

24 November 2006

S2006/040

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**TO:                   Special Needs Coordinator  
Principal  
Principal's Nominee**

### **Special assessment conditions**

In August 2006 the Qualifications Authority audited 34 schools that had made applications for special assessment conditions.

We were pleased to note that many schools demonstrated excellent practices with the recording of details about their applicants. These practices could be adopted by other schools and are discussed in the attached Special Assessment Record keeping document.

The Qualifications Authority will again audit a selection of schools in 2007. The audit will occur in Term 1 of 2007. You will be notified in February if your school has been selected to be part of the audit.

### **Enquiries**

Please refer any enquiries relating to this circular to your School Relationship Manager.

School Relationship Manager Liaison Services Telephone: 04 463 3000 Fax:           04 463 3113 Email:        firstname.lastname@nzqa.govt.nz
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Circulars are available from the Qualifications Authority website ([www.nzqa.govt.nz/publications/circulars](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/publications/circulars)).

## **Record Keeping for Special Assessment Conditions**

The following guidelines are intended to assist schools establish systems surrounding the provision of Special Assessment Conditions.

### **Administration**

It is recommended that schools establish folders for each applicant or potential applicant to record the details of their 'significant learning problem'. The folder should contain a cover sheet for each candidate indicating the current status of testing, what special assessment they are receiving and when the application was completed. There should also be a record of the ongoing supported learning that the candidates receive in the form of extra tuition to assist them to overcome their learning difficulties. Comments from staff and exam assistants about the performance of the candidate in internal assessments with and without assistance should also be recorded. These are examples of good practice.

### **Independent assessment**

The independent assessors used by schools or from whom parents and caregivers request reports need to be either a registered educational psychologist or registered NZCER level C assessor. Some schools may use an RTLB if that person is correctly qualified. Ideally, independent testing should occur in the year prior to a candidate's first entry into external assessment for national qualifications for which special assessment conditions are sought.

Testing by schools and psychologists needs to establish that a candidate has the intellectual capacity to be able to perform in assessments but is held back by a significant learning difficulty. Such an assessment must detail the extent of the learning problem and clearly indicate that the candidate will fail to perform without assistance because of this. Any independent non-professional audit of the report (such as a Principal's Nominee might perform prior to making online applications) must be able to clearly determine the reasoning behind any recommendations for special assessment conditions.

The independent reports must clearly note if a candidate qualifies for reader assistance, writer assistance or reader/writer assistance, or separate accommodation or extra time or computer use and specify the reasons for arriving at such a conclusion based on the testing conducted. Independent assessors and schools should define the nature of the significant learning problem that the candidate exhibits and describe the impact of this learning problem on the applicant's ability to complete assessments without the special assessment conditions applied for.

### **Evidence**

The evidence for the provision of reader/writer or reader or writer assistance needs to be examined carefully. It is important for the school to be able to identify that the candidate has 'a significant learning problem'. A description of 'spelling at age 8.9' or 'reading age of 10.4' is insufficient to support the need for special assistance, particularly where this is contained in a report completed up to three years earlier. While this candidate may not appear to read well this is not "a significant learning problem" but a surface feature that may indicate the need for further investigation. The school, with reference to the report and other evidence, has to be able to demonstrate why this is so.

Similarly, demonstration of an inability to write well or at speed needs to be explained. There is no issue with any student having writer assistance because of a physical disability but in all other cases, legibility and speed of writing needs to be objectively assessed. One explanation may be lack of practice of the skills of reading and/or writing, and this may be signalled in the report. It is expected that schools adopt and adapt the suggested interventions as appropriate. Much of the evidence for candidates needing writer assistance relates to their poor spelling.

Candidates who are spelling at a 11 or 12 year old level may not appear to spell well because they cannot spell words that they verbalise. The school has to be able to demonstrate why they cannot spell and describe how it is 'a significant learning problem'. Once again, it is likely that a report would suggest interventions, such as intensive practice in spelling course-specific vocabulary for the candidate. Although their spelling of words may not be exact, many candidates spell phonetically and the words are recognisable. There are very few standards where correct spelling is crucial to the achievement of the standard, and in those where it is, writer assistance may invalidate a candidate's results so the provision of a writer is not required in most cases where poor spelling alone is the only factor identified.

Educational psychologist reports often allude to the poor spelling of a student and how this detracts from their work and impacts on their performance because the student spends an inordinate amount of time trying to spell a word. Poor spelling is often used by a psychologist to support the recommendation of writer assistance for a candidate. Writer assistance will not be approved by NZQA just because someone is a poor speller. Schools should ensure that candidates practise writing to improve their speed in writing and to improve their spelling.

Reports citing Irlen syndrome alone are insufficient evidence upon which to provide reader, writer or reader/writer assistance to a candidate. Other testing needs to have established the candidate's intellectual level and his or her abilities before any special assistance is provided. Such candidates may be best assisted by the provision of extra time.

Candidates whose reports indicate 'low ability' are not approved for special assessment conditions. Special assessment conditions are to ameliorate 'a significant learning problem' not to provide them with an advantage in their performance in assessments. Candidates in such situations can be awarded credits from their demonstrated performance in internal assessments. The evidence of their learning can perhaps be proven by an oral demonstration rather than having to produce written evidence within the constraints of time.

### **Processing Applications**

Schools should know who their candidates for special assessment conditions are at the start of the year. The school will know at that time who is under the guidance of the Special Needs department and can ensure that entries for externals are correct. All independent testing for candidates making their first entry into external assessment for national qualifications should have been completed in the previous year and copies provided to the school before the end of March in the year of assessment.

The 'Reason for application' produced online should be a summary of their learning or physical problems rather than a biographical study of each candidate.

The approval by NZQA of special assessment in one year does not necessarily mean that approval will be given in subsequent years. A review of the results of students for whom assistance has previously been provided may indicate the need to modify the nature of the assistance provided over time. Ongoing extra teaching and programmes of special learning will assist most candidates become more independent in their assessments.

In addition, the school should conduct an annual needs analysis to determine the efficacy of the special assessment conditions provided. For example, it may be appropriate for some candidates to complete more internal assessment, perhaps with the use of a computer, or for candidates entering standards requiring computation or manipulation of formulae to write for themselves.

## **Special assessment conditions**

**Extra time:** Applications should reflect the amount of time that a candidate will take to complete the standards in the exam. Candidates with applications for 'extra time' must use this extra time at the end of the three-hour examination. They are not to be started 30 minutes before the start of the examination.

In many cases, extra time will not be needed for a candidate who is working with a reader and or writer. For example, an application for 30 minutes extra time for a candidate who is sitting one standard in 3 hours will be declined.

Candidates with extra time will be provided separate accommodation only if they have a medical reason in support of this extra provision. Schools need to decide if the candidate's 'significant learning problem' can be best managed by entry into fewer external standards and/or an increased programme of internal assessment.

**Reader Assistance:** Applications should be supported by an independent report and school-based observations of the need for reader assistance.

**Writer Assistance:** Applications should be supported by an independent report and school-based observations of the need for writer assistance. Writer assistance may risk invalidating a candidate's responses in some standards and for others it is too difficult to work with a writer. For example, some English standards require the student to have an independent command of language features which may require the candidate to dictate spelling and punctuation features. In mathematics and other standards requiring calculations it is very difficult for a candidate to work with a writer and this provision is often declined. The use of computers may be more appropriate for some students.

**Computer Assistance:** Applications should be supported by an independent report and school-based observations of the need for computer assistance.

**Separate Accommodation:** Schools must note in any application why they have requested this assistance. Applications without this supporting detail will not have separate accommodation approved.

# Independent evidence supporting Special Assessment applications

## Checklist

**Name:**

**Year:**

**Class:**

- Evidence that candidate needs special assessment conditions
- Evidence from: .....
- Latest evidence or report dated .....New test needed .....
- Evidence must be related to candidate's time at secondary school
- Evidence is related to a medical condition
- Evidence notes candidate's intellectual capacity
- Candidate is not described as 'low ability' or 'below average'
- Evidence notes the 'significant learning problem'  
(significant means performing at a level 4 – 5 years below the year level of the exam entered)

### Report recommends

- Extra time
- Separate accommodation
- Reader
- Writer
- Reader/writer
- Computer use
- Other:

Can the 'significant learning problem' be managed by entry into fewer standards and /or an increased emphasis on internal assessment?



**Student Name:**

**Year:**

**Class:**

**Candidate's Response to Special Assessment Conditions provided by the school/ externals**

(also note the name of the reader or the writer used with this candidate)

<b>Date</b>	<b>Special assistance provided &amp; by whom</b>	<b>Effectiveness / Student Response</b>	<b>Further Action</b> Eg Change nature of assessment

<b>Student Name:</b>  <b>Year:</b>  <b>Class:</b>
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**Annual Needs Analysis**

<b>Special Needs Department Feedback</b>	<b>Student Feedback</b>	<b>Parent/ Guardian Feedback</b>

**Outcomes**

Review indicates a need to:.....

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