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ASSESSMENT & SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH HEARING LOSS

Australian Association of Teachers of the Deaf
(Victorian Branch) Inc.



ASSESSMENT & SPECIAL PROVISIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH HEARING LOSS

This publication is intended for:

- Teachers of the Deaf who are school-based, or Visiting Teachers from across all sectors
- Teachers of students with hearing loss in mainstream schools
- Teachers responsible for the administration of both school-based and external assessments

Terms used throughout this publication:

Students with hearing loss refers to students who are deaf or hard of hearing, whether their loss is sensorineural, permanent or fluctuating conductive. It includes unilateral/single sided, and encompasses all degrees of hearing loss.

Students with hearing loss includes students who use spoken language, and students who use Australian Sign Language (Auslan).

Teachers of the Deaf includes teachers from the Department of Education and Training (DET) who are based in Schools for the Deaf, Deaf Facilities in mainstream schools, and Visiting Teachers who visit children with hearing loss in their local school. In the Catholic education system, Teachers of the Deaf may be based in a campus of a School for the Deaf or be a Visiting Teacher/Learning Consultant (Hearing Impaired). Teachers of the Deaf also includes teachers based in independent schools and independent school Deaf Facilities (also known as Deaf Integration Units or Hearing Units), and those who provide a private Visiting Teacher service.

Information in this booklet has been compiled from official documentation by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), and from recommendations by Teachers of the Deaf.

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INTRODUCTION

Students with hearing loss may require adjustments and/or Special Provisions to be put in place so that they can access learning and demonstrate their knowledge in assessments. These assessments include school-based tests throughout their school years and School Assessed Coursework (SAC) which do not require approval by VCAA. External exams such as NAPLAN and VCE do require formal applications for Special Provisions and are detailed in this document.

Some adjustments may be as simple as sitting at the front to enable the student to access instructions accurately and be able to hear announcements such as how much time is remaining. Alternatively, the student may require a separate room with good acoustics to effectively utilise their hearing technology for a listening task. Some students may also require additional time, or additional support to access and process assessment tasks.

Special Provisions

Special Provisions in external exams should reflect existing adjustments and supports used in the classroom. These adjustments for external examinations should be trialled and used at the school prior to submitting any application, and are recommended for the support of a student with hearing loss throughout their education. Records should be kept of all these adjustments. A formal early application can be made from Year 9.

Eligibility for adjustments in external exams is a confirmed bilateral, sensorineural hearing loss and/or conductive hearing loss that is moderate, severe or profound.

For students who don't meet this criteria, extra evidence is required.

Students with hearing loss may have difficulties with access to, and accuracy in, hearing the following parts of assessments:

- general examination instructions and finish times of exams
- exams that have elements requiring listening
- reading or understanding the language of the questions
- completing tests within time limits

The Disability Standards for Education (2005) outline an obligation for education providers to make reasonable adjustments.

“A reasonable adjustment is described as a measure or action taken to assist a student with disability to participate in education on the same basis as other students” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority: Australian Curriculum: Students with Disability, n.d.).

WHY ARE ADJUSTMENTS NECESSARY?

Impact of Hearing Loss on Receptive Language - Listening

“Listening” can be thought of as involving one’s ears but it also has the broader meaning of “receptive language”. With this second meaning, language is received through listening and speechreading.

The nature of hearing loss is that not all sounds will be heard clearly, even with assistive listening devices, and there is frequently distortion of sounds. Hearing aids/cochlear implants do not overcome this. Instead, they only amplify what a student can hear; they don’t restore hearing. Speech may be soft, some sounds such as those with a higher frequency e.g., “s” or “t” sounds that appear in the weaker syllables of words may not be detected. The result is that information can be fragmented and children may experience a listening gap (Anderson, 2014).

There are many impacts associated with reduced sound discrimination. Any degree of hearing loss, with or without amplification, results in the need for greater effort in listening. This continual increased effort contributes to listening fatigue. Students with hearing loss expend additional concentration and cognitive engagement to access information.

Higher cognitive engagement is required to process both auditory and visual cues, especially in noisy classrooms. Information needs to be mentally rehearsed so it can be stored in short- and long-term memory. The ability to watch the speaker improves speech understanding and may reduce some listening effort, but many other factors impact on this access. Listeners who are better speechreaders/lipreaders benefit from visual clues, however these do not provide clear information on all sounds/words. The processing of visual clues requires more cognitive resources; effort levels increase and speech recognition is slower. Students need to have typical or better working memory capacity to do this successfully.

Listening and speechreading/lipreading assumes knowledge of language and vocabulary. It is difficult to speechread/lipread language or vocabulary that you don’t already know. Acquisition of vocabulary is challenging and often negatively impacted by hearing loss. It is common for students with hearing loss to be unable to hear conversations or other students’ questions or comments consistently. Students are required to constantly utilise semantic and syntactic clues to make sense of what they hear and fill in the gaps of their fragmented signal. This is more challenging if language levels do not match those of their peers.

A range of factors can influence speechreading/lipreading effectiveness. Some of these are:

Speaker

- facial expressions
- diction
- body language
- speech rate

- familiarity to the speechreader/lipreader (the student)
- accent
- facial characteristics (e.g., beard, moustache)
- speech prosody (intonation, stress and rhythm)
- objects in or over the mouth (e.g., tongue studs, food, pens/pencils)

Message

- length
- syntactic complexity
- frequency of word usage
- shared homophones (words which are spelled and articulated the same)
- heteronyms (words which are spelled the same but articulated differently)
- context
- words borrowed from other languages

Environment

- viewing angle (It's difficult to speechread/lipread from the side.)
- lighting
- distance
- background noise
- room acoustics
- distractions

Speechreader/lipreader (the student)

- speechreading/lipreading skill
- residual hearing
- use of appropriate amplification
- stress profile (level of confidence)
- attentiveness
- fatigue
- motivation to understand
- knowledge of cultural and social conventions
- language skills
- prior knowledge
- uncorrected vision impairment

(Adapted from Tye-Murray, 2015, p. 211)

Impact of Hearing Loss on Receptive Language - Auslan

Auslan is the term for **Australian Sign Language**. It was coined by Trevor Johnston, the compiler of the first Auslan dictionary. Auslan is the sign language of the Australian Deaf community. It is a complete, natural, visual, spatial language that has linguistic properties and grammar that are different from English.

Students may receive Auslan directly from a teacher who uses Auslan or their education may be mediated through an Auslan interpreter. The use of an Auslan interpreter requires increased effort and contributes to fatigue. Students using an interpreter expend additional concentration and cognitive engagement to access information while also needing to pay attention to what is happening around them.

Auslan interpreting occurs simultaneously, unlike the usual practice of spoken language interpreting, where one language is interpreted following the other language, i.e., sequentially. Interpreting in Auslan is not a word-by-word translation due to the different grammatical structures of Auslan and English. There is a time lag as the interpreter processes the information, provides the visual language and vocabulary, and so will typically be signing one to two sentences behind a speaker. Therefore, students sometimes don't get the opportunity to answer questions unless the teacher is familiar with how to use an interpreter appropriately.

"The teacher is often speaking at the language and cognitive level of the hearing students. For many deaf and hard of hearing students, this may be an appropriate level. However, some deaf students have language and vocabulary skills that are delayed compared with their hearing peers" (Schick, n.d.).

In the classroom, students may need scaffolding. "By scaffolding the interpreter provides the necessary vocabulary, definitions and background information to expand on previously learned concepts and clarify new concepts and terminology..." (Schick, n.d.).

Receptive language (Auslan) can be influenced by a range of factors. Some of these are:

Message

- length
- syntactic complexity
- frequency of word usage
- context
- words borrowed from other languages
- using signs unfamiliar to the student
- a delay between the spoken message and the signed interpretation

Environment

- viewing angle (It's difficult to read fingerspelling from the back or side.)
- lighting
- distance
- visual distractors

Signer (Student)

- Auslan competency
 - age of language acquisition
 - access to Auslan outside of the school environment
 - access to appropriate language models

(There will be difference between a student who has parents who are fluent in the language and is exposed to many and varied signing deaf people – compared with a student who acquired Auslan at a later age and has no one outside of the school environment who uses Auslan with them. These two students would be very different and therefore their adjustments needed might be different.)

- stress profile (level of confidence)
- attentiveness
- fatigue
- motivation to understand
- knowledge of cultural and social conventions
- language skills
- prior knowledge
- uncorrected vision impairment
- cultural background

Auslan Interpreter

- training, qualifications and experience
- interpreter's understanding of the subject material
- familiarity to the student
- diverse language knowledge
- clarity of sign
- use of facial expressions and body language
- signing space
- pace of signing
- use of non-manual markers such as eye gaze, eyebrow movement and head and body positioning
- facial characteristics (e.g., beard, moustache)
- regional sign variations

(Adapted from Tye-Murray, 2015, p. 211)

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN THE CLASSROOM, SCHOOL-BASED ASSESSMENTS & VCE EXAMS

Classroom Learning

The following is a **checklist** for all classroom learning situations:

- ✓ Ensure all personal and school-based hearing technology is working well.
- ✓ Ensure the student is seated towards the front near the speaker so that they are able to hear instructions more clearly and have access to speechreading/lipreading.
- ✓ Consult with the interpreter and the student to ensure the interpreter is positioned appropriately prior to any instructions or information being delivered.
- ✓ Check with the student regarding seating position in relation to any internal background noise such as heaters, fans or clocks.
- ✓ Check the student has heard and understood all information/instructions by asking open ended questions.
- ✓ Ensure general instructions and due dates are written where they can be easily seen.
- ✓ Ensure that documentation exists that shows adjustments have been made throughout Primary/Secondary education.

School-based Assessments

In order to provide equal access for students with hearing loss, many school-based assessments involving listening will require adjustments. These include listening tasks such as spelling, music, mental maths, watching multimedia presentations in all subject areas, and learning another language.

These adjustments may include:

- Conducting assessment tasks in a **separate room** with good acoustics and minimal reverberation. This can be checked with the SoundOut Room Acoustics App. Consult your Teacher of the Deaf for advice regarding the proposed assessment space.
- If using a pre-recorded audio source as part of the assessment, students should be able to **trial different ways to access the audio** prior to the actual assessment, to ensure that they can effectively/accurately access the material. These could include laptop, tablet, whiteboard, amplifier, TV. This will enable them to determine the equipment that provides the best sound quality for their needs.
- Throughout the task, **students should be able to change** the volume and balance of the sound on the recording themselves. Students may need to connect their hearing aid/cochlear implant or other hearing technology to the audio source using a purpose made audio cable. If the student uses

Bluetooth or streaming to access the audio, this must also be trialled prior to the assessment. Ensure that the pre-recorded audio only, or audio-visual assessment, is obtained well in advance so that necessary access checks can be done prior to the assessment.

- Some students may struggle to comprehend the audio source without access to **visual clues**. Speechreading/lipreading can provide clarification if similar sounds are confused. **Speechreading/lipreading** requires access to facial expression and whole body reading, so the audio/visual presentation needs to show the whole face and upper body in good light. Practice audio/visual presentations should be trialled beforehand to determine if they provide this access to clarification.
- Students may require **additional repetition** to better process the information and take into account the impact of listening fatigue.
- All audio/visual material should be **captioned** in line with the Accessibility Guidelines (World Wide Web Consortium, 2018) to allow for full access.
- If a student is still not able to access all of the information, a **live speaker** who reads from a transcript could be used. This would enable the student to access lip-reading for clarification and repetition. If there is more than one speaker then this should be reflected in the use of a live speaker/s e.g., two speakers/male/female/voices.
- If a student is unable to access the auditory assessment with any of the above adjustments, then an **alternative task** should be used.
- **Extra time and rest breaks** will be required if there is a live speaker or if audio/visual material needs to be reviewed.
- For assessment that involves watching **multimedia**, both **captions and a transcript** should be provided. Contact the Victorian Deaf Education Institute (VDEI) Caption Centre:
<https://www.deafeducation.vic.edu.au/services/VDEICaptionCentre>
- In assessments for students who use **Auslan**, an **Auslan interpreter** should be used or an alternative task provided.

Resources

- A bank of suitable audio-visual materials should be developed to enable students with hearing loss to access listening components for language exams.
- EAL practice audio-visual materials are available at
<https://www.deafeducation.vic.edu.au/Pages/YarraValleyVideos.aspx>

Assessments in Music

“Both modern hearing aids and cochlear implants are programmed primarily to make speech clearer. Speech and music have many differences including intensity, different frequencies, and frequency emphasis. Musical instruments typically have a much greater dynamic range and frequency range than speech.

This means that hearing aids and cochlear implants do not reproduce music exactly, and that a deaf or hard of hearing person may not experience music in the same way as a hearing person.

A single talker, singer or instrument is often easier for hearing aid or cochlear implant wearers to follow. Due to the limitations of hearing devices, it is more difficult for wearers to follow multiple instruments.

Modern hearing aids have multiple program capability and it is possible to add a program for music which alters the gain and output of the hearing aid, ensuring the volume of the device remains comfortable and therefore improving the listener’s experience of music” (National Deaf Children’s Society, n.d.).

Students may struggle to distinguish between instruments that are playing solo, or concurrently. Some instruments may be inaudible if presented at low volumes. Students should check with their audiologist whether adjustments can be made to the programming of their assistive technology.

For cochlear implant users, sound interpretation is different. Thousands of tiny hair cells, which detect sound and are crucial in conveying messages to the brain, are replaced by an electrode inserted into the cochlea. This electrode transfers information to the brain, but frequencies need to be compressed to fit the limited 22 channels of the electrode array. Frequencies are adjusted and distortions usually occur. A cochlear implant wearer has considerably less than perfect hearing, and will require access to Special Provisions.

Audio recordings can lose information with the sound quality of speech and instrumental sounds being distorted. This makes it difficult for students using assistive technology to access audio, especially during assessments.

VCE Listening Exams, including Languages, EAL English and Music

For these assessments, the following provisions are recommended and need to be requested in the application form:

Preparation for the Exam

- Students should be given the opportunity to **trial the equipment** that will be used to play the audio/visual presentation with captioning in the relevant language e.g., laptop, tablet, whiteboard, TV, amplifier. They should be provided with alternatives so they can decide which equipment provides the best sound for them.
- If a music program has been added to the student's personal assistive technology, the student should have an opportunity to **ensure the program is providing improved access**.
- Students should be able to **practise** for the exam using this equipment.
- If the student **cannot** consistently and accurately access the listening exam, or components of the listening assessment, access to a live speaker, or an audio/visual presentation with **captions** and **Auslan interpreters** (if appropriate) should be requested well in advance.
- Identify a **separate room** with appropriate lighting, good acoustics and minimal reverberation, away from other classrooms and noise sources. The SoundOut Room Acoustics App can be used to determine rooms with suitable acoustics.
- Schools should ensure that they request **an additional recording** for the student with hearing loss, working in a separate room.
- **Backup** equipment should be readily accessible.
- **Supervisors** should be identified well before the exam and have contact with the Teacher of the Deaf in order to **familiarise** themselves with the approved provisions before the exam.
- If an Auslan **interpreter** is used, this person will require **prior access** to preview the material.
- If a Roger system is used, a splitter with multiple inputs and extra sets of headphones are required for the supervisor and clarifier.
- Students will need to **enter the exam room early** to ensure that the equipment is set to their specific needs.

During the Exam

The student should be permitted to:

- **change the volume** and the balance of the sound on the equipment being used
- **use additional** appropriate personal listening **technology** preferred by the student, apart from hearing aids, cochlear implants and bone anchored hearing aids (BAHAs)
- **choose when to use their extra time** as requested (e.g., for reading, writing, listening and/or for processing segments of the audio/visual presentation)
- **pause the listening task** when required, to process what they have heard and take notes
- **replay sections** of the audio/visual presentation as often as needed
Note: currently language examination papers state: "Each text will be played twice. There will be a short break between the first and second playings of each text. You may make notes at any time. Listen carefully to each text and then answer the following questions."
- determine when **rest breaks** occur

Panel Assessments (e.g. for live assessments in Languages, Theatre Studies, Music, Dance)

- **Panel members** must be informed of a student's hearing loss and mode of communication, and made aware the student may be unfamiliar with the voices of panel members. This can make listening and speechreading/lipreading more challenging.
- The student may ask to have **questions repeated and/or rephrased**. There should be no penalty if it is necessary for the student to ask clarifying questions or confirm what is heard.
- Rephrasing the statement or question may be necessary as certain words contain sounds that are not visible by lipreading or accessible with their particular hearing profile.
- Students with hearing loss may be unfamiliar with non-subject specific vocabulary. By **substituting different words**, the intended meaning may be more readily conveyed.
- Panel members will need to **face the student** when they are asking questions and speak at an appropriate pace.

- Panel members should provide **visual cues** prior to a new or different panel member speaking, as the student may lose vital visual cues as they attempt to localise the speaker.
- The student may use their assistive listening device/s throughout the assessment. It is important to be aware that hearing devices amplify all sounds. It is essential to ensure that **background noise** is limited.
- Allow the student to select the **optimum seating position** for seeing all panel members clearly and for listening.
- Ensure that the student can clearly see both **the interpreter** and panel members.

VCE Written Exams

For these assessments, the following provisions are recommended when needed:

- Clarifiers
- Auslan interpreters
- Extra time and rest breaks
- Assistive technology
- Separate room

Students with a scribe or a clarifier need to use a separate room. If a separate room is required for another reason, an application is required.

“It is the school’s responsibility to plan appropriate **seating arrangements** in an external assessment so a student who is deaf or hard of hearing can clearly see the chief supervisor and follow any communications and messages during an external assessment” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 146).

Clarifiers

Clarifiers should complete a training session to ensure the process is robust and equitable.

Compared to typically hearing peers, students with hearing loss are impacted by the cumulative long-term effects of missed language exposure. They often do not have the same access to explicit language (explanations, questions, directions), incidental language learning and knowledge acquisition that underpins the language learning of other students. This is due to the limitations of their hearing and technology when distance, background noise, reverberation or multiple conversations occur at the same time.

Students with hearing loss often need support to comprehend the language of the curriculum and the formal language of exams, especially when they are required to access and/or demonstrate their learning. This language needs to be explicitly taught

but students with hearing loss will need greater exposure to this language than their hearing peers.

Students need to be taught how to work with a clarifier and practise this regularly in the classroom. This knowledge is essential to be able to effectively utilise a clarifier in assessment situations.

Clarifying may take the form of repeating, rephrasing, explaining and/or simplifying complex language in questions and passages that require decoding, in order to enable the student to respond to the assessment. Clarifying may be presented orally or in Auslan, depending on the student's mode of communication. In order to demonstrate knowledge of the subject, e.g., historical concepts, scientific variables, or mathematical processes, the carrier language of the question should not cloud or confuse the student. Carrier language refers to the specific vocabulary, grammatical structures, figurative and/or colloquial expressions used to ask or pose the assessment question. It is the language used to frame the question.

Example of exam question clarification:

Complex Sentences

Exam question If a student were provided with three painted metal rods, one of which was known to be made from brass, one from magnetised steel and one from non-magnetised steel, describe how, without scratching the paint, the student could identify each of the rods?	Redraft A student has three painted metal rods. One is made from brass, one from magnetised steel and one from non-magnetised steel. Describe how the student could find out which rod is which, without scratching the paint?
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Can the redraft be improved?

A student has three painted metal rods.

- One is made from brass
- One is made from magnetised steel
- One is made from non-magnetised steel

The student is not allowed to scratch the paint on the rods.

Explain how the student could find out what each rod is made of

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(Adapted from Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors, 2019, p. 5)

To ensure the student is confident to ask for clarification and is not disadvantaged by being unfamiliar with the lip patterns and intonation or signing of the clarifier, the person should be known to the student. The clarifier should be a familiar communication partner with the student, for example the support teacher or Visiting Teacher. This standard should also be applied to readers and scribes.

“The person appointed as a scribe should have a facility for English and a familiarity with the VCE study being examined” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 135). In order to create consistency across provisions, the clarifier should also be familiar with the specific language of the subject being examined. This is to ensure that subject-specific vocabulary is not clarified.

The clarifier should be permitted to access the examination paper up to one hour prior to the start of the examination to enable identification of subject specific language and consider where clarification may be necessary.

Role of the Clarifier

“For students who are deaf or hard of hearing, clarification is restricted to:

- definition of one or more words in a question. However, the clarifier must not define any words or terms that are ‘study specific’ or subject-related
- provision of alternative words to those words in the question. Again, the clarifier must not offer alternatives for ‘study specific’ words or terms
- breaking complex sentences down into more manageable parts”
(Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 136)

“A request for a clarifier for a student who is deaf or hard of hearing is unlikely to be approved if the student does not regularly use a clarifier or is not enrolled with the Visiting Teacher Service or a deaf and hard of hearing facility or school”
(Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 146).

If a Clarifier is approved, “the appointed clarifier may work with the student during any practice examinations” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 136).

Clarifier Examination Notes

To be given to the clarifier and the supervisor at the beginning of the exam

- “Clarification can occur during reading and writing time” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 136).
- During reading and writing time “the student and clarifier are permitted to write the clarification on the examination question/task book” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 136).
- “...the clarifier must not define any words or terms that are ‘study specific’ or subject-related” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 136).
- Ensure that the approved adjustments are clearly understood by the student, clarifier and supervisor.
- Ensure that the exam times and rest breaks are clearly written/displayed.
- Record the questions, phrases and rewording requested by the student – this is useful feedback to subject teachers.

- For the General Achievement test (GAT), English and English as an Additional Language (EAL) – an English and/or bilingual printed dictionary may be used including during reading time.
- Ensure that the clarifier’s Statutory Declaration is completed and provided to the school.

If a **Clarifier** is approved for the student, this person must be **familiar** with the **subject-specific language**.

“If a student is granted permission by the VCAA to use a clarifier, their school must ensure a copy of the clarifier instruction document (available on VASS) relevant to the impairment/disorder is given to the supervisor and the clarifier. It is the supervisor’s responsibility to ensure that the instructions are followed.

The supervisor, in addition to the clarifier, must be present in the examination room and monitor all interactions between the clarifier and the student.

If the use of a clarifier is approved, extra working time at a rate of ten minutes per hour of writing time will be approved” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 136, emphasis added).

Auslan Interpreters

Auslan interpreters are key components in education. “Accurate, competent and ethical interpretation ensures that deaf students are able to participate fully in education and that education providers are able to accurately evaluate student performance” (Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association, 2011, p. 5).

Auslan interpreters provide communication that is vital to enable students, who use Auslan as their first or primary language, to understand instructions and have equal access to the exam.

“It is critical for the educational interpreter to understand the student’s language skills and modify the classroom language to ensure that the student understands the concepts while conveying the message accurately” (Schick, n.d.).

It is essential that the interpreter understand classroom objectives well...to support the educational team” (Schick, n.d.).

“A person appointed as an interpreter should:

- be fluent in both English and Auslan
- have a familiarity with the subject matter being examined
- have patience and sensitivity to the student’s requirements
- remain impartial and objective and respect confidentiality” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 137).
- be a familiar communication partner with the student

Sometimes Auslan interpreters have acted as clarifiers. There should be a separate Auslan interpreter and clarifier provided as needed. Auslan interpreters must not be expected to voice at the same time as they are signing to the student. This results in English-like signing and therefore the adjustment of Auslan interpreting is negated. If the supervisor needs to know what the interpreter has signed, the conversation between the two must occur after the interpreter has finished working with the student.

The Auslan interpreter must not act in the role of a supervisor.

“The role of the interpreter is to facilitate communication between the student and the supervisor, or between the supervisor, the student, and the reader, scribe and/or clarifier” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 137).

“Educational interpreters should convey the message and intent of the teacher at the language level which is appropriate and challenging for the student (Schick, n.d.).

The interpreter must sign in Auslan everything that is spoken and voice in English everything that is signed, so that the student is able to participate fully and equally in the test/examination.

“Interpreters cannot add or omit information or modify the original message. Interpreters cannot assist the student with their work, including advising or prompting for answers” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 137).

The Auslan interpreter needs to be able to understand what a student is signing and communicate this to the clarifier and supervisor. Inability to accurately convey all communication will result in frustrations and stress, which will impact on the student’s confidence and ability to complete the exam.

In many subject areas there are no universally accepted Auslan signs. In some educational settings, interpreters and students agree upon signs for use in particular subjects to assist understanding. An Auslan interpreter unfamiliar with the student, the setting and/or the subject matter will be unfamiliar with these signs. Using fingerspelling rather than the sign may increase cognitive load for the student.

The Auslan interpreter should be permitted to access the examination paper up to one hour before the start of the examination in order to familiarise him/herself with the content so extra copies of the examination paper need to be requested for this purpose. During this time the Auslan interpreter must remain strictly supervised and may not communicate with the student or any other person.

If the student is using an Auslan interpreter, they should automatically be granted extra time.

Extra time is allowed for the time in which a student engages with the Auslan interpreter.

Auslan Interpreters should complete a training session to ensure the process is robust and equitable.

Extra Time and Rest Breaks

Students with hearing loss need to work harder than their peers to process information and as a result can experience high levels of fatigue. Therefore, they may require extra time and/or rest breaks.

- Students who meet the criteria for Special Provisions because of hearing loss will automatically be given extra time. This special provision should be requested for reading, processing the language of the question and formulating a written response.
- There is frequently a difference in the extra time provided for mathematics. Extra time should be requested for mathematics to allow for processing of the language of mathematics and text-based questions.
- If a clarifier is approved, extra working time will be approved.
- If an Auslan interpreter is requested, then extra time should also be requested.
- “The VCAA will consider requests for additional time in excess of 10 minutes per hour ... where it can be clearly demonstrated, through professional and/or school-based evidence, that there is a compelling need for the additional time.
- Extra working time approved by the VCAA is to be used in addition to the ‘scheduled writing time’ of the VCE external assessment” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 143).
- **For students who don’t meet the criteria** of having a moderate/severe/profound sensorineural or conductive hearing loss, then extra evidence is required. This may include:
 - a reading comprehension test
 - a timed essay and an essay written for a School Assessed Coursework (SAC) or exam
 - teacher feedback on the functional impact of the student’s hearing loss and their ability to access assessments

“If a school plans to submit an application for Special Examination Arrangements requesting additional time for a student with a long-term condition it is important for the school to initially trial this arrangement during classroom activities. At the same time the VCAA strongly recommends schools contact VCAA Special Provision team to discuss the student’s history and the appropriateness of this type of provision before an application is submitted, preferably well before the student begins studies at senior secondary level” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 127).

Timetabling should be carefully considered as students may struggle to do their best in exams and SACs that are run consecutively.

If a student with hearing loss has more than one VCE exam in a day with extra time allocated in the first exam, it is recommended that the VCAA is contacted to ensure that a sufficient break is scheduled between the exams.

Assistive technology in VCE exams

Except for hearing aids and cochlear implants, you must make an application to use assistive hearing technology in VCE exams.

“If specific technological devices, such as the Microlink assistive technology, are required, these should be requested in the application” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 146).

Requests can include, but are not limited to: Roger Inspiro, Roger Touchscreen, Roger Pen, Roger EasyPen, Miniclip or Roger Select and an ear level receiver or streamer - Mylink, MiniTek, EasyTek, MiniMic or the use of Bluetooth technology with a specific device.

APPLYING FOR SPECIAL PROVISIONS

Possible Adjustments

The following adjustments *may* be required for your student:

- Separate room with appropriate acoustics (minimal reverberation and background noise as confirmed by a result in the 'Acceptable' category in the SoundOut Room Acoustics App)
- Separate supervisor
- Clarifier/Reader
- Auslan Interpreter
- Use of personal listening technology
- Permission to alter volume of the recording if used
- Extra time
- Rest Breaks
- Audio/visual presentation of listening assessment (to provide visual cues)
- Alternative audio items for NAPLAN online
- Ability to stop to make note of what was heard (without penalty)
- Closed captioning
- Audio/visual speaker with understandable diction and lip patterns that are visible
- Early opening of the exam paper for the clarifier and/or Auslan interpreter

Providing Evidence

When applying for Special Provisions for students with hearing loss, requests need to be specific and detailed.

“The VCAA requires the following evidence to support an application for Special Examination Arrangements for a student who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- **a recent unaided audiogram and report** from a qualified practitioner (for example, an ear, nose and throat specialist or audiologist) indicating a bilateral sensorineural hearing loss and/or conductive hearing loss that is moderate, severe or profound
- **a support statement** with comments and recommendations from a specialist teacher, along with confirmation of the student's enrolment in either the Visiting Teacher Service or a deaf facility or school.

If this evidence is not available, the VCAA may contact the student's school to request other educational and testing information” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 146).

A statement from a Cochlear Implant Clinic is also acceptable if a recent audiogram is not available.

Not all students who are funded under the Department of Education and Training Program for Students with Disabilities are eligible for special provisions.

For students who don't meet the moderate/severe/profound sensorineural or conductive hearing loss criteria, extra evidence is required.

This could include the results of a reading test and timed essay as described for Specific Learning Disorders by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2021b, pp.141–142).

The support statement should:

- explain how hearing loss has a functional impact on learning.
- explain the support that has been provided by a Teacher of the Deaf and specify the importance of having access to a Teacher of the Deaf.
- outline the provisions which are given in class and when completing assessments. Explain how the special arrangements assist the student. Link these to the requests you have asked for in the application.
- explain any other supports in place, for example, parent support groups, audiologists, etc.

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS

Listening Exams

If applying for special provisions for listening exams, include:

- the functional impact of hearing loss on listening
- sounds that the student is unable to discriminate in English because of their specific hearing loss
- the different conditions that have been trialled and the student's preferred condition

For students who **don't** meet the moderate criteria, **additional evidence** is required. This could include:

- a functional listening evaluation e.g., Recorded Functional Listening Evaluation (FLE) (Johnson, C.D., 2010, rev.), BKB (Bench-Kowal-Bamford) sentences (Bench et al., 1987), AB word lists (Boothroyd, 1968)
- TAPs (Test of Auditory Processing Skills) auditory memory, auditory comprehension, auditory reasoning sections (Martin, Brownell & Hamaguchi, 2018)
- OWLS (Oral and Written Language Scales) Listening Comprehension section (Carrow-Woolfolk, 2011)

Using a Clarifier

If applying for a clarifier include:

- why a student with hearing loss requires a clarifier
- if a clarifier has been used by the school previously
- that the student is enrolled in the Visiting Teacher Service or a deaf facility or school
- a request for extra time
- a request for early opening of the exam paper for the clarifier which can also be used during the exam as a reference for questions that may be asked

For students who **don't** meet the bilateral moderate criteria, **additional evidence** is required. This could include:

- Examples of when clarifying has been needed at school and examples of the type of words and phrases clarified
- Reading comprehension assessment e.g., YARC (York Assessment of Reading Comprehension) (Snowling, Stothard Clarke, Bowyer-Crane, Harrington, Truelove, ... Hulme, 2012)

- Language assessments – OWLS – Listening Comprehension and Oral Expression), CASL (Comprehension Assessment of Spoken Language) Complex language sections (Carrow-Woolfolk, 2011)

There is a need to show that the student’s language levels and comprehension are significantly below their peers (more than 1.5 standard deviations below).

Using an Auslan Interpreter

If applying for an Auslan interpreter include:

- why the student requires an Auslan interpreter
- if an Auslan interpreter is used at school
- that the student is enrolled in the Visiting Teacher Service or deaf facility or school
- a request for extra time
- a request for early opening of the exam paper for the Auslan interpreter which is also available for the interpreter to refer to during the exam. This would enable the interpreter to become familiar with the questions and prompts during times they were not interpreting, therefore interpreting a question more effectively and accurately.

Extra Time and Rest Breaks

If applying for extra time include why the student requires extra reading time or processing time.

For students who **don’t** meet the bilateral moderate criteria, **additional evidence** is required.

If **extra time is required for reading**, follow the information for specific learning disorders:

“The test should be:

- silent reading comprehension (this reflects the silent reading conditions of an examination)
- timed
- published with Australian norms”
(Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 141).

“The purpose of such a reading test is to establish if a student’s reading level is significantly below what is expected of an average Year 12 student” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 141).

“The current prescribed reading test is Progressive Achievement Test in Reading (PAT-R) published by ACER. The VCAA will accept results from the Comprehension Booklet 10 (edition 4 or 5)” (Stephanou, Anderson, & Urbach, 2008); (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 141).

“Evidence of a student’s reading comprehension skills must be based on a test administered no earlier than the year the student commences the VCE or Term 4 of the year prior” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 141).

“The results of the York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC) or other reading tests administered, if available, can be submitted by schools as additional evidence” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 141).

If **extra time is required for writing** then applications must include two handwritten essays administered at the school under test conditions.

Essay One

“The topic for this essay will be supplied by the VCAA and must be completed according to the following conditions:

- strictly five minutes’ reading time and 30 minutes’ writing time are to be provided
- no special provisions to be used for this essay”
(Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 142).

Essay Two

- “This essay should be a copy of a handwritten English or Literature essay from an assessment that the student has recently completed (within six months) at school:
- It must have been for either a School-based Assessment or a school examination,
- have had a writing time of at least one hour duration.
- with Special Provision permitted”
(Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 142).

If applying for **rest breaks**, provide details as to why the student has a higher level of fatigue than other students.

If **extra time is required for mathematics** this can be requested.

“The following evidence is required in support of applications for Special Examination Arrangements for an impairment in mathematics or requests for extra writing time for mathematics examinations on the basis of a deficit in written expression:

- examples of mathematics assessments completed at school by the student – with and/or without special provisions, detailing any provisions utilised by the student and time taken
- study specific teacher observations of student difficulties during assessments and in class” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 143).

SCHOOL RESPONSIBILITIES

“Schools are responsible for identifying who may be eligible for special provision for both School-based Assessments and VCE examinations” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 130).

- “Schools must consider individual student’s circumstances, any existing special provisions for classroom learning and/or School-based Assessments, teacher observations and professional evidence when determining what Special Examination Arrangements to apply for” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 130).
- Show the history of provisions, for example, what specific words or phrases have been clarified for the student. This could be tracked via a shared Google doc on each student. It is important to provide examples.
- “Schools must ensure a copy of any approved Special Examination Arrangements are distributed to the student, relevant school personnel (i.e., VCE Coordinator) and the examination chief supervisor” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 131).
- “School personnel must ensure there is a common understanding between the school, student and supervisor as to precisely what any approved Special Examination Arrangements entail” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 131).

Early Applications

“Early engagement and application

The VCAA encourages schools to engage with the VCAA as early as possible to discuss any issues relating to managing students completing secondary level studies (Years 7–12) who may be eligible for or require special provision.

Through the early application process schools can apply for pre-approval for Special Examination Arrangements for a student’s future VCE Unit 3–4 external assessments, for chronic or ‘long-term’ conditions.

Where the student’s condition is considered to be acute or episodic in nature, schools may apply for provisional approval. Should the arrangement still be required when the student first enrolls in a Unit 3–4 sequence, updated evidence will be required.

Schools are encouraged to trial arrangements prior to submitting an application.

The school is responsible for informing the VCAA of the student’s Unit 3–4 external assessments, to which pre-approved arrangements will be applied. The VCAA will provide schools with the means to facilitate this process” (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021b, p. 129).

NAPLAN

The National Protocols for Test Administration – NAPLAN Online (2020a) states “Where disability impacts on access to the tests, reasonable adjustments may be granted to facilitate access to all or some of the tests” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 17).

“Adjustments should reflect the kind of support and assistance provided for assessment in the classroom in order for students to demonstrate what they know and can do, noting that adjustments that are appropriate in a learning environment may not be appropriate in an assessment environment” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 17).

“A student may have access to more than one adjustment in any one test and different adjustments may be appropriate for different tests” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 17).

Adjustments available for students with hearing loss are:

- the use of a NAPLAN support person
- signed communication
- extra time
- rest breaks
- alternative audio items for NAPLAN online

NAPLAN Online

The Handbook for Principals - NAPLAN Online 2021 outlines some of the adjustments that may be provided (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2021a, pp.17–21). These include:

- the use of NAPLAN support person (DAC code SUP)
- rest breaks (DAC code RBK)
- extra time:
 - one minute for every six minutes of test time (DAC code ETA)
 - one minute for every three minutes of test time (DAC code ETB)
 - one minute for every two minutes of test time (DAC code ETC)
 - double total test time (DAC code ETD)
- oral/signed support (OSS)
plus
- Alternative items – the audio Platform will swap audio items for alternatives if alternative items are defined for this DAC (DAC code AIA)
(Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2021a, Appendix 1, pp. 54–55)

If students are sitting NAPLAN assessments in a separate room, ensure the support person has the ability to pause the assessment if needed for rest breaks or extra time as required.

NAPLAN Support Person

“A NAPLAN support person is permitted only for those students with disability (including a temporary disability such as a broken arm) who experience difficulty in accessing the tests by any other adjustments available, including the ‘use of a computer’ (for example, due to fine motor difficulty), or who usually use such a support person to participate in classroom assessments” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 21).

“A NAPLAN support person may be permitted for students with disability to:

- assist with access to the reading, conventions of language and numeracy tests, for example by clicking on or dragging answers indicated by the student, or typing short responses or answers dictated by the student for the tests (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021b, p. 23)
- provide access to the test by logging in for the student
- read aloud only those elements of the test that can be read to all students” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority 2021b, p. 23).

“Prompting, interpreting, or paraphrasing etc. are practices that are strictly prohibited” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021b, p. 23).

Oral/Sign Support

“Students who are deaf, hard of hearing or have a hearing impairment may access oral or signed communication (for example, Auslan).

The support person must be a skilled and familiar communication partner with the student and is permitted to read or sign the instructions in all tests.

Signing is permitted only for those sections of the tests that can be read to all students” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p.25).

Special Provisions should be discussed at student support meetings with parents, teachers, Visiting Teachers and other professionals involved with the student.

Assistive Technology

If headphones are required, students should use their Roger system with the transmitter connected via an audio cable to the headphone socket of the device they are using. If the AIA code is used, headphones are not needed.

Extra Time and Rest Breaks

“Extra time may be provided for students with disability who usually require additional time to complete assessment tasks” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 24).

Online – “extra time ...may also be provided for students with disability who are accessing assistive technology where the logistics of use increase time taken and/or physical effort, to access test materials or interact with the platform” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021b, p. 24).

“It is recommended that no more than five minutes of extra time per half hour of test time be granted; however, depending on the level of disability, a longer time may be needed” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 24).

“Rest breaks may be provided for students with disabilities who need regular breaks when completing assessment tasks” (Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 24).

“Where relevant, rest breaks can be used as an alternative to extra time to avoid student fatigue, although there will be instances where both adjustments are necessary” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021a, p. 24).

“Granting of extra time as a disability adjustment must be recorded in the platform by adding the appropriate DAC (disability adjustment codes) to the student’s profile prior to the relevant test(s)” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021b, p. 33).

Principals’ Responsibilities

National Protocols for Test Administration – NAPLAN Online 2021, states that “the principal must:

- ensure a range of strategies, including personalised education plans and the NAPLAN Online public demonstration site, has been used to identify adjustments required by students with disability and, where necessary, apply in writing to the relevant TAA for permission and/or alternative formats, according to the timelines set by the TAA (Test Administration Authority)
- ensure that parents/carers are informed about, and have agreed to, the nature of the adjustment(s) the student will receive
- document all adjustment arrangements and ensure disability access codes (DAC) are uploaded to the platform, and keep a record of these for audit purposes
- make arrangements at the school level to provide students with disability with the adjustments they require
- comply with the TAA requirements for requesting and recording adjustments provided by the school
- ensure that the test administrator supervising the test has a thorough understanding of the students’ requirements, as well as protocols related to adjustments and their administration” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2021b, p. 18).

CONTACTS

Department of Education and Training

For more information on supporting students with hearing loss, contact the Visiting Teacher Service Manager in your region.

North Eastern Victoria Region, Email: nevr@education.vic.gov.au

Phone: 1300 333 231

North Western Victoria Region, Email: nwvr@education.vic.gov.au

Phone: 1300 338 691

South Eastern Victoria Region, Email: sevr@education.vic.gov.au

Phone: 1300 333 231

South Western Victoria Region, Email: swvr@education.vic.gov.au

Phone: 1300 333 232

Catholic Education Victoria

For more information contact the Visiting Teacher/Learning Consultant (Hearing Impairment) in your region.

Catholic Education Office Ballarat, Phone: (03) 5337 7135

Catholic Education Office Sale, Phone: (03) 5622 6600

Catholic Education Office Sandhurst, Phone: (03) 5443 2377

Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (MACS)

Head Office, Phone: (03) 9627 0228

Northern Regional Office, Phone: (03) 8387 3200

Eastern Regional Office, Phone: (03) 9427 6400

Western Regional Office, Phone: (03) 8412 2400

Southern Regional Office, Phone: (03) 8301 7400

Independent Schools Victoria

For more information about Visiting Teacher services contact:
Manager, Student Services, Phone: (03) 9825 7200

For information about Special Provisions for NAPLAN

contact: vcaa.naplan.help@education.vic.gov.au

For information about Special Provisions for VCE

contact: vcaa.special.provision@education.vic.gov.au

For information about students with disability

See: www.education.gov.au/students-disability

For information regarding the Visiting Teacher Service, Deaf Facilities and Schools for the Deaf

See:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/learningneeds/Pages/visiting-teachers.aspx>

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/parents/additional-needs/Pages/hearing-school-support.aspx>

<http://vden.vic.edu.au/>

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