Advice to school counsellors, Year advisers, career advisers, STLA/support teachers and school staff responsible for submitting applications for disability provisions for the HSC examinations
What are Disability Provisions?

Disability provisions provide students who have special needs with practical support in the Higher School Certificate examinations. Students’ special examination needs may include learning, medical, vision or hearing difficulties.

Examples of provisions available include: braille or large-print papers, use of a writer and/or reader, use of an oral interpreter, extension of test time, rest breaks, separate examination supervision and permission to take medication.

For more information, refer to Section 10 of the Assessment, Certification and Examination (ACE) Manual which can be downloaded from the Board’s website at http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/manuals/acemanual.html

Schools’ responsibilities under the Disabilities Discrimination Act

All schools must be sure that students with disabilities, including learning difficulties, are able to access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. Schools should assess and accommodate their students’ disability provisions needs, and, when necessary, submit applications for the HSC examinations on their behalf.

The Disability Standards for Education, issued under the Commonwealth Disabilities Discrimination Act, outline the obligations of education and training providers. There is a link to the Standards on the Board’s website.

Identifying students who may be eligible for disability provisions

Many of the students who are eligible for disability provisions will already be known to school staff through ongoing support programs and discussions with parents. However, some students, particularly those with a learning difficulty, might not always be easily identified. A student’s results in the school-administered spelling (South Australian Spelling Test), reading (Neale or Woodcock) and timed writing (words per minute) tests should give schools an indication of whether a student could apply for disability provisions. This functional evidence can then be submitted with the application.

Disability provisions for school-based assessment tasks

Schools are responsible for determining and approving disability provisions for all school-based assessment tasks. The Board only determines disability provisions for the Higher School Certificate examinations.

Students and parents should be advised that there is no guarantee the Board will grant the same provisions as those given at school.

Schools must consider their disability program carefully. Not offering provisions that students are likely to be granted for the HSC could be discriminatory under the Act. Allowing students provisions they are unlikely to be approved for the HSC may unfairly raise expectations.

For more information, see Sections 10.1 and 10.3 of the Assessment, Certification and Examination (ACE) Manual.

Applying for disability provisions

The Disability Provisions online application form is available to schools from Schools Online for students in Year 12 who intend to sit for the Higher School Certificate examinations in that year.

On Schools Online select Disability Provisions under the heading Data Collection. Click the How to Apply Online document for further information.

An ID and PIN/Password is needed for Schools Online:
- if you are a principal call Records and Strategic Business Systems Branch on (02) 9367 8275.
- if you are a staff member your principal can set up an account for you using Schools Online.

Most schools nominate a Disability Provisions Coordinator. Often this is the Year adviser, school counsellor or support teacher but it could be another teacher nominated by the principal.

All applications for disability provisions must be submitted and processed electronically. Please refer to the document ‘How to Apply Online for Disability Provisions’ under Download Memos and Documents on Schools Online.
How to apply for disability provisions for the HSC examinations

Student/parent identifies possible need for disability provisions

School discusses disability provisions application process and eligibility requirements with student

All applications must be processed and submitted electronically through Schools Online. Schools must:
- complete student details
- indicate provisions sought

Medical, hearing or vision conditions
- collect supporting documents, e.g., medical reports that confirm diagnosis of a particular condition; hearing and vision tests; timed essays

NB: Supporting documentation should be less than 12 months old except where an existing medical condition/diagnosis will not change with time, e.g., permanent vision loss, diabetes.

Learning difficulty
- conduct and record results of standardised reading and spelling tests; supply timed essays

Timed essays must be extended responses from an examination/assessment. Schools may find it useful to keep copies of students' Year 11 end-of-year English examinations for this purpose.

Neale, Woodcock reading tests; South Australian Spelling Test

Phone Student Support Services Branch* for late injury or illness applications immediately before and during the examination period.

The school submits the application electronically through Schools Online.

Principal receives decision letter electronically through Schools Online listing the provisions granted and declined, with student copy.

Schools may appeal the Board’s decision by submitting new/further evidence through Schools Online. Appeals are reviewed by an independent specialist and a decision letter is provided electronically through Schools Online for both the principal and student.

Applications for students with known/existing conditions should be submitted by the end of Term 1.

Appeals should be submitted within 14 days of receipt of BOS decision letter.

* Student Support Services Branch
T: (02) 9367 8325 or 9367 8117  F: (02) 9367 8087  E: studentsupport@bos.nsw.edu.au

NB: Provisions may be sought in multiple categories
Applications for known cases must be submitted by the due date. This allows time for the application to be processed and gives students a reasonable length of time to practise with their provisions before the HSC.

The due date is always the last day of Term 1, except for applications based on chronic fatigue syndrome, post-viral syndrome, Ross River fever or glandular fever. These should be submitted in July of the examination year, with teacher comments and medical documentation also dated July. Provisions for emergencies (e.g., a broken arm) may be sought up to the day of the examination.

If all the necessary information is not provided, some requested provisions may be declined due to insufficient evidence.

**Providing evidence to support an application**

All applications must include teacher comments which indicate how the provision requested will actually address the difficulty a student has in reading and/or responding to the examination paper. Then, depending on the category of disability, other evidence required is usually one of, or a combination of, the following:

- results of school-administered tests for reading and spelling. The school counsellor or STL/STLA/support teacher is able to administer these tests
- timed essays/extended response (at least one of which must be an assessment task)
- report from GP or other health professional
- vision or hearing test.

The evidence should be less than 12 months old at the commencement of the test/exams.

**Discussing applications with students and parents**

It’s important to discuss each student’s disability provisions application with the student and to advise their parents. However, the application must be submitted electronically by the school, through Schools Online, as it requires specific information about the difficulties the student experiences in class or examinations.

**Use of a computer in the HSC examinations**

The HSC is a timed, hand-written examination so the use of a computer is granted only under very stringent conditions where there is no appropriate alternative provision.

Some students, even those with hand injuries, can type at a much faster rate than most students can write. Allowing these students to use a computer would give an unfair advantage. Instead, students are generally offered either regular short rest breaks or the option of dictating their answers to a writer.
Support for schools

The Board’s Student Support Services Branch can provide detailed advice to schools that would like further information on the disability provisions program or assistance completing an application.

Frequently Asked Questions

The parents of a Year 11 student at my school are insisting their daughter needs to use a computer to complete her school examinations but I’m not sure she will be granted this provision for the HSC. Can the Board advise whether the student should be allowed to use a computer?

Schools are required to determine the disability provisions that will be allowed in school-based examinations. The Board only determines disability provisions for the Higher School Certificate examinations. Students and parents should be advised that there is no guarantee the Board will grant the same provisions as those given at school.

One of the Year 12 students at my school injured their back in a car accident at the start of the year. I’m not sure if they will still need disability provisions by the time the HSC exams start but I don’t want them to miss out.

Hold the application until July and then send updated medical and teacher comments. As the student’s condition may improve with time it’s important that provisions are based on the student’s needs during the examination period and not their condition earlier in the year.

A student has supplied me with a copy of a recent medical report. Do I still need to ask the doctor to fill out the medical provisions page in the application form?

No. Medical reports don’t have to be on the Board’s form, but they must provide similar information to what is requested on the Board’s form. This helps the Board to determine what provisions are most appropriate and allows consistent application of the guidelines.

I have a student who suffers from frequent, debilitating migraines, resulting in him missing a lot of school and often impairing his examination performance. What disability provisions can he apply for?

Where a student has a condition that may or may not occur during an examination, such as migraines or asthma, the occurrence of an episode during an examination is covered by illness/misadventure appeals, not disability provisions. Also, disability provisions cannot compensate students for difficulties in undertaking a course or for lost preparation time. However, if there are identifiable factors known to contribute to or trigger a particular condition, an application can be submitted on this basis; for example, separate supervision in a room with natural light if bright lighting frequently results in a migraine. Contact the Student Support Services Branch for further advice.
**Case Studies**

**Learning difficulty**

Year 12 teacher comments on Alex’s application indicate he struggles to understand new concepts in class, needing extra time to process his thoughts and answers. His bookwork suggests he has trouble organising and planning his work and he often becomes overwhelmed by the ‘rushed’ feeling he experiences during examinations.

Alex has difficulty with the questions in examinations, taking longer to read material than the rest of the class. He often responds well orally in class but has trouble writing his responses down. Alex’s school has provided reading test results which show his reading comprehension is well below his peers, and two timed essays (at least one of which is an assessment task), which demonstrate that his writing ability is outside the typical range for his age group.

**Provisions approved**

- Separate supervision, reader, extra time (at the rate of five minutes per half hour of examination time), writer (at the rate of five minutes per half hour of examination time to allow for the dictation process) OR extra time to write (at the rate of two and a half minutes per half hour of examination time).

**Asperger’s syndrome**

Riley was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome in primary school. His teachers’ comments indicate he has difficulty concentrating and finds it hard to remain focused on a task. He struggles with writing extended responses and experiences anxiety in exam situations; however, on timed tasks he manages to finish his answers. A medical report from his GP confirms Riley’s diagnosis and its affect on his ability to concentrate in an exam situation.

**Provisions approved**

- Exam supervision in a small group and extra time to rest (at the rate of five minutes per half hour of examination time).

**Back injury**

Isabella injured her back in a car accident in February. Her teachers report that she is experiencing pain when seated for extended periods and request extra time to rest and a padded chair/pillow. Her GP’s report confirms Isabella’s injury and indicates full recovery is expected within three months of injury.

Student Support Services Branch requests updated medical report be supplied closer to the examinations, in September.

The updated medical report indicates Isabella is still experiencing significant pain which affects her concentration and ability to sit for extended periods.

**Provisions approved**

- Extra time to rest (at the rate of five minutes per half hour of examination time), padded chair/pillow, seating at the back of the examination room, permission to move (eg stand up, stretch).
Psychological – depression
Comments from Rania’s Year 12 teachers indicate she often disengages during class and needs assistance to stay focused. Rania is often anxious and worried; she is frequently absent and at times lacks interest in her work. Her application includes a report from her clinical psychologist stating she has been diagnosed with depression.

Provisions approved* Small group supervision and extra time to rest (at the rate of five minutes per half hour of examination time).

Chicken pox just before the examinations
Ali contracted chicken pox just before the start of the HSC and was unable to attend his first examinations. His school telephoned the Student Support Services Branch for advice.

Provisions approved* Separate supervision or home supervision granted over the telephone, subject to receipt of a doctor’s certificate confirming the diagnosis and that he is no longer contagious. His school was also advised that if Ali’s illness affects his examination performance he may need to lodge an illness/misadventure appeal.

Cerebral palsy
Courtney has cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. Comments from her teachers indicate Courtney has extremely limited movement and uses a computer to undertake all her classwork, which is a very time-consuming process. Courtney also has severe difficulty speaking and tires quickly. Her school has supplied a medical report detailing Courtney’s diagnosis and timed typed assessment tasks.

Provisions approved* Use of a computer (student unable to dictate to writer), extra time to type (at the rate of two and a half minutes per half hour of examination time), extra time to work (at the rate of five minutes per half hour of examination time), extra time to rest (at the rate of five minutes per half hour of examination time). Given the severity of Courtney’s condition, the Student Support Services Branch will also contact the school to discuss the need for further individual arrangements.

*Provisions approved on the basis of individual evidence meeting the Board’s established guidelines.
Contact Details

Student Support Services Branch
Telephone: (02) 9367 8325
          (02) 9367 8117
Fax:      (02) 9367 8087
Email:    studentsupport@bos.nsw.edu.au

Address:
Office of the Board of Studies NSW
GPO Box 5300
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Visit the disability provisions section of the Board’s website at: www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/disability-provisions


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