

Policy on Special Provisions for School-based Assessments in Authority and Authority-registered Subjects

January 2009

Introduction

This policy defines the responsibilities, principles and guidelines to be applied for special provisions in school-based assessments for Authority and Authority-registered subjects. It updates and replaces, and is consistent with, the previous *Policy on Special Consideration for School-based Assessments in Senior Certification* (February 2006). It specifically relates to students working towards senior certification in Authority and Authority-registered subjects.

The responsibility for making decisions about special provisions lies directly with the schools. However, this policy should serve as an appropriate guide and reference for schools in making those decisions.

“Special provisions” means making reasonable adjustments to conditions of assessment to ensure equitable opportunities for all students.¹ Special provisions may apply to any student, depending on the circumstances. In making a decision about special provisions, the school is required to consider what adjustments to assessment conditions are reasonable in the circumstances.

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) *Equity Statement* (August 2006) underpins all curriculum development and assessment in Queensland; it states that “all young people in Queensland have a right to gain an education that meets their needs and prepares them for active participation in the creation of a socially just, equitable and democratic global society”.

This policy on special provisions should be read in conjunction with the *Equity Statement* and with our policy on *Late and Non-submission of Student Responses to Assessment Instruments in Authority and Authority-registered Subjects* (January 2009).

¹ Reasonable adjustments are defined in Part 3 of the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*. See the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for a copy of the standards <www.dest.gov.au>



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Scope of application of this policy

This policy covers only school-based assessment that is quality assured by the QSA for Authority and Authority-registered subjects.

The policy therefore does not apply to the Queensland Core Skills (QCS) Test, the Senior External Examination, the scaling for Overall Positions (OPs) and Field Positions (FPs), and the Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA). Separate processes and procedures apply for these.²

Assessment that is quality assured by other jurisdictions, such as assessment for vocational education and training within the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and approved assessment by other agencies, also is not covered by this policy.³

This policy is not intended for use in situations where a critical incident (e.g. disaster, emergency, traumatic event) has significantly impacted the school community and students. In these cases, schools should contact the QSA for advice and support.

Specific educational needs

Special provisions may be particularly relevant for students with specific educational needs. These needs must be considered in a proactive way — to design inclusive learning and assessment programs, and to provide opportunities for alternative assessment arrangements.

Students with specific educational needs include but are not limited to:

- students with disabilities that have a physiological basis, such as those of a sensory, motor or neurological nature⁴
- students with educational needs arising primarily from socioeconomic, cultural and/or linguistic factors where there may be some form of educational disadvantage, such as students:
 - of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
 - with language backgrounds other than English
 - who are migrants or refugees
 - from rural and remote locations
 - in low socioeconomic circumstances
- students whose difficulties in accessing learning do not appear to be directly or primarily attributable to educational disadvantage arising from impairment, or to socioeconomic, cultural and/or linguistic factors or

² The relevant policies and procedures are detailed on the QSA website <www.qsa.qld.edu.au>.

³ See the Reasonable Adjustments in the 2007 AQTF Standards <www.training.com.au/aqtf2007>.

⁴ Disability is used here as an inclusive term, covering impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. The World Health Organization defines an impairment as a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation as a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; and a participation restriction as a problem experienced by an individual while involved in life situations. See the WHO website, accessed January 2009 <www.who.int/topics/disabilities>.

- psychological needs (e.g. students who have short-term impairments such as glandular fever, fractured limbs, etc.)
- students with identifiably different patterns of educational development and orientation, influenced by factors such as:
 - gender, for example, the inclusion of learning resources relevant to both females and males
 - special talents (including giftedness), with opportunities for extension programs to be experienced
 - life circumstances that may impact on a student's opportunity to engage in learning and be assessed fairly.

Responsibilities

Under the Australian Government's Disability Standards for Education 2005, schools are responsible for making special provisions in school-based assessments. The QSA strongly recommends that schools become familiar with these standards. Each school is responsible for designing the assessment program within the requirements of the relevant syllabus or study area specification, as well as meeting the quality assurance processes for Authority and Authority-registered subjects.⁵ However, the QSA may provide advice on special provisions to schools, based on the principles outlined in this document and the QSA's *Equity Statement*.

Principles

- Special provisions is a positive act of making reasonable adjustment to assessment requirements and conditions to ensure that assessment is equitable for all students. All students, including those with specific educational needs, should have opportunities to demonstrate their current knowledge and skills.
- Schools must strive to identify and minimise barriers that prevent students from demonstrating their current knowledge and skills. To do this, they must plan to ensure that specific educational needs are recognised and reasonable adjustments made to accommodate students. Schools must also take reasonable measures to assess students with specific educational needs so that they can participate in Authority and Authority-registered subjects on the same basis as other students.
- Reasonable adjustments for students with specific educational needs must be planned and negotiated as early as possible so that students can be provided with appropriate support in order to commence, participate and complete course of study requirements.
- Special provisions involve the application of relevant syllabus criteria and standards against which achievement is judged. Assessment criteria and standards are not modified to suit particular students. The school is required to maintain the intent and rigour of the syllabus or study area specification and any other requirements or components that are inherent

⁵ See also the section on educational equity in QSA senior syllabuses and study area specifications.

or essential to the course of study.⁶ Special provisions do not involve compensating for what the student does not know or cannot do.

- The school must consult and involve the student (and, where appropriate, the student's parents/carers or associates and other relevant school personnel) in the decision-making process concerning special provisions. The school must take into account the student's specific educational needs and balance the interests of all parties affected, including those of the student, the school, staff and other students.

Guidelines

Each case must be considered on an individual basis and decisions reached through consultation.

The principal and teachers of the school, with the advice and assistance of the QSA (if required), should:

- consult with the student and the student's parents/carers or associates regarding any preferred adjustments, any adjustments that have been provided previously and any recommended or alternative adjustments
- take into account the nature of a student's disability or the reason for the student's specific educational needs
- consider the effects of the adjustment on the student, including the effect on the student's ability to achieve the learning outcomes and to participate in courses of study, and the effect on their independence
- identify assessment instruments that may require reasonable adjustment for students with specific educational needs
- seek advice from other relevant personnel if considered necessary
- make decisions about the nature and appropriateness of the adjustments. This may include considering the costs and benefits of making the adjustment
- assess whether changes are needed to the adjustment over the period of a student's education in order to allow for the changing needs of the student over time.

Students with specific educational needs often require adjustment to the form of presentation of an assessment instrument and their response to it. The method of transmission of information about the assessment and the way a student presents evidence of their knowledge and skills may have to be adapted.

When making these adjustments, the principles and practices for high quality assessment should apply at all times.⁷

⁶ *Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia* (Council for the Australian Federation, 2007) refers to "a commitment to rigorous curriculum standards" and clause 3.4(3) of the Australian Government Disability *Standards for Education 2005* states that a school is entitled to maintain the academic requirements of the course or program and other requirements or components that are inherent in or essential to its nature.

⁷ See Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities 1995, *Guidelines for Assessment Quality and Equity* <<http://acaca.bos.nsw.edu.au/go/acaca-documents/>>.

The school should ensure that the steps taken to identify and implement special provisions maintain respect for the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of the student, their parents/carers and associates.

Reasonable educational adjustments

These involve varying the conditions under which assessment occurs in order to enable students to have opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in a course of study

Examples of reasonable adjustments include, but are not limited to:

- permitting signing instead of speaking for students with hearing impairments, and computer simulation instead of laboratory work for students with physical impairments
- allowing the use of specialised equipment to accommodate a student's disability (e.g. keyboarding rather than handwriting)
- providing a reader to communicate a text where reading is not the skill being assessed, or providing a scribe to produce an exact transcription of student responses to assessment items where a physical impairment does not permit a student to write
- providing assistance with the interpretation and comprehension of assessment items for students with language difficulties (e.g. students with language backgrounds other than English) as long as this assistance occurs for assessment items that are not designed to assess those language skills
- allowing additional time for students to complete assessable tasks (e.g. written tests or assignments) to give them the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills
- giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, migrant and refugee students the opportunity to present their cultural experiences in responses to assessment items (e.g. providing an alternative essay question, in consultation with the students, that allows them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the subject by applying it to their own cultural context).

Exemption (allowing non-completion of some particular piece of assessment)

- An exemption should only be allowed when there is sufficient alternative information to make a judgment about an exit level of achievement without the student having to complete a particular assessment instrument. For example, an exemption may be appropriate where a student has missed an assessment instrument due to illness or because of some other legitimate absence, and completing the assessment would place an unreasonable burden on the student.
- An exemption is inappropriate if it results in insufficient evidence being available to make a judgment about the student's exit level of achievement, or the student being unable to meet the mandatory requirements stated in a syllabus or study area specification.

- Exemptions should not be a substitute for schools making efforts to remove barriers to a student's access to learning and assessment opportunities. Exemption is not an option where reasonable adjustment is appropriate.

Quality assurance processes

Folios of students who have been given special provisions do not generally need to be submitted for review for the purposes of quality assurance of Authority and Authority-registered subjects. The exceptions are when these students are part of small groups for which all folios are submitted or when a particular sample student folio is required. In these cases a brief supporting statement describing the nature of reasonable adjustments can be attached to the folio to help the review panel provide appropriate advice.