

## Hints for Completing an Application for Special Examination Arrangements

The following suggestions are made to assist schools with completing an application for special examination arrangements. Applications are required for **any** candidate who needs to sit the WACE examinations under **any non-standard arrangement**. This includes access to any special equipment, seating or examination conditions, for the **practical** or **written** examination. Standard examination conditions and approved equipment are explained in the *Year 12 Information Handbook*.

### General hints

#### *Start early*

Case management is a vital part of managing the education for a student with a disability. The school, student and parents should work together to access appropriate remedial strategies while there is time for success. Year 10 is a good time to implement examination technique strategies.

Remember that not all students with a disability (past or current) will need special examination arrangements or meet the eligibility requirements for them. Make this clear to students and parents right from the start. Many schools do this in writing. It will avoid any false expectations. Do not simply replicate what has occurred in the past or accept hearsay evidence – this has been a recipe for disappointment in many cases. Assess the situation in line with current documentation and current policy, then case-manage from a point of fact. What may have been approved for a sibling or other students in the past may no longer be appropriate.

#### *Start with a diagnosis*

The diagnosis of a disability must be clear. It must be made by a person with professional credentials relevant to the disability. Where relevant, the diagnosis must meet with appropriate professional standards e.g. DSM-IV criteria. The impact of the disability in an examination situation must be clearly explained. The disability may affect only the written examination, only the practical examination, or both. Be clear about the difference between a disability (rare) and a difficulty (much more common). Students experiencing **difficulties** do not meet the eligibility criteria for special examination arrangements. Ensure the diagnosis is current. While a diagnosis is essential to enter the process, no special arrangements will be approved on the basis of diagnosis alone.

#### *Gather evidence*

Start early in organising assessments and collecting professional reports. Remember specialists do take annual leave. The Curriculum Council's decision will be made on evidence presented at the time of application. The final decision will be made by looking at the **current functional impact** of the disability on the student in an exam situation. This will include standardised testing and academic information gathered by the school (e.g. PAT-R comprehension, essays).

#### *Be realistic*

When making arrangements at school level, examine the evidence and recommendations provided by external consultants and compare it with the Curriculum Council's **special provisions policy**. If there is a discrepancy, investigate, communicate and negotiate. Remember the Council does not replicate arrangements made by a school if the student does not meet eligibility criteria. Check out the documents on the website to guide your decision-making. Few students qualify for multiple accommodations. You may need to trial a number of accommodations (commencing with the lowest level of support), then decide on which is the most reasonable for each course. Make it clear to the student that, until an arrangement has been approved by the Curriculum Council, any accommodations are interim arrangements and subject to change.

### *Check currency of evidence*

The definition of 'current' will vary with the type of disability. For example, a hand injury during Year 11 may be recovered by Year 12 so its diagnosis will no longer be current. However, a specific learning disability diagnosed in Year 10 or autism diagnosed as a child will still be current – but the information related to **functional impact** will need to be updated. Generally, functional impact evidence should be collected in the year of application. Psychometric assessments may be considered if done in the two years prior to application. If the disability results from a degenerative condition, it is in the student's best interest to ensure the medical evidence is as recent as practical, i.e. usually in the year of application. If the disability is of a variable nature, or was reported to be improving, no arrangements can be made without recent medical evidence of its severity and impact.

### *Present a complete case*

Make it easy for the assessors to say YES. Applications are made by the school, but often the evidence is held by the family. Ensure the parents have provided **all** the relevant information. Parents withholding pieces of information has been a common cause for applications to be declined when put to the Curriculum Council. Reassure parents that all information is treated with the utmost confidentiality, and is not provided to exam centres or third parties. Nothing should be held 'in reserve' – i.e. intended for use only if the first request is denied. Also be sure to present a true picture, including the strengths of the student. Candidates will not always need support in every course examination. Application forms should not be sent home to be completed.

### *Respect deadlines*

These are there for the benefit of the students. It is in your student's interest to get a decision as early as possible. However, as every application is assessed individually, this does take time. Your completed applications can be processed any time after the school has uploaded its enrolments. In 2012, this deadline is 25 May, but earlier is preferable. Applications (if complete) are processed in order of receipt, so it pays to be in the top of the stack for a prompt response. Incomplete applications cannot be assessed, so please do not send until complete. They will be returned or go to the bottom of the stack while awaiting information. The closing date for applications is stated on the application form. All applications relating to pre-existing conditions need to be submitted before that date. After this date applications are only accepted where there are extenuating circumstances, e.g. a newly diagnosed medical condition. (Failure to diagnose a learning disability until after the deadline is not generally an extenuating circumstance.) From the end of Term 3, applications can be considered **only** for emergency provisions for candidates who have been injured just before the examinations.

If the application is for extra working time or the use of a scribe or computer, you will need to request essay topics. Please ensure you allow enough time for this process, and for the student to complete the essays. You do not need to mark the essays we set. Check page 7 of the application form to confirm the requirements for the essays. Please remember to do an accurate word count for each essay.

### *Students with a long-term injury or illness preventing participation in standard practical examinations*

This situation is most likely to affect candidates of Physical Education Studies or Dance, but could potentially affect candidates of other performance-based practical examinations. If the student has an injury or illness that exists at the start of Term 3, and that illness/injury will prevent him/her taking part in the standard practical examination, an application for a special format practical examination **MUST** be submitted. This is not discretionary. These students are **not** covered under sickness/misadventure provisions. Failure to apply for a special format practical examination could jeopardise their achievement of a WACE and impact on their ATAR. Applications can be accepted up to 3 August, but earlier application should be made where the situation is known sooner e.g. for reconstructive surgery early in the year.

*Remember your diabetic students*

While not strictly having a disability, we need applications from these students so we can ensure they have access to everything they need for optimal health during the examinations. This also applies to other illnesses needing medication, or conditions needing special equipment or out-of-order seating.

*Who should complete the application form?*

Most information relates to the student's performance in an examination situation, therefore someone from the school should complete the form. The person responsible will vary from school to school, but is most often the deputy principal, Year 12 coordinator, special needs coordinator, counsellor or school psychologist. The Curriculum Council refers to this person as the **case coordinator**. While this person will coordinate the completion of the form, information may come from the English teacher (essays) and other staff as needed and also from external consultants or doctors. Where possible, enter all information directly onto the form. The student will need to independently complete his/her comment and sign the form. Ultimately the school principal is responsible for the application and will sign the declaration, but he/she may delegate this responsibility. The form should not be sent home for completion.

Only **private** candidates may submit their application direct to the Curriculum Council.

Where possible, please use the apricot coloured form distributed to schools in February. This is easier to use than other formats of the form. The application form is available on the Council's website for emergency and reference use. Please do not return the insert (pages 11, 12) when submitting an application.

*Keep a copy*

Remember to keep a copy of the completed application form and associated attachments. Applications cannot be returned or copies provided after submission.

## **Specific hints**

Complete all relevant sections for the disability type experienced by the student. Other pages can be left blank.

### *Section A – Student details*

Check student number before entry. Use only the Curriculum Council's number allocated to the student.

Mark only those courses for which special arrangements are requested. For many students this is not all that they are enrolled in.

Reason for application – more than one disability may be selected. (Indicate which one is a major disability.)

### *Section B – Provisions requested*

Select only from the section related to the student's disability type.

Ensure requested provisions meet with eligibility criteria and are supported by professional diagnoses and functional impact evidence.

If a request does not apply to all courses listed in Section A, then name the course for which it is needed.

Be discriminating when selecting provisions – this is not a 'wish list'. Read Section G on pages 11 and 12 of the form **before** selecting the provisions in Section B.

### *Section C – School case coordination*

This section is essential to build a picture of the functional impact of the disability on the student in examinations. Student's comments must be written (or dictated) by the student.

Restrict these comments to the space provided – an attachment is not required.

Council staff often need to discuss a student's needs, so case coordinator contact details will assist this to be done efficiently. A direct-line or mobile phone number is best, along with details of any restrictions to availability. Emails work well for those with restricted phone access.

Intervention history assists to strengthen the case, especially for a specific learning disability. Applications where there has been no attempt at remediation for a specific learning disability are rarely successful. It is also important to show if particular strategies were unsuccessful and why. Do not include details of meetings, or strategies used for your whole cohort. Individual education plans are not necessary, nor are school reports.

### *Section D – Supporting information*

Psychometric test results are vital for applications related to a **specific learning disability**.

**Page 5 must contain the requested information.**

Psychologist's reports are sometimes lengthy, with the important information hidden in text. Where possible keep reports succinct, as they are read by fellow psychologists. Make it easy for the assessors to approve the application by presenting the requested information where they can see it at a glance. They will of course read the report too, but the summary table will assist them to do that easily. Diagnosis of a specific learning disability cannot be made on a WISC IV/WAIS IV assessment alone. The academic skills test results, and other information is equally important. For many students, the CTOPP is vital to show the nature and level of disability. For a list of frequently provided tests, please see the end of this document.

Psychometric results are not generally necessary for students with other disabilities. If in doubt, please phone the Curriculum Council as such tests are expensive and parents do not appreciate being put to unnecessary effort or expense.

*Reading results* are important if the student is applying for extra time on the basis of a **reading disability**. The school must conduct the comprehension test of the PAT-R 4<sup>th</sup> edition (2008) and complete this section of the form. This edition has Australian norms to

Year 10 level. As the new version of this test has been in use since 2008, earlier versions are no longer accepted. This test is best administered by a teacher; it does not need a registered psychologist.

*Handwriting results* are important if the student is applying for any provision on the basis of a **handwriting disability**. This is usually completed by an occupational therapist, but in certain situations may be completed by a psychologist. Typing results are vital if the student is seeking the use of a computer. An occupational therapist's report should contain information related to diagnosing the disability and describing the functional limitations of the disability. Poor handwriting, as such, is **not** considered a disability that necessitates a personal computer and neither does a student's preference for the use of a computer.

### *Essays*

These provide a picture of the student's ability to write in a timed situation. Remember to request the topics in sufficient time to complete this requirement. Instructions are on the application form, and additional information is provided on the essay topic cover sheet. Teacher feedback recorded on the cover sheet can be very useful to the assessors. The word count, including words crossed out, must be accurate (not an estimate). For consistency, all essays will be assessed by a trained marker.

### *Section E – Medical evidence – hearing and vision provisions*

The impact of the impairment on the student in an exam situation is important. If the student's condition is particularly rare, inclusion of a fact sheet is a good idea. Remember to specify if the candidate is also seeking special arrangements for a practical examination.

### *Section E – Specialist evidence – special paper requirements*

This section is **ONLY** required for students needing modifications to the written format of any examination. This is usually students with a physical disability or vision impairment. It is usually completed by the specified specialists. For students with vision impairment this will be the visiting teacher from the Vision Education Service. Remember to specify if the candidate is also seeking special arrangements for stimulus materials used in a practical examination.

### *Section E – Medical evidence – other than vision and hearing.*

To facilitate prompt completion of the form it is often easiest to provide a medical practitioner with a **copy** of this page. Affix the completed section when it is returned. The impact of the illness on the student in an exam situation is important. If the student's condition is particularly rare, inclusion of a fact sheet is a good idea. If any prescribed drugs have side effects likely to impact on the student during the exam, this should be mentioned.

### *Section F – Student and principal declarations*

This section is essential and the form will not be processed without both signatures. (A private candidate will need only their own signature.)

If the school principal cannot approve the full application, the offending clause may be deleted and initialled or a note of explanation be attached. The Council is mindful of the need to make adequate arrangements for a student, without providing advantage.

### **What happens next?**

1. The student will receive a letter confirming that the application has been received. The student should inform the case coordinator. (If the application is incomplete, it will be returned to the school, or the case coordinator contacted. Receipt of the application will not be acknowledged until the application is complete.)
2. If essays have been submitted as part of the application, these will be sent to a specially trained assessor.
3. Applications will be sorted according to the category of disability.

4. Each application will be considered individually. (Only complete applications will be assessed. If there is missing information, the application will be returned or held until all information is received. This can cause a significant delay in receiving a decision.)
5. The student, school and examination centres will receive a letter detailing the special examination arrangements approved. If the application is declined, only the student and school will be advised.
6. If the student does not agree with the special arrangements approved, they should discuss the matter with their case coordinator. (The Council is not able to discuss details of applications with parents.)
7. If the school does not agree with the special arrangements approved, they should discuss the issue with the examination coordinator (special provisions). If there is additional evidence to support a change of arrangements, the school may request a **review** of the application. There should be a valid reason why the additional evidence was **not** presented at the time of the application. This is not an open invitation to seek additional information.
8. If the school objects to the original decision made by the assessors they may appeal the decision. The role of the independent appeals committee is to consider only cases without additional evidence or requests falling outside special provisions policy.
9. The student will sit all school-based assessments under the agreed conditions. It is essential that this occur immediately on receipt of the approval letter. Any delay in changing the conditions will cause disadvantage to the candidate.
10. Towards the end of Term 3 the student will receive a *personalised examination timetable* showing the centre at which each examination will be sat. This should be **checked carefully** on receipt. If there is any discrepancy between the centre appearing on the timetable, and that specified in the approval letter this should be discussed with the examination coordinator (special provisions) **immediately**. Changes to examination centres or conditions cannot be made after the end of Term 3. Candidates presenting at the wrong examination centre may not be able to receive their approved arrangements.
11. The WACE examination is sat under the agreed conditions. Students should present their approval letter to the supervisor at the examination centre.
12. Students should **keep** their approval letter as it may be required when enrolling at TAFE, university or for the STAT test through TISC.

## Frequently used tests

N.B. Appropriate tools should be chosen by the educational psychologist according to the student's age and weaknesses identified in prior testing. The following is a list of tests the Curriculum Council assessors often see in supporting the case for a specific learning disability.

### *Cognitive ability*

The preferred assessments are WISC IV or WAIS IV. If alternative tests are used, the results must be fully explained, and results still be recorded on the summary table of page 5. Tests should be administered according to standard guidelines. Where alternative sub-tests are used, their choice should be explained.

### *Phonological awareness:*

CTOPP (Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing)  
TOWRE (Test of Word Reading Efficiency)  
CELF-4 supplementary tests PA/RAN (Often done by a speech pathologist)

*Standardised achievement tests – in reading, written expression, spelling, handwriting, as needed.*

### Reading

TOWRE (Test of Word Reading Efficiency)  
Neale Analysis of reading ability  
GORT 4 (Gray Oral Reading Test 4)  
Woodcock Reading Mastery Tests – Revised  
WIAT II (Wechsler Individual Achievement Test 2nd Edition)

### Written Expression

OWLS (Oral and Written Language Scales)  
WIAT II

### Spelling

WIAT II  
South Australian Spelling Test (revised)  
N.B. no special examination arrangements are provided for spelling difficulties.

### Handwriting

Handwriting speed test (Wallen Bonney and Lennox) (Often done by an OT if the student also has a physical disability)