**Presenter -** This special provision video is on changes to the evidence requirements for the 2024 special examination arrangements applications. This video is going to cover what special provision is. What are the VCAA's responsibilities? What are the school's responsibilities, the types of special examination arrangements? When are special examination arrangements appropriate? What conditions can I apply for special examination arrangements? What types of special examination arrangements are there and when do you not need VCAA approval?

Special provision. The underlying principle of the VCAA special provision policy is to ensure that the most appropriate, fair and reasonable options are available for students to demonstrate their capabilities if their learning and assessment programmes are affected by disability, illness, impairment, or other circumstances. Students may need special provision in their learning programme to participate fully in learning and achieve the learning outcomes, and remove the barriers in assessment to demonstrate their learning and achievement. Special provision should be equivalent, alternative arrangements for students, but not confer an advantage to any student over other students.

Students who have been approved special provision are not exempt from meeting the requirements for satisfactory completion of VCE or from being assessed against the outcomes for a study. Students are required to demonstrate their achievement fairly in meeting the outcomes of the study design, as well as completing school-based assessments and VCE external assessments. Special provision can be school-based or for the VCE external assessments, special provision for classroom learning and school-based assessment. Schools are responsible for determining eligibility and the nature of the provisions for classroom learning and school-based assessment. School decisions regarding special provisions made must be evidence-based and made using a range of sources, including professional and educational assessments and reports, knowledge of the student gained from the teacher observations in the classroom, and from assessments completed by the student at the school.

Provisions approved by schools may be for a fixed period of time, such as in the case of a broken arm, or throughout a student's schooling for conditions like learning disorders. Schools should regularly review a student's special provisions for classroom learning and school-based assessment. This helps to ensure the provisions approved remain appropriate in meeting the student's requirements. Must keep records of all special provision made for each student. The VCAA is responsible for approving special exam arrangements or SEAs for VCE external assessments. External assessments include all VCE, and VCE VET written, performance, and language oral examinations, and the extended investigation critical thinking test and oral presentation, as well as the GAT. SEAs are available for all VCE external assessments, including the GAT.

The VCAA will approve provisions consistent with those already implemented by the school for school-based assessments. The VCAA decisions will be based on the strength and completeness of evidence of existing modifications made by the school in classroom learning and school-based assessments as outlined in the school-based evidence. Emergency special examination arrangements are for students who experience the onset of an illness, the exacerbation of an existing condition or the occurrence of an injury or personal trauma in the period immediately before or on the day of an external assessment. An emergency application form is made available through VASS in the fortnight leading up to each assessment period. This form requires the school to outline what provisions are being sought and in cases relating to injury or illness, have the accompanying medical proforma completed. Conditions can be acute or short in duration such as a broken arm. Emergency applications will not be accepted for known or longstanding conditions.

Students who are ill or affected by other personal circumstances at the time of a VCE external assessment and whose result is unlikely to be a fair or accurate indication of their learning or achievement in the study may apply for a derived exam score or a DES. If the application is approved, a DES will be calculated by the VCAA. The purpose of a DES is to ensure that a student's final result for an external assessment reflects as accurately as possible the level of achievement that would be expected based on the learning and achievement the student has demonstrated in the study over the year.

In 2024, there are two important dates to remember. For any previously approved special examination arrangements, the last day to have submitted an application is Friday, February 16th. For all new special examination arrangement applications, the last day to submit an application is Friday, March 8th. The closing dates are definite. Late submissions will only be accepted for newly diagnosed health impairments or mental health conditions for which supports are deemed necessary.

The VCAA considers each application for special exam arrangements on a case by case basis. Each year, the VCAA will convene a special examination arrangements panel comprising of speech pathologists, deaf and hard of hearing specialists, education professionals, and other relevant individuals to assist with the assessment of the applications. The VCAA's decision regarding a student's special examination arrangements will be communicated to the school via email.

There are changes to the process for 2024. For those of you who have previously applied for a SEA application for students, you might be familiar with information requests. Information requests are requests from the special provision team to schools for a range of situations, including but not limited to missing signatures on a form, incorrect student attachments, i.e., information has been attached to an application for the wrong student, where more detail about a student's condition was needed by the panel or lack of sufficient detail in the school-based evidence form. This year, we are entrusting schools with the responsibility of accurately completing and submitting student applications. A failure to include all the necessary information may result in the requested provisions being declined. Schools will receive an explanation for any decision that is declined and may appeal to the VCAA decision by submitting an appeal application. An appeal should be lodged by the school within 14 days of receiving the decision email. In the appeal, it is important to clearly outline the reasons for appealing to the VCAA decision and to refer to the evidence provided in the original application. Additionally, any new supporting evidence such as additional letters of support from professionals, educational or academic tests not previously submitted, and school-based evidence, and observations not previously supplied, should be included with the appeal.

Schools may apply for a SEA on behalf of their students and will administer and conduct student external assessments. The VCAA expects schools are aware of their students with chronic conditions, as they are usually identified early in the student's schooling. Schools engage with the VCAA on behalf of students and need to communicate openly and honestly with students and their parents about reasonable provisions that maintain the integrity of the VCE external assessments.

Schools must ensure that they apply to the VCAA in a timely manner by the due date for chronic or ongoing conditions, and to apply for students with previously approved provisions or rollovers. Schools must not permit a student to receive special examination arrangements within external assessments without the VCAA's approval. Failure to comply with these instructions may constitute a breach of the rules governing the conduct of the VCE external assessments.

Once the VCAA has approved provision, schools are notified via email. Schools are responsible for communicating VCAA special examination arrangement applications decisions to students and their families. The school must ensure a copy of the advice slip containing details of any approved special examination arrangements are distributed to the student, the examination chief supervisor, and any relevant school personnel such as the VCE coordinator.

There are eight special examination arrangement categories, mental health conditions, health impairment, physical disability, specific learning disorders, language disorder, motor disorders, deaf and hard of hearing, vision impairment. These categories remain unchanged. For students with comorbidities, schools may select multiple categories. Most categories, schools will be prompted to select a subcategory, being a specific illness or condition. For example, under the mental health condition, subcategories, anxiety disorder, OCD, depression, et cetera, will be listed.

Schools must determine the functional impact of a student's condition on the ability to access and respond to timed assessments. They should consider the individual student's circumstances, any existing special provision for classroom learning and or school-based assessments, teacher observations and existing professional evidence when determining which special examination arrangement to apply for. Reasonable provisions may vary depending on what is being assessed and the format of the examination. For example, what is required of an extended written response may not be necessary for a mathematics examination. It is important schools trial provisions to ensure that they are suitable for the student and the functional impact being addressed and review approved provisions at regular intervals.

Types of common special examination arrangements include rest breaks, extra working time, a separate room for individual students, the use of computers, tablets, and or any assistive technology, readers, scribes, clarifiers, Auslan interpreters, alternative format examination papers. If a student has been approved a separate room for one or more of the examinations, the school must provide a separate room and appoint an independent supervisor for the student's external assessments. A partitioned room cannot be used as a separate room. If a reader, text to voice software, a scribe, a voice to text software, a clarifier or an Auslan interpreter has been approved, the school and chief supervisor must ensure that examination room is in a quiet location where students cannot hear the work of another student.

Schools are encouraged to consider all reasonable provisions before. For example, in the case of a student with a generalised anxiety disorder, placement in the examination room near an exit or at the back of a room may be enough to assist the student. If this provision does not address the student's requirements, trial rest breaks or permission to leave the exam room before progressing to a small group setting or a separate room. Please refer to the special provision on the VCAA website for special provision categories and appropriate provisions for guidance or contact the special provision team.

Schools are required to provide the following evidence to support an application for SEAs, signed student consent form. This is to be signed by the student or a parent or guardian, if the student is a minor, detailed school-based evidence form, which comprehensively outlines the student's condition, disability, illness, long-term injury or ongoing personal circumstance, including medical and educational history, and outlining the functional impact of the condition on learning and assessment, outline the history of the provisions approved by the school and used by the student over the period of the condition, outline the evidence the school has used to make decisions. For example, health professional or teacher observation. Both the student consent form and the school-based evidence form are available via either VASS, navigating to the system admin menu, then selecting downloads and searching on keyword special or downloaded from the special provision online platform.

New to 2024, schools are required to provide any existing relevant academic and educational assessments and evidence used by the school to determine appropriate student provision or provisions. As introduced in 2023, it is not mandatory for schools to undertake specific testing to be submitted in a SEA application. The panel, not knowing the student, are guided by the information provided in your school's application and may seek further information to support the panel assessment of an application if necessary.

There are a number of special examination arrangements available to students with mental health conditions that do not require the VCAA approval. These include seating arrangements within the main cohort, whether you move them near a doorway at the back of the exam room, et cetera, a small group setting, provided the student has been approved other provisions by the VCAA. Provisions that do require VCAA approval include rest breaks, both timed and untimed, permission to leave the examination room during a rest break and a separate room.

If a student has been approved a separate room for one or more of their examinations, the school must provide a separate room and appoint an independent supervisor for all the students' written examinations. If a student has been approved a separate room, they may not be put into a small group setting. We recommend that schools consider the number of separate rooms they apply for in respect to school logistics for the GAT and VCE external examinations. The VCAA panel does not consider the number of separate rooms a single school has applied for when making decisions for individual student applications. If the application clearly shows the need for a student to have a separate room, and it is strongly supported by school-based evidence and or an appropriate health professional, the requested provision is likely to be approved.

Refer to the special provision section on the VCAA website for guidance for appropriate provisions. Not every available provision is listed on the website. Schools need to consider the individual student circumstance and requirements. Some arrangements do not need VCAA approval. These include seating arrangements within the main cohort, tinted or coloured lenses, silent fidget toys, foam or rubber earplugs, furniture in the examination room, e.g., standing desks or a specific ergonomic chair, asthma inhalers, EpiPens, or up to 1500 mL of drinking water in a clear bottle. Schools can submit an application for special examination arrangements for their student using the Special Provision Online or SPO platform, available through VASS. For assistance in creating an application in SPO, refer to the How to apply for a SEA video available on the VCAA website at the 2024 annual VCAA briefing for the VCE and VPC webpage.

Thank you for listening. For further information, please contact the Special Provisions team via any method on your screen.

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