1. Tertiary institutions' responsibilities to students

The need for clearly defined policies
Clearly defined policies give students who are blind or partially sighted a framework within which to seek appropriate assistance from their institution. All staff should be aware of the policies in place, and know whom to contact for advice. Policies may include:

- appointing a disability co-ordinator or liaison officer
- making calendars, enrolment forms, etc. available in accessible formats
- making provision for modifications to classrooms or the external environment
- providing accommodations for tests, examinations, labs, and practical work

Of particular importance for all tertiary staff is the ACHIEVE endeavour to establish a national code of practice for the provision of tertiary education service to students who have an impairment. For more information see http://www.achieve.org.nz/

Resource implications
Institutions must allocate sufficient financial and staffing resources to ensure that students who are blind or partially sighted are able to study under conditions equivalent to those of other students.

Written records
Staff should keep written records of discussions, negotiations and resolutions made with each individual student. These may prove useful at a later date. The student should also be provided with a copy of these records in an accessible format. Records may contain the following types of information:

- the format(s) in which texts are required
- who will organise and pay for any format production
- test and exam accommodations negotiated
- how timetable, venue changes, and other notices will be communicated

Consistent and ongoing support
All students who are blind or partially sighted should have the same access and opportunity as other students. Tertiary institutions should ensure that the provision of support, resources, and accommodation is consistent at all times and across all departments.
2. How tertiary staff can help students

The following section outlines the ways in which some tertiary staff can assist blind or partially sighted students during their tertiary education.

Disability co-ordinators / disability liaison officers / accessibility officers
- explain the policies and benefits available at the institution
- introduce key staff
- arrange, attend, and keep records of meetings
- provide and acquire written materials in accessible formats
- organise staff or volunteers to assist with orientation to the campus, information access, practical and laboratory work, or any other requirements
- provide support if problems arise

Heads of department
- inform staff of students' needs
- ensure full staff co-operation

Teaching staff
- verbalise visual information when presenting it in class
- provide booklists, textbooks and handouts in accessible formats
- provide material that will be required in alternative formats in enough time for it to be produced
- arrange accommodations for tests, exams and practical work

Administration staff
- provide large print and/or advance copies of handouts and overhead transparencies and PowerPoint presentations
- forward notices and other information to students in an accessible format

Library staff
- offer information services and research advice etc.
• in line with services to other students, extend access to reading materials in formats that blind students can use, e.g. electronic, audio and large print

• ensure that databases and other electronic resources are accessible to students who have a print disability

• direct students to special facilities in the library for use by students who are Blind or Low Vision

Counsellors
• support the student in finding solutions to problems
Accessing Information

What information do students need to access?
Tertiary students who are blind or partially sighted need to access the same types of information as other students. This includes:

- calendars, book lists, and departmental handbooks
- textbooks
- handouts
- study guides, workbooks and laboratory manuals
- notices and administrative information
- tests and examinations

How students access information
Students who are blind or have low vision access information in a variety of ways including:

- using electronic and/or adaptive technology, e.g. Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) or other enlarging device, a scanner with synthesised speech output, or e-mail files
- using a support person such as personal readers
- using the work in an accessible format such as braille, audio, large print or electronic file

Questions about obtaining material in accessible formats may be directed to Accessible Format Production at the Blind Foundation:

Accessible Format Production
Contact: Workflow Coordinator
Royal New Zealand Foundation of the Blind
Awhina House, 4 Maunsell Road, Parnell
Private Bag 99941, Newmarket, Auckland 1031
Phone: 0800-243-333 or 355-6962
Fax: 09-355-6960
E-mail: workflow.coordinator@rnzfb.org.nz
3. Considerations when teaching blind or partially sighted students

The causes and results of vision impairment are many and varied. Everyone is unique, and the arrangements for one student may not suit another. Some people who are vision impaired can see enough to read large clear print. Others have little or no vision and use special equipment and alternative methods to access information.

Tertiary staff should consider the following:

- when interacting with a student who is blind or partially sighted, people need to identify themselves by name
- it is courteous to let the student know when someone enters or leaves a room
- staff should ask the student if and how they require help before giving it
- whatever the degree of vision impairment, a student should be expected and allowed to participate fully in all classes
- the needs of individual students are quite different and need to be understood before classes begin - it is reasonable to expect students to know what they need from tertiary staff, and to have the appropriate equipment and skills required before they begin a course

**Before class**

The teacher should:

- discuss in advance with the student his or her preferred way of accessing any visual information that will be presented (includes videos, slides, information shown on whiteboards and via PowerPoint or data show, handouts (if students are expected to discuss or refer to them during class), specimens or experiments used in laboratories or practical work)
- provide in advance copies of materials that will be used in class - these should be supplied well in enough time to allow production as an accessible format before the class begins

While teaching classes attended by students who are blind or partially sighted, teachers should:

- convey orally all visual information or provide it in advance
• use a good quality black pen on a white background to provide the best contrast for partially sighted students

• provide a sighted tutor or buddy as requested for practical classes and laboratory work

• ask other students to identify themselves by name (if requested by the student) before speaking in tutorials or discussions

Setting assignments
When setting and marking assignments for students who are blind or partially sighted, teachers should be aware that an assignment may have visual components that will need to be discussed with the student and perhaps provided in an alternative format. The student may need more time for assignments and tasks that require research because texts in an accessible format can take some time to locate or produce.

It is reasonable, however, to expect students who are vision impaired to achieve the same standard of spelling, grammar, content, and presentation when handing in assignments as other students.

Administrative details
Staff need to arrange with each individual student the most acceptable way of accessing important information posted on notice boards or handed out in class, e.g. changes of venue, time, assignment topics, and deadlines. Private correspondence (grades and comments on work) should be provided in a format that the student can access independently (e.g. large print, computer disk). Accessible Format Production can advise on this.
4. Environmental matters for students who are blind or partially sighted

Tertiary institutions, and departments and staff within an institution, can help make their campuses and classrooms more accessible and user-friendly to students who are blind or partially sighted. Most of the suggestions below are inexpensive and easy to provide, and they will make a great deal of difference to students’ ability to work and move around independently on campus.

**Internal environments/classrooms**
For the safety of students who are blind or partially sighted, other people should:

- leave doors fully open or closed, not ajar.

- keep walkways and passage ways free of furniture and objects such as bags and parcels.

- when changing the layout of a room or changing the location of a class, inform the student in advance of the changes and when they are being made; allow the student sufficient opportunity to become familiar with the new layout or location before the class.

- if requested by a student who is partially sighted or sensitive to light, reserve a specified seat, provide additional and/or task lighting, and provide a reading stand.

- provide a power point and/or extension cord for a student to operate a tape recorder or laptop computer

**External environment**
For the safety and convenience of students who are blind or partially sighted, institutions could:

- install braille and large print signs to identify buildings, room numbers and lift buttons

- have a system in place to inform students of potential hazards, such as construction work or contractors on site

- ask contractors to consider students who are vision impaired by keeping tools and equipment away from walkways as much as possible

- provide a toilet enclosure for guide dogs
5. Accommodations for tests and examinations

Entitlements
All tertiary students who are blind or partially sighted are entitled to test and examination accommodations. These should be negotiated in advance between the student and tertiary staff and agreed in writing. The institution's disability co-ordinator may also be involved in negotiations. Accommodations may include one or more of those detailed here.

Extra time
When negotiating extra time in tests and examinations, it is necessary to consider:

- the subject (e.g., subjects containing diagrams and visual information may require more time than those consisting mainly of text)
- the type of examination (e.g., multi-choice examinations will require less extra time than open book ones)

Accessible formats
Students may wish to access their examination papers in several different formats, and every attempt should be made to accommodate this. Students should always be provided with an ordinary print copy of the examination in addition to any other format(s).

N.B: If the examination paper needs to be converted into accessible format(s) outside the institution, a minimum of ten days should be allowed (contact Accessible Format Production for advice).

Use of computers
The following are guidelines pertaining to the use of computers in exams:

- students who use a laptop may have the screen of their laptop switched off to conserve battery life; ask the student to turn on their screen for the benefit of the amanuensis
- in ordinary exams, students should access only the file in which they are writing and saving their answers (and, if it has been provided in electronic format, the file containing the exam paper)
- in open book exams, students may also access files containing the allowed textbooks
as far as is practicable, all data files that are not required in the exam and that contain information which could be used to cheat in the exam, should be removed from the computer’s hard drive

students may have a wireless modem in their laptop; ask the student to disable any wireless modem during the exam

spell checkers should not be used unless the chief examiner has permitted other students to use them

at the end of the exam, answers should be printed out; a disk containing the answers should also be submitted in case of printer error

Amanuensis or reader/writer

Although a student can read and write in braille or large print, or with the help of a computer, they may still require an amanuensis when sitting examinations. Ideally, the amanuensis should know the subject to a level equivalent to or higher than that being examined, and should be someone whom the student has met or worked with previously, and with whom the student feels comfortable.

Regardless of what other formats the student has access to, it is appropriate for an amanuensis to:

- read out questions and give instructions and information from the examination paper
- describe graphs, diagrams and other visual information to the student
- look up figures in statistical and other tables using the co-ordinates given by the student
- draw graphs and diagrams as dictated by the student

It is not appropriate for an amanuensis to:

- assist the student to interpret or answer any question
- alter or query an answer - or the wording of an answer - given by the student, even if it is obviously incorrect

Separate room

It is appropriate for a student to have a separate room for exams when:

- extra time is required
• a student's use of equipment such as a tape recorder or a computer with speech may distract other students

• a student requires extra space to access special equipment or material in bulky formats such as braille

• a student is using an amanuensis