

# HSC written exams

## Preparing for exams

The department recognises that this year's HSC will be different

These guidelines are designed to support schools in preparing for the HSC written examination period during the ongoing coronavirus outbreak. These guidelines aim to protect the health and safety of students and minimise the risk of disruptions to or cancellation of the HSC exams.

The priority for the department is to ensure schools have appropriate contingency plans in place so all students will be able to sit their exams with minimal disruption. This includes the introduction of some additional measures including reducing the number of students in exams rooms to minimise the number of close contacts, access to appropriate cleaning and hygiene supplies and plans for alternative venues if a confirmed case of COVID-19 was to impact a school. It is expected that the Directors, Educational Leadership undertake the administrative and logistical work associated with implementing these guidelines to ensure that Principals do not have their workloads adversely affected.

NESA is also providing updated guidelines to support the HSC written exams. Further advice on NESA's requirements can be found on their [COVID-19 advice page](#). NSW public schools should follow the advice contained within the HSC COVID-19 Toolkit which will be supplied by the department.

### Exam rooms and timetable

Additional safety measures are being put in place to minimise the risk of transmission and enable schools to respond promptly if a confirmed case of COVID-19 was to impact a school, disrupting the HSC exams. Schools will need to commence planning for exams by following the safety measures below. Schools should confirm their plans through a discussion with their Director, Educational Leadership.

HSC Plans should include:

- **Maximum exam sizes**

Schools should ensure that there are no more than 75 students in any one examination room. Limiting student numbers per room ensures that in the event of a confirmed case, there are fewer students identified as close contacts – making contact tracing easier.

- **Isolating exam rooms**

It is best practice to secure and isolate exam rooms from use by other students in the school for the duration of the exam period. Where possible schools should plan their exam timetable and room locations to minimise access and use over the exam period. The rooms should be cleaned and secured at least the night before the exam.

- **Visiting students**

Visiting students should be accepted at host schools by prior arrangement. This is considered an essential HSC activity and is consistent with current guidelines. Schools are advised to keep visiting students together and place visiting students in a separate room where possible and should plan their timetable accordingly.

Schools may consider nominating neighbouring high schools as part of their alternative venue planning for smaller cohorts. This should be organised in advance and the above procedures should apply. In these circumstances, the visiting students should limit interaction with other students at the school and subject to NSW Health advice, the Presiding Officer and supervisor from the host school should attend the exam.

- **Record keeping**

Schools will need to keep accurate lists of the location of exam rooms and the students, staff and exam supervisors who participated in each room. A seating plan is also recommended for students. These records will be important if contact tracing is required.

- **Disability Provisions**

Schools will also need to consider provisions for students with a disability and any additional arrangements that would need to be made to support these students both on-site and in alternate venues.

## **Alternative venue planning**

Directors, Educational Leadership will work with all schools to prepare an alternative venue for each exam over the exam period by way of contingency planning. Alternative venues will reduce the likelihood of exams needing to be cancelled due to school closures. For the health and safety of students and supervisors, the accommodation must comply with the cleaning, hygiene and physical distancing requirements consistent with the school environment.

In planning for alternative venues:

- Schools need to consider locations near the school that are accessible for students
- Venues should be adequately lit and ventilated and as free as possible from external noise
- Accommodation for students requiring disability and special HSC provisions needs particular attention
- Venues should be able to be set up for the exam at short notice (alternatively, a venue that can remain setup for the duration of exams would be ideal)
- Schools may consider the use of neighbouring primary schools
- In the case of small exam cohorts (less than 20 students), a neighbouring local high school may be considered. Procedures for visiting students should be followed
- Community venues and other local facilities that may incur additional costs may be considered if no other suitable venue is available. In these circumstances, the school should discuss the need for these arrangements with their Director,

Educational Leadership and where appropriate the department will meet the cost of venue hire.

Principals will need to consult with the NESAs Presiding Officer before finalising any arrangements for alternate venues.

## Alternative venue planning for large schools and higher risk locations

The Health and Safety Directorate will work with Directors, Educational Leadership in locations where one centrally located venue could serve as a contingency plan for multiple schools. This is in areas where schools have large HSC cohorts and where there have been confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Consideration the following in planning for alternative venues:

- Central locations that are accessible for students should be prioritised.
- Venues should be adequately lit and ventilated and as free as possible from external noise.
- Venues should be able to accommodate the needs for students requiring disability and special HSC provisions.
- Venues will need to be able to be set up for the duration of the exam period and not used by other community groups.
- The department will work with DELs and schools to negotiate contracts with venues with the department meeting the costs.

Principals will need to consult with the NESAs Presiding Officer before finalising any arrangements for alternate venues.

## Exam supervision

### Supervisors

Schools are permitted to use more rooms which may result in additional examination supervisors needing to be recruited. Schools should also consider employing more supervisors in 2020 so that back up supervisors are available. Principals should consult with their Presiding Officer to ensure that the required number of supervisors are arranged to meet their plans. This includes having additional supervisors on call if required. NESAs will meet the cost of additional supervisors.

## **Arranging additional school staff as supervisors**

Should a number of supervisors be required to self-isolate or are unavailable due to illness, as a last resort, schools may be requested to have staff available during the exam period. Supervisors of the examinations should not be teachers of the course being examined and where possible, avoid teachers of Year 12 students. Schools may also consider using School Administrative and Support staff or other staff. In the event of schools needing to use school staff, NESA and the department will work directly with schools on a case by case basis.

Supervision arrangements should be discussed with the Presiding Officer.

## **Communicating with students and families**

Clear communication with students and families in the lead up to the exams will be essential. Sample communication with families and key messages for students will be provided in the HSC COVID-19 Toolkit.

Once finalised, a copy of the exam timetable should be provided to each student and their family.

The timetable should contain information about:

- The exact room and location of the exam
- Arrival and finishing times
- Alternate venue locations and transport options
- COVID safe expectations of students for not congregating in large groups before and after the exams.
- Reassurance that personal hygiene supplies will be available on site for use and a reminder that students should not attend the exam if they are unwell
- Reassurance that if the exam was to be cancelled or rescheduled the school will assist the student with the submission of illness/misadventure process.
- Details of the alternative location allocated for the exam in the event it is relocated at short notice.

Students should also be made aware that they will receive communication from their school in the case where the exam is relocated to the alternative venue.