs and steps to reduce impact
3. Action plan produced and disseminated to relevant staff and review date set

Delivering a Needs Assessment

1. Identification of course demands; what are the skills and competencies needed?
2. Identification of student needs: what supports or accommodations are required?
3. A statement of needs or an assessment report, outlining the accommodations needed by a student

How are the support requirements disseminated?

The Programme Coordinator will prepare an individual summary of the student support requirements. This information is passed to the teaching and administration staff by letter if they are involved in its implementation. Students are also encouraged to inform teaching staff themselves if they feel comfortable to do so.

Key Supports available to students:

The key supports and good practices that are available in the school can be categorised into three key areas:

- 1. Learning Support**
- 2. Accessible Curriculum**
- 3. Assistive Technology**
- 4. Examination and Assessment accommodation**
- 5. Physical Learning Environment**
- 6. Careers Services**

All staff personnel have a role to play in supporting students, including those with disabilities. Staff will be trained to be aware of how they can play a role in supporting students in their teaching practice.

1. Learning Support

The aim of learning support is to assist students with any difficulties they may encounter in the learning environment due to the impact of their particular disability. Learning support is about improving students underlying learning skills and equipping them with the learning strategies they need to assist them through their course of study. It focuses on the development of the sort of problem solving, organisational and study skills that all students need, particularly in the first year of college.

The Gaiety School of Acting will offer a study skills module to all students on the programme which will cover:

- Study Skills
- Learning Styles
- Note taking techniques
- Memory Strategies
- Mind Mapping
- Research Skills
- Essay Writing
- Task Analysis
- Project Planning and Report Writing
- Grammar and Punctuation
- Referencing
- Revision Techniques and Examination Strategies
- Time Management
- Organisational Skills and Goal Setting
- Problem Solving Skills and Analytical Thinking

Learning support can also include self-help strategies such as:

- Stress Management
- Relaxation Techniques
- Improving Concentration
- Motivation
- Referral to Counselling

The goal of learning support is that students become independent learners. The first year is crucial in the development of learning strategies and techniques that will benefit all students throughout their course.

The Gaiety School of Acting has traditionally provided individual tutorial sessions to support students with learning difficulties. This will continue as part of the overall student support services.

2. Accessible Curriculum

There has been a growth in the number of students participating in third level education. The GSA is committed to ensuring that accessibility and inclusive practices become embedded into the delivery of courses to all students in line with the requirements of the Disability Act 2005.

The GSA is committed to training, advising and guiding staff in the range of accommodations that can be made to ensure curriculum is accessible.

How to support new students?

The Gaiety School of Acting is committed to supporting new learners through the following actions:

- Orientation visits
- Course induction
- Readings lists and course syllabi made available as early as possible
- Identify student needs as early as possible
- Ensure students are aware of the supports available

3. Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) refers to any item or piece of equipment that can be used to increase a person's independence and make the environment more accessible. Assistive technology does not replace teaching support but rather complements it by providing students with tools which enable them to perform tasks more easily.

The Gaiety School of Acting will endeavour to provide appropriate assistive technology for students with disabilities. Examples of assistive technology include adapted workstations in the computer laboratory; mind mapping software such as Inspiration; screen magnification software such as Zoom Text Extra; alternative keyboards; voice recognition systems such as Dragon; and reading and writing software such as Text Help Read.

Lo tech solutions also include handheld magnifiers; tape recorders and Dictaphones; diaries and personal organisers; calculators; antiglare screens and highlighting and colour coding.

How are students assistive technology needs assessed?

- Assessment will be carried out based on the specific needs of the course which will cover:
 - a) A functional assessment of AT requirements
 - b) An assessment of students IT literacy
 - c) An interview with the student
 - d) A self assessment by the student
 - e) A review of any existing assessment reports
 - f) Production of an assessment report or statement of AT needs
- Any difficulties being experienced will be identified.
- Knowledge gaps will be identified and skills upgraded to the required standard
- Review of the current resources available
- Identify what resources need to be put in place
- Ensure that these resources are delivered as soon as possible

What is the student's role?

- Actively participate in their needs assessment
- Avail of and attend relevant training
- Care for and return equipment
- Provide feedback to staff on any problems being experienced so that they can be addressed
- Participate in the development of strategies to resolve such difficulties

4. Examinations and Assessment

Assessments and Examinations are stressful events as their results can have a significant impact on a student's future direction. Some students, for example, may be unable to demonstrate their ability through conventional methods of assessment and reasonable accommodation will need to be made.

The Gaiety School of Acting adopts an inclusive practice of offering alternative means of assessing and examining students' work against the objectives of the course so as to minimise the impact of disability on their performance.

Creating Alternative Assessment and Examination Strategies

- Identify areas for accommodation through a needs assessment
- The findings of the needs assessment should be communicated in writing to the appropriate teachers, assessors and Board of Examiners and to the learner concerned
- Plan the assessment process in advance

- Provide students with a description of the assessment practice so that they know what is expected of them
- Inform students of the total marks attached to the course and how they are allocated

The B.A. in Acting programme already demonstrates best practice in flexible learning and embeds naturally many of the recommended alternative forms of assessment due to the practical nature of the programme. These include:

- Continuous assessment
- Multiple choice texts
- Journals or learning logs
- Practical projects
- Class presentations
- Research Projects

Other accommodations may be appropriate including:

- Time extensions
- Provision of an alternative task or assignment rather than a set examination

5. Physical Learning Environment

The physical environment can present many challenges to students with disabilities. The Gaiety School of Acting is located in purpose built premises in Sycamore Street and access to the building is limited due to a stairs for those with mobility difficulties. The school will be moving to new premises at Smock Alley Theatre and the building will adhere to the Universal Design Principles. The architects involved in the project will design the building to ensure that it is accessible to all users including the classrooms.

6. Careers Services

Research has consistently shown that graduates with disabilities are much more likely to be unemployed than their non-disabled counterparts (Get Ahead). Career services play a key role in fulfilling in supporting students with disabilities to access the labour market and will liaise with the AHEAD Willing able Mentoring Programme to establish internships for graduates where appropriate..

Career guidance for students is scheduled in semester three of the current two year full time programme to ensure they are aware of the opportunities available to them upon graduation in terms of postgraduate studies and career pathways. These opportunities will be included in the brochure and course information on our website available to applicants to the programme.

The school has always provided career guidance in an informal manner to graduates through mentoring, provision of rehearsal space free of charge for the development of projects, audition coaching, informal discussions, access to IT and printing facilities and advice. These supports will now be provided on a planned basis through the following:

- Basic careers advice and information on postgraduate courses, job search techniques, and the completion of application forms, covering letters and CV's
- Mock interviews, advice and guidance on disclosure of a disability
- Individual personal development planning and goal setting, aptitude
- Advice on current employment legislation
- Graduation Showcase and Play for industry

Graduate Supports include:

- Written communications to graduates through a bi-monthly newsletter
- GSA Graduate Network LinkedIn Group
- Discounts for Further Study
- Free Reference Access to GSA Journal Library
- Careers Support for Recent Graduates

Our staff are working professionals as well as academics so are in touch with the labour market trends and developments as well as employment opportunities so as to maximise benefits for students.

The school will carry out a graduate survey to record employment and progression of students periodically.

References:

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- AHEAD (2001) Examination Arrangements for Students with Disabilities. A guide for institutions of higher education.
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