



## **HSC minimum standard: Disability Provisions, Exemptions and Appeals**

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## 1. Background

The HSC minimum standard is intended to raise literacy and numeracy levels for all students and ensure that school leavers have the essential reading, writing and numeracy skills needed for everyday tasks and future learning.

From 2020, meeting the HSC minimum standard will be an eligibility requirement for the award of an HSC.

The HSC minimum standard is set at Level 3 of the Australian Core Skills Framework (ACSF). Level 3 of the ACSF describes the functional literacy and numeracy skills required for life after school, for work and further education.

Students are able to demonstrate the HSC minimum standard by successfully completing online tests in reading, writing and numeracy in Years 10–12.

In accordance with legislative obligations outlined in the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the *Disability Standards for Education (2005)*, NESAs have approved disability provisions for students who have a permanent or temporary disability requiring practical support to take the HSC minimum standard tests.

NESA has also approved provisions for students who, due to the nature of their disability or through exceptional circumstances, should be exempt from meeting the minimum standard requirement.

## 2. Purpose

This policy describes the disability provisions, exemptions, appeals and application processes as they apply to the HSC minimum standard tests.

As the HSC minimum standard is an eligibility requirement for the HSC, this policy incorporates, where appropriate, the disability provisions, exemptions, appeals and application processes as they currently apply to HSC examinations.

## 3. Disability provisions

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) and the *Disability Standards for Education (2005)* require NESAs to ensure that students with a disability are able to access and participate in teaching, learning and assessment experiences on the same basis as a student without a disability. Consistent with these requirements, students are able to access reasonable adjustments in the form of disability provisions for the HSC minimum standard tests. Students may require disability provisions for:

- a permanent condition, such as vision or hearing loss

- a temporary condition, such as a broken arm, or
- an intermittent condition, such as back pain when sitting for long periods.

Disability provisions are based on the functional impact of a diagnosis, not the diagnosis itself. The provisions apply only where the disability requires a practical arrangement to provide a student access to read and/or respond in an exam situation and are solely determined by how the disability affects the student's performance.

When determining if disability provisions are required, the online platform of the HSC minimum standard tests should be considered, as features such as manipulation of font size and background colour will be made available to all students.

For the HSC minimum standard tests, Principal Approved Provisions and NESAs Approved Provisions are available.

### **3.1 Principal Approved Provisions**

Principal Approved Provisions are disability provisions that can be approved and implemented by the school. Principal Approved Provisions include:

- rest breaks: standard is 5 minutes per half hour but principals may approve up to 30 minutes per half hour
- additional time: standard is 2.5 minutes per half hour but principals may approve up to 30 minutes per half hour
- reader
- scribe
- modifications to the environment e.g. special furniture, lighting

### **3.2 NESAs Approved Provisions**

NESA Approved Provisions are disability provisions that require approval by NESAs. NESAs Approved Provisions include:

- modified paper, e.g. modifying questions that contain visual stimulus
- braille
- rest breaks (greater than 30 minutes per half hour)
- additional time (greater than 30 minutes per half hour)

Other provisions that are required to provide access and participation on the same basis as a student without a disability may be applied for.

### **3.3 Applications and Appeals**

Schools are required to apply to NESAs for provisions that are in addition to the Principal Approved Provisions. For example, this may be more extra time or rest breaks than principals can approve. This would include examination modifications such as braille.

### **3.3.1 Principal Approved Provisions**

Principals are responsible for approving applications for all Principal Approved Provisions. Principals may delegate this process to appropriate school personnel, however maintain responsibility for decisions made. Evidence used to determine Principal Approved Provisions, such as health reports, reading test scores or teacher comments, must be retained in the school for three years after the tests as this evidence may need to be reviewed by NESAs.

As outlined in the Assessment Certification Examination Manual under ACE 10003, students and parents should be advised that there is no guarantee that NESAs will grant the same provisions for the HSC examinations as those approved by schools for the minimum standard tests.

If a school declines a student's application, the student may appeal to the school. If the school upholds its decision, the student may appeal to NESAs in line with existing HSC provisions.

NESAs will review the appeal and determine whether to maintain or overturn the school's decision. Further guidelines and advice about the process will be provided for schools.

### **3.3.2 NESAs Approved Provisions**

Applications for NESAs Approved Provisions must be submitted to NESAs. Recognising that students may continue to grow and develop, and that some disabilities may be temporary or intermittent, NESAs Approved Provisions are valid for 12 months from the date of approval.

Students can appeal NESAs's decision to decline a provision. NESAs will then conduct an internal review of the decision and advise the school and student of the outcome.

Once NESAs makes a decision, schools are able to submit an appeal based on further evidence.

## **3.4 Credentialing**

Where students use a reader to access the online reading test, the reading test report will include the following footnote:

*This test was completed with the assistance of a reader. The reader provided no assistance in the interpretation of the meaning of words or the text.*

## **4. Exemptions**

### **4.1 Life Skills Exemption**

Where possible, all students in NSW should be supported to develop core literacy and numeracy skills required for personal, community, work and training contexts. NESAs recognises that due to the complex nature of their disability, it may not be appropriate for some students who undertake Stage 6 Life Skills courses to be required to demonstrate the HSC minimum standard of literacy and numeracy. This decision should be made as part of the collaborative planning process, based on the personalised learning needs of the student.

Students undertaking Life Skills courses may only be eligible for an exemption under the following conditions:

- Students taking an English Life Skills course in Year 12 can be exempt from meeting the minimum literacy standard.
- Students taking a Mathematics Life Skills course in Year 12 can be exempt from meeting the minimum numeracy standard.
- Students who do not take a Stage 6 Mathematics course but who are enrolled in four or more Life Skills subjects can be exempt from meeting the minimum numeracy standard.

To be exempt, students need to undertake Life Skills courses to the completion of Year 12.

Students undertaking Life Skills courses still have the option to sit for the online reading, writing and numeracy tests. Schools should refer to the HSC minimum standard test guidance for further advice in relation to students undertaking Life Skills courses and the online tests.

## **4.2 Exceptional Exemption**

This provision allows principals to apply to NESA for an exemption from meeting the HSC minimum standard for a student under exceptional circumstances. Consistent with other HSC provisions, a specialist panel will be convened to review applications for exemptions and to make recommendations to NESA.

## **4.3 Credentialing**

Students exempt from meeting the literacy and/or numeracy minimum standard will receive an HSC Record of Achievement with a footnote indicating that they were exempt.

Exempted Students who successfully complete the minimum standard tests will not have their exemption included on their HSC Record of Achievement.

## **5. Exceptional circumstances**

It is expected that students will demonstrate the HSC minimum standard in the online tests. There may, however, be rare and exceptional circumstances in which a student with the requisite levels of numeracy and literacy is unable to demonstrate their skills in an online test.

Applications to NESA would need to provide:

- Evidence proving the student is unable to demonstrate the minimum standard via the online tests.
- Evidence that the student has the requisite literacy and numeracy skills. This will require either school-observed or school-verified evidence clearly annotated to show alignment to the ACSF Level 3 or above. Unannotated material will not be accepted.

Applications must be made for each domain of reading, writing and numeracy. Given the minimum standard is a Year 12 standard, applications for exceptional circumstances under the disability provisions will only be available once the student is enrolled in Year 12, i.e. from Term 4 in Year 11.

NESA will advise the school of the application decision. The school has the right to appeal the decision. Appeals will follow current processes for appeals against other NESA decisions, such as disability provisions applications.

## **6. Illness / Misadventure**

It is not appropriate for the Illness/Misadventure process for the minimum standard tests to be aligned to the current HSC process as there are multiple opportunities to sit the tests, the tests do not have to be sat on a particular date, and there is no assessment mark to use in place of an exam mark.

If a student is affected by Illness or Misadventure during the test or test window, the following can be implemented:

- If an incident occurs before a test starts, the school can arrange for the student to sit the test later in the test window.
- If the incident occurs during a test, the school may:
  - arrange for the student to sit another test in the next available window, OR
  - request NESAs to cancel the test, which would allow re-enrolment in the same test window.

## **7. Post-results services and appeals**

Schools will receive some diagnostic information on each student's performance in the tests. This information will be available via the Results Analysis Package (RAP).

It will not be permitted for schools or students to appeal an individual result.

As per the Anomalous Results Inquiry, a process for HSC principals to request information on a student's result will be in place (ACE 9026).

The following will not be permitted:

- remark of any component, including writing
- copy of written response provided back to the student or school, as this would reveal stimulus question.