

# Suggested Process for Assessing Students for Special Assessment Conditions

for Psychologists and Level C Assessors

### Collect Background Information

- 1) Review developmental history.
- 2) Review academic history and interventions provided previously. Include any history of:
  - Reading Recovery
  - Teacher Aide Time
  - Private Tutoring
  - Speech/Language Therapy
  - RTLB
  - RTLiT
  - Reader
  - Computer Or Writer
  - Extra Time
- 3) Request information from school if possible. Information should include the functional use of Special Assessment Conditions already being trialed, and school-based assessment results. School-based assessments will allow you to compare results and support the validity of your assessment. Students may only be able to provide general information about the types of support they have been accessing and what they believe works well for them. However, gathering student voice is important.

### Complete a Cognitive Assessment

- 1) A full battery assessment is required to enable the assessor to evaluate a candidate's strengths and weaknesses. NZQA suggest the WISC-V or the WJIV assessment. On the WISC-V a minimum of 10 subtests should be administered to the student. Calculate the Index and Full-scale scores. Add additional subtests as indicated (for example, some assessors choose to administer the Comprehension subtest).

On the WJIV you will need to administer a minimum of 7 tests of Cognitive Abilities for a GIA standard (General Intellectual Ability score) or all the subtests for the GIA extended. If the GIA standard is obtained, rather than the GIA extension, you will also need to administer additional tests to obtain the following:



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- Processing Speed cluster score (letter-pattern matching, pair cancellation).
- Fluid Reasoning cluster score (number series, concept formation and analysis-synthesis).
- Working Memory cluster score (verbal attention, numbers reversed, object-number sequencing).
- Cognitive Efficiency cluster score (verbal attention, letter-pattern matching, number reversed and number pattern matching).
- Short Term Working Memory (visual attention, numbers reversed, object-number sequencing).
- Cognitive Processing Speed (letter pattern matching, pair cancellation).
- Long Term Retrieval (story recall, visual-auditory learning).

2) I find it is helpful to include both percentile scores and standard scores in the body of the report.

### **Complete an Assessment of Academic Skills**

1) Consider which tools are required. You will need to be able to compare cognitive and academic achievement at a basic level to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the student's academic and cognitive skills. This is required to assess whether the student presents with a Specific Learning Disorder (SLD).

For WIAT III users it is suggested that as a minimum the Word Reading and the Spelling subtests are administered, however you can utilise other assessment tools to supplement these. These may include the YARC (York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension) or the DRA (Diagnostic Reading Analysis). Both these assessments are available from NZCER.

If completing a comprehensive WIAT-III assessment it would be important to include at least the following subtests:

- Listening Comprehension/Oral Expression.
- Reading Comprehension, Word Reading (and if indicated Pseudoword Reading and Oral Reading Fluency) – i.e. Either Basic Reading or Total Reading.
- Spelling.
- Written Expression may also be useful but given that the PATOSS is required it may be redundant.

For WJ users you will need to obtain cluster scores for broad reading (if a reader is requested) and/or a broad written language score if a computer or writer is requested.

BROAD Reading.

BROAD Written Language. (This assessor, who is not a current WJ user, understands that a basic written language score would include tests of editing and spelling, but this is insufficient for applications for computer or writer.)

BROAD Oral Language may also be useful.

- 2) Administer other assessments that are necessary. The primary area where assessment is required include:

Writing Speed – NZQA require the PATOSS writing and typing assessment. If requesting a writer, it is suggested that a sample of work dictated to a scribe could also be completed. (Some of these could be completed by the student's school).

Other commonly used handwriting assessments not recommended for SAC applications: *The Handwriting Speed Test, Dyslexia Screening Assessment do not require the student to write for long enough and work is not self-generated, so are not often useful to the application. It is suggested that the DASH (while a valid assessment) is not consistent with the PATOSS, and using this as an alternative may be setting up students and families to expect writer/computer when the student does not meet the criteria on the PATOSS (Which NZQA require schools to submit with all applications for computer/writer or extra time of slow writing).*

- 3) To be able to confidently complete the declaration form you may need to be able to comment on additional areas (and you may wish to identify further assessments/subtests to achieve this), especially if your decision is not clear cut.

### Conduct a Profile Analysis

- 1) If there is **not** a persistent and enduring weakness (previously referred to as a statistically significant difference) between cognitive and academic achievement the student is **not** eligible for Special Assessment Conditions.
- 2) Refer to the Special Assessment Conditions available for Specific Learning Disabilities to assist in making your suggestions (<http://www.NZQA.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/special-assessment-conditions/info-for-parents-and-caregivers/conditions-available/>)

Special Assessment Conditions Available to students assessed by an educational psychologist:

#### Reader

The criteria are as follows:

Reader: demonstrated at least two of the following:

- Persistent and enduring weakness in Reading Comprehension, when Listening Comprehension is average or above
- Persistent and enduring weakness in Reading Speed of Text
- Persistent and enduring weakness in Reading Accuracy
- Persistent and enduring weakness in the Speed of Reading Comprehension

AND Overall reading age is below a functional adult level which is approximately 12 years.

#### Writer/Computer

Use the PATOSS data to determine whether a writer or additional time is indicated. The piece of written work should be written in an academic style, rather than a piece on "my family" or "what I did in the holidays". This is because it gives the student the ability to indicate their potential to achieve. The following are required:

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Prepared for IEDP workshop on 06/06/2018. (Based on previous workshops by this psychologist - updated)

Writer/Computer recommended because:

- The PATOSS result is 40% or more slower for year group.
- OR Medical diagnosis proves need for writer or computer and has used computer successfully previously.
- OR Legibility of handwriting makes it mainly illegible for someone who is unfamiliar with it.

OR

Writer/Computer recommended because applicant demonstrated in testing a statistically significant weakness in at least **two** of the following:

- Spelling makes handwriting unable to be understood.
- The PATOSS result is 25% or more slower for year group.
- Persistent and enduring weakness in their Written Expression, when compared to Oral Comprehension.

#### Extra Time

A student may be eligible for extra time when they are not eligible for a reader/writer or use of a computer:

Extra time is recommended because:

The PATOSS result is 25% or more slower for their year group.

OR

Extra time recommended because applicant demonstrated, in assessment, a significant difficulty in at least **two** of the following:

- Persistent and enduring weakness in Processing Speed
- Persistent and enduring weakness in Reading Speed
- Persistent and enduring weakness, in Reading Comprehension Speed
- Persistent and enduring weakness in Working Memory
- Persistent and enduring weakness in Speed Of Lexical Access

Note: Extra time is not to be recommended if a Reader or a Writer or Computer is recommended to alleviate slowness in that particular skill.

#### Extra time in addition to any combination of Computer or Writer or Reader

- This is **only** to be recommended when the persistent and enduring weaknesses above are below 10th percentile.
- Show caution when suggesting extra time in addition to computer/writer and/or reader.

#### **Confirm a Specific Learning Disorder**

DSM V outlines four clear criteria that should be met for a diagnosis of a Specific Learning Disorder. These are as follows:

- Criterion A refers to the key characteristics of SLD (at least one of six symptoms of learning difficulties that have persisted for at least 6 months despite the provision of extra help or targeted instruction).

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- Difficulty reading (e.g., inaccurate, slow and only with much effort)
  - Difficulty understanding the meaning of what is read
  - Difficulty with spelling
  - Difficulty with written expression (e.g., problems with grammar, punctuation or organisation)
  - Difficulty understanding number concepts, number facts or calculation
  - Difficulty with mathematical reasoning (e.g., applying math concepts or solving math problems)
- Criterion B refers to measurement of those characteristics (the affected academic skills are substantially and quantifiably below those expected for age and cause impairment in academic, occupational, or everyday activities, as confirmed by individually administered standardised achievement measures and comprehensive clinical assessment).
  - Criterion C refers to age at onset of problems (during the school-age years, although may not fully manifest until young adulthood in some individuals), and
  - Criterion D specifies which disorders (Intellectual Disabilities, uncorrected auditory or visual/ acuity problems, other mental or neurological disorders) or adverse conditions (psychosocial adversity, lack of proficiency in the language of instruction, inadequate instruction) must be ruled out before a diagnosis of SLD can be confirmed.

The following describe the updated 2013 DSM-5 diagnostic subtypes of Specific Learning Disorder:

1) **Specific learning disorder with impairment in reading** includes possible 'deficits' in:

- Word reading accuracy
- Reading rate or fluency
- Reading comprehension

This has previously been described as dyslexia.

Note: Dyslexia is an alternative term, used to describe a pattern of learning difficulties characterised by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding and poor spelling abilities.

(DSM-5 diagnostic code 315.00.)

2) **Specific learning disorder with impairment in written expression** includes possible 'deficits' in:

- Spelling accuracy
- Grammar and punctuation accuracy
- Clarity or organisation of written expression

This was formerly known as dysgraphia.

(DSM-5 diagnostic code 315.2.)

**Specific learning disorder with impairment in mathematics** includes possible 'deficits' in:

- Number sense
- Memorisation of arithmetic facts
- Accurate or fluent calculation
- Accurate math reasoning

This was formerly known as dyscalculia.

(DSM-5 diagnostic code 315.1.)

Specific learning disorder can vary in severity:

- Mild: Some difficulties with learning in one or two academic areas, but may be able to compensate
- Moderate: Significant difficulties with learning, requiring some specialised teaching and some accommodations or supportive services
- Severe: Severe difficulties with learning, affecting several academic areas and requiring ongoing intensive specialised teaching

### **Important Considerations:**

- It is ultimately up to the school, in consultation with the student and family/whanau who determines what conditions will be applied for. For example, a student may be eligible for a reader but prefer to use extra time.
- Special Assessment Conditions are **not** recommended for students who do not have the ability to achieve at curriculum level 5/6 (for NCEA level 1) without the support available. These students should be encouraged to enrol in alternative programmes.
- Students who are unable to achieve at this level could be offered unit standards and/or supported learning unit standards.
- Those providing the Special Assessment conditions need to be aware that they are only able to read the text on the paper – not explain or interpret it. They are to record only what the student asks them to record. Please refer to the NZQA documentation with respect to this:  
<http://www.NZQA.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/special-assessment-conditions-guidelines/role-of-the-reader-and-writer/>

Disclaimer:

Please note that this document is just one assessor's approach to completing assessments for Special Assessment Conditions.