

## **Guidelines for Accommodating Neurodiversity and Disability Australasian College Of Health Service Management (ACHSM) Fellowship**

**Introduction:** Oral exams are a crucial component of Fellowship candidacy. The Fellowship exam and preparation are an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skills verbally and share their leadership capacity and expertise with health service executive colleagues.

In this process, it is important to recognise and accommodate the diverse needs of candidates, including those with neurodiversity and disability, to ensure an equitable and inclusive **learning** and **assessment** environment.

This guideline provides strategies for accommodating neurodiverse and other candidates with identified impediments that could hinder their performance in oral exams. The intention is to support fairness and accessibility and support all candidates to succeed.

A key principle is that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to supporting needs but the guideline clearly outlines appropriate accommodations to support candidates but uphold the integrity of Fellowship and equity for all candidates. Consideration for candidates should be informed by relevant legislation such as the anti-discrimination Act.

A further principle is the protection of the privacy of candidates, advice to examiners and the appropriate accommodations. Neurodiverse or candidates with identified disability are likely to have individual needs, meaning any strategies suggested will need to be considered by the Chief Examiner and if approved, adopted to suit the needs of the candidate, such as specific technologies, support animal/s or persons or extended examination time or additional time to read questions prior to the examination.

Individual accommodation will need to be reasonable and considered to provide balance and equity for all candidates.

### **Advance Communication:**

1. Encourage candidates to disclose their specific needs and accommodation requirements as soon as possible and well in advance of the examination, ensuring ample time for the Chief Examiner to decide and advise examiners of the requirements. This should include information about how their needs are accommodated in their day-to-day roles as health service leaders.
2. Provide clear instructions on how candidates can request accommodation and communicate their requirements confidentially.

**Flexible Scheduling:**

3. Offer flexibility in scheduling oral exams to accommodate diverse needs, such as providing extended time slots, alternative exam times or additional time allowed for reading examination questions.
4. Consider scheduling exams to minimise distractions for neurodiverse candidates e.g., times of day.

**Individualised Accommodations:**

5. Tailor reasonable accommodations based on individual needs, which may include:
  - Allowing the use of assistive technologies or communication aids for candidates with hearing or visual loss.
  - Offering breaks during the exam to manage fatigue or anxiety.
  - Permitting the use of written notes or outlines to support verbal responses.
  - Allowing additional supporting formats for responses, such as recorded or typed responses.

**Clarity and Structure:**

6. Clearly outline expectations and criteria for the oral exam in advance, providing structured prompts or questions to guide candidates.
7. Use clear, concise language and avoid ambiguity in instructions or questions.
8. Allow candidates the opportunity to review and clarify questions before responding.

**Supportive Environment in the Examination Room:**

9. Create a supportive and empathetic atmosphere during the exam, emphasising encouragement and positive reinforcement.
10. Be patient and attentive to candidates' communication styles and needs, allowing for processing time and accommodating diverse communication methods.
11. Provide reassurance and support if candidates experience anxiety or difficulty during the exam.
12. Consideration of the impact of interruptions to the exam process

**Accessibility Considerations:**

13. Provide materials and resources in accessible formats, such as electronic documents compatible with screen readers or large print formats.

### **Training and Awareness:**

14. Train examiners on best practices for accommodating neurodiverse and disabled candidates, including training and familiarity with the common accommodations identified in this guideline.
15. Foster awareness and understanding among examiners and staff regarding the diverse needs of candidates, promoting a culture of inclusivity and support.

### **Checklist for examination panels**

#### **Panel to introduce themselves**

- ✓ Panel to advise candidates that the Chief Examiner or others may drop-in to ensure that exams are progressing and to resolve technical issues.
- ✓ Panels to advise the Chief Examiner if sessions are running late. The Chief Examiner or delegate will advise the affected candidates.
- ✓ Allow an opportunity for commonly practiced cultural greetings and acknowledgements, such as an acknowledgement of country (Australia), Karakia (*prayers or incantations*) (*New Zealand*) and others as appropriate.
- ✓ Encourage candidates when they introduce themselves and outline their own needs/ for example, stop me if I am rambling/remind examiners of their own needs.

#### **Checklist (Alison)**

- Provide a practice Teams entry for candidates – dummy meeting invite in pre materials to test microphone, speaker, and camera.
- Inclusion of declaration in application to Fellowship process.