



# Disability Provisions in the HSC Examinations for Students with Learning Difficulties

by

*Magda Trzeciakiewicz, SPELD NSW*

Over 5000 students in NSW apply each year to the Board of Studies Teaching and Educational Standards NSW (BOSTES) for Disability Provisions. There are four categories of disabilities - Learning Difficulties, Hearing, Medical and Vision. The Learning Disabilities provisions are to help students with reading the examination questions and communicating their written answers.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and the Disability Standards for Education (2005) schools are responsible for ensuring that all students with disabilities, including Learning Difficulties, can access and participate in education on the same level as students without disabilities. Schools must assess and accommodate the needs of these students for day-to-day class work, assignments and class tests as well as school exams, including HSC Trials. The School Principal approves this practical support and this forms the basis of evidence to support the student's request when applying for the HSC examination provisions that are granted by BOSTES.

## **Applying for disability provisions - procedures and timeframes**

A student who would like to apply for Disability Provisions should contact the Year Advisor, School Counsellor or Learning and Support Teacher to discuss the application process and eligibility requirements. Parents can help in the Disability Provisions determination by talking to the school and describing the student's needs and by providing the school with health professional reports.

The application for a student with a known existing condition must be submitted no later than the last day of Term 1 in the year of the HSC examinations. There are special conditions when late applications might be accepted especially for medical reasons. After collecting all evidence (health professional reports, functional evidence, teacher comments, student's work samples, etc.) the Year Advisor, School Counsellor or an appointed Disability Provisions Co-ordinator lodges an electronic application through *Schools Online* accompanied by the Student Declaration and Principal/Delegate Declaration. When BOSTES has made a decision on whether to approve or decline the provisions, a declaration letter is provided to the school with a copy for the student.

If a parent or school is not satisfied with BOSTES' decision it is possible to lodge an appeal which must be submitted in 14 days of receipt of the decision letter. The appeal should state why the BOSTES' decision is unsuitable and it should include additional evidence.

## **How to prepare an application?**

It is essential that the application includes a diagnosis and/or evidence that a disability exists. The application must indicate the category of provisions that the student is applying for; e.g. learning difficulties. It is important to refer to similar case studies to get an idea of appropriate provisions for the particular disability. The key part of the application is evidence that must show how a disability impacts on the student's classroom work and examination responses.



**This evidence may include:** health professional reports (in case of Learning Difficulties usual from a psychologist or speech pathologist), functional evidence (writing samples, reading and spelling test results) and teacher comments.

A psychologist's report that states 'Learning Disability', for example dyslexia, must not only indicate the disability but also describe its impact on the student's classwork and examination responses. It should state why the student needs support and how it will help them in reading exam instructions and/or writing answers. This report, with possible diagnosis and explanatory comments must be done no earlier than in Term 3 of the year prior to the HSC examination and can be submitted in writing on the BOSTES form.

In special circumstances, when a student is not able to obtain an appropriate diagnosis and report, then other detailed information will be required to determine the existence and nature of the disability.

The functional evidence provided by the School is crucial with this type of application especially the teacher's comments on how the student's condition currently affects their classwork and performance in examinations. The submission should also include a detailed explanation on why the student is unable to provide documentation and a diagnosis, and to describe the history of the student's difficulties and needs, previous diagnosis and current in-school support, and how their condition currently impacts on the student's written work.

### **Importance of functional evidence and teacher's comments**

Functional evidence and teacher comments are very important because they indicate why and how the disability (Learning Difficulty) influences the student's work. This evidence is gained by the school and might have a key role in BOSTES' decision, especially on provisions for students whose needs and disabilities vary in each particular case. For example, students might have difficulties in reading and comprehending written questions, writing (expressing thoughts in writing and/or illegible or extremely slow writing) and spelling that affects communication.

When applying for provisions for students with Learning Disabilities relative to the student's condition and provisions expected, functional evidence must include:

- Writing samples that are timed for at least 30 minutes, such as an assessment task rather than short answers or multiple choice tests.  
Provide word counts (how many words per minute),  
Provide time used and enclose the teachers' comments and observations.
- Reading tests that are current (not earlier than Term 3 of the year prior to the examinations) and provide reading age rather than raw scores, such as the YARC, Neale Analysis, and Woodcock Johnson III.
- Spelling Tests such as South Australian Spelling Test

It is strongly recommended that the teacher's comments relate directly to use of provisions at school and explain how they are helpful for the particular student in an exam situation when she or he reads and responds to questions. *BOSTES advises that words 'full potential' and irrelevant comments such as 'tries hard' are not supportive.*



## Types of provisions and case study examples

Various provisions are available to students with Learning Disabilities. Provisions requested can include the use of a writer, use of a reader, extension of test time, rest breaks, small group supervision, individual supervision (rare), and other provisions considered as appropriate in the individual cases. Extensions of examination time might be granted for different reasons, for example, as extra time for use of a reader or unassisted reading or extra time in addition to use of a reader, and extra time to write. Examples of case studies are helpful while framing the suitable provisions.

Statistics show that, in 2012, of the 8% of candidates who applied for Disability Provisions, over 50% of applications of students in all categories of disability were approved and 38.0% were approved partially while only 6.7% were declined.

<b>Case 1 Application</b>		
Learning Difficulty (reading and writing problems)	Reading Test	Extra time or reader APPROVED
	Spelling Test	Writer APPROVED
	Teacher Comments	Extra time to write DECLINED
	1 x essay (5 minutes) and 1 x short answer assessment task	Separate Supervision APPROVED
<b>Case 1 Appeal</b>		
Learning Difficulty (reading and writing problems)	1 x non-assessable essay (30 minutes) & extended response assessment task <b>ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE</b>	Extra time or reader APPROVED
		Writer APPROVED
		Extra time to write APPROVED
		Separate Supervision APPROVED
	Reading Test	Separate Supervision APPROVED
	Spelling Test	
	Teacher Comments	
1 x essay (5 minutes) and 1 x short answer assessment task		

Source: BOSTES presentation on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014



Learning difficulty				
Condition(s)	Provision(s) requested	Diagnostic evidence	Functional evidence	Provision(s) determined
<b>Dyslexia</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writer</li> <li>• Extra time to write</li> </ul>	Specialist report indicating that testing has shown that the student has dyslexia.	<p>Teacher comments stating that the student occasionally struggles with reading and spelling.</p> <p>Spelling test results.</p> <p>Two timed extended tasks handwritten by the student – at least one MUST be an extended assessment task or examination. Cover sheets completed by the school for both tasks.</p>	<p><b>Approved:</b> Writer and small group supervision.</p> <p><b>Declined:</b> Extra time to write – the student is outside the guidelines for extra time based on the essays submitted. The provision of a writer addresses the issue of spelling difficulties.</p>
<b>Learning disability</b>	Extra time Reader Writer Small group supervision	None provided.	<p>Teacher comments noting that the student is weak academically and struggles with written material.</p> <p>Reading test results.</p> <p>Spelling test results.</p> <p>Two timed extended tasks handwritten by the student – at least one MUST be an extended assessment task or examination. Cover sheets completed by the school for both tasks.</p>	<p><b>Approved:</b> None.</p> <p><b>Declined:</b> Reader, writer, extra time and small group supervision. The reading test and spelling test results are outside the guidelines. There is no evidence that the student has a disability.</p>



Learning difficulty				
Condition(s)	Provision(s) requested	Diagnostic evidence	Functional evidence	Provision(s) determined
<b>Reading disability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reader</li> <li>• Extra time</li> </ul>	Specialist report noting that the student has a learning disability.	Teacher comments stating that the student has difficulty reading extended passages and a reader is used for assessment situations.  Reading test results.	<b>Approved:</b> Reader or extra time (if reading for themselves) and small group supervision.

Source: <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/disability-provisions/case-study.html#learning>).

**References:**

Presentation on 1st April 2014 organised by PALS and conducted by Neal Crocker and Belinda Deggs from the Board of Studies Teaching & Educational Standards(BOSTES) and Schools' Guide to Disability Provisions (<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/disability-provisions/guidance.html>)  
 Case Studies (<http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/disability-provisions/case-study.html>)  
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