



**LAW
INSTITUTE
VICTORIA**



Specialist Accreditation: Application Handbook

Essential information for practitioners aspiring
for Specialist Accreditation

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Contents

1. About Accredited Specialisation	4	6. Accessibility policies	11
What is the Accredited Specialisation Scheme?	4	Are there arrangements for people with disability?	11
What is an Accredited Specialist?	4	Supporting documentation	11
Scheme Rules	4	Approval of special assistance	11
		Reasonable adjustments	11
		Assessment arrangements	11
		Apply for a reasonable adjustment	11
2. Key program milestones	6		
3. Assessment overview	7	7. Accredited Specialisation fees	13
Methods of assessment	7	Application Fees	13
Performance standards	7	Withdrawal Fee	13
Performance outcomes	7	Ongoing Fees	13
		Can I apply for a scholarship?	13
4. Submitting an application	8	First Nations Scholarship eligibility requirements	13
What are the eligibility criteria?	8	How are First Nations Scholarships evaluated?	13
What if I do not meet the criteria?	8		
How to calculate substantial involvement	8	8. Candidate support and conduct	14
What to include in the resume of practice	9	Learning support	14
Reference criteria	9	Assessment guidelines	14
Ineligible referees	9	Unacceptable conduct	14
Referee submission form	9		
5. Exceptional circumstances	10		
What additional documentation is required to apply for an exemption?	10		
Exemption requirements for substantial involvement	10		

1. About Accredited Specialisation

Specialist Accreditation is a structured assessment process that requires practitioners to draw on the knowledge and skills gained through a minimum of five years of practical experience. This process demonstrates their competency and expertise in their chosen area of law.

What is the Accredited Specialisation Scheme?

The Accredited Specialisation Scheme is a peer-founded, sector-led certification in specialist practice areas, requiring individuals to demonstrate ongoing excellence and high competence, including the ability to manage complexity and deliver exceptional client service.

Governed by the LIV Accredited Specialisation Board and the LIV Board, this nationally recognised certification enhances professional standing and career opportunities, distinguishing lawyers as experts. Operating for over 30 years, the Scheme currently has more than 1100 Accredited Specialists across 16 areas of law, marking excellence to peers and clients.

What is an Accredited Specialist?

A legal professional who is accredited as a specialist is recognised as having an enhanced skill level, as well as substantial involvement in established legal specialty areas. The Law Institute of Victoria requires such specialists to annually demonstrate superior knowledge, experience and professional skills across a particular area of law to ensure that recognition as an Accredited Specialist is meaningful and reliable.

To become an Accredited Specialist, you must:

- successfully complete the Assessment Program
- demonstrate an annual commitment to developing and improving skill through 12 units of CPD, and
- adhere to the Scheme Rules.



Accredited Specialisation Assessment Program

The Accredited Specialisation assessment program allows practitioners to gain formal recognition of their specialist experience, knowledge, and expertise.

This program verifies professional experience through various assessment formats, rather than a curriculum-based education or training program. It tests the breadth and depth of legal knowledge and skills based on practical experience and ensures quality alignment with peers.

Applicants are encouraged to consult with mentors and managers regarding their readiness.

The assessment guidelines outline the expected understanding, recommended topics, legislation and resources to help in preparation, building on existing knowledge to enhance practical skills.

Scheme Rules

The Accredited Specialisation program is governed by the Scheme Rules. Applicants must read and understand these rules, which cover Scheme governance, application, assessments and ongoing specialist commitments.

Note that the guidelines may be updated at any time; the latest version will always be available on the Law Institute of Victoria website: www.liv.asn.au/AccreditedSpecialisation.

“Getting that accreditation has probably had a bigger impact on my career than any other step I’ve taken. Not just for the piece of paper, but for the study that necessarily goes with it, which has rounded out my knowledge in this practice area.”

Rob Dalton AccS(Adm)

Director, Dispute Resolution and Inquiries, Victorian Department of Health



“I learned so much more about this important area of practice and enhanced my skills in representing parents and children in the Children’s Court. The study groups were a great way of sharing experiences and building professional connections, and the connections made have continued to support me throughout my career. I also felt I was a much better child protection lawyer after completing it.”

Cleona Feuerring AccS(Childs)
Legal Director, Women and Gender Diverse People’s
Rights Program, WEstjustice

2. Key program milestones

DECEMBER	Applications open (commencing self-guided study is recommended upon submitting application)
EARLY FEBRUARY	Early Bird applications close
LATE MARCH/ EARLY APRIL	Applications for Specialist Accreditation close
MAY	Welcome Orientation Session Gain access to Learning Portal Optional study technique sessions available Online exam platform familiarisation required
MAY – JULY	LIV run support sessions: Study techniques series
30 JUNE	Final day to withdraw from the program
JULY	Practice written exam and familiarisation exam available
JULY – AUGUST	Assessment period
NOVEMBER	Results released to candidates
DECEMBER	Conferral ceremony

Disclaimer: The dates listed are intended as a guide only. Please refer to specific area of law assessment guidelines for exact dates and further information.

3. Assessment overview

The LIV Accredited Specialisation assessment program takes a digital-first approach and consists of three methods of assessment.

Methods of assessment

The methods of assessment vary across each area of law. All candidates undergo a written exam and two additional assessments, which may include any of the below examples. Specific details for each area are outlined in their respective Assessment Guidelines.

Take Home Assessments Examples Include	Oral Assessment Examples Include
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mock file• Letter of advice• Written advice• Written submission to tribunal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simulated client interviews• Presentation to peers• Case presentation• Mock tribunal hearing with AAT or VCAT• Advocacy• Simulated court presentation

To gain accreditation candidates must obtain a satisfactory outcome in each of the assessments they undertake.

Assessments are graded on the basis of either being satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A satisfactory outcome in each of the three assessments will result in a candidate becoming an Accredited Specialist in their chosen area of law.

Practitioners wishing to be accredited must be able to:

- Perform at a superior standard expected of practitioners wishing to hold themselves out as specialists in the area
- Display a superior standard of skill, knowledge of the law and procedure that underpins the performance of tasks in their area of practice.

Performance standards

The Law Institute of Victoria recognises that an Accredited Specialist has skills and attributes that set them apart from other legal professionals. The objective of the Accredited Specialisation assessment program is to allow candidates to demonstrate their superior knowledge, experience and proficiency in their chosen area of law. A candidate's successful completion of all assessments is usually indicative of the following performance outcomes.

Performance outcomes

- Demonstrated ability to identify relevant information, issues and facts from a case scenario (including a fact situation or directly from a client)
- Demonstrated advanced legal knowledge, including significant recent decisions and contemporary application of this knowledge
- Demonstrates advanced knowledge of procedural rules and procedures of relevant jurisdictions
- Demonstrates clear, practical, persuasive and comprehensive communication
- Provides practical recommendations that demonstrates an integration of legal, business, ethical and professional skills to generate advice for complex legal problems that informs decision making
- Demonstrates effective client and stakeholder communication and is able to manage expectations

4. Submitting an application

The Accredited Specialisation application process requires meeting specific eligibility criteria and submitting a comprehensive online application with accompanying documents and references.

What are the eligibility criteria?

To be eligible for the Accredited Specialisation assessment program, you must meet the criteria listed below.

- Be a current member of the Law Institute of Victoria (or interstate equivalent)
- Hold a current practising certificate
- Have at least five years' full-time equivalent experience in practice (by 31 December of the year of application)
- Have substantial involvement in the area of specialisation in the preceding three years. Refer 4.4.2 of the Scheme Rules for further information
- Provide three references in support of the application.

What if I do not meet the criteria?

Applicants who do not meet the eligibility criteria may apply for an exemption under Exceptional Circumstances in accordance with the scheme rules. This requires completing the special consideration section of the online application form with supporting documentation.

Refer to Exceptional Circumstances for further information. Full details on eligibility criteria can be found in section 4 of the Scheme Rules.

How to calculate substantial involvement

The table below provides guidance for those seeking Accredited Specialisation or for current specialists. It outlines how to determine substantial involvement based on hours worked, equivalent to a full-time workload (40 hours per week) over 46 weeks per year, or pro rata for part-time work. For example, a part-time workload of 20 hours per week would require a minimum involvement over 92 weeks.

For Rule 4.4.1(b), substantial involvement means legal work in the practice area for which accreditation is sought, equivalent to at least 25% of the total workload of a full-time practitioner, equal to 460 hours per year or 10 hours per week.

Refer to section 4 of the Scheme Rules or more information on the type of work that can be counted towards these totals.

Percentage	Baseline hours per year	Baseline hours per week	Baseline days per week
5%	92	2	.25 of a day
10%	184	4	.50 of a day
15%	276	6	.75 of a day
20%	368	8	1
25%	460	10	1.25 days per week
30%	552	12	1.5 days per week
40%	736	16	2 days per week
50%	920	20	2.5 days per week
60%	1104	24	3 days per week
70%	1288	28	3.5 days per week
80%	1472	32	4 days per week
90%	1656	36	4.5 days per week
100%	1840	40	5 days per week

How do I apply?

All applications must be submitted via the online application form on the LIV website. The following supporting documents must be included with your application:

- Resume of practice/CV
- Three references on the prescribed reference form
- Portrait photo (jpeg format)
- Information on Professional Conduct as outlined under section 4.7 of the Scheme Rules (if applicable) (refer to sections 4.8 – 4.10 of the Accredited Specialisation Scheme Rules for more information)
- Supporting documentation for exceptional circumstances (special consideration) (if applicable)
- Supporting documentation for scholarship applications (if applicable).

Payment of the application fee or special consideration fee is also required at time of application.

The online application form will verify eligibility criteria and, if needed, direct the applicant through the exceptional circumstances (special consideration) requirements.

Applicants are responsible for providing all relevant supporting documents. Incomplete applications may be deemed invalid, and no further opportunity will be given to supply additional information.

What to include in the resume of practice

Applicants must submit a resume detailing their professional activities relevant to the area of practice for which specialisation is sought. The resume should provide an overview of the applicant's experience and expertise, with an emphasis on involvement over the past three years. A comprehensive curriculum vitae is not required.

No standard format is prescribed, but applicants must use the following headings:

- Description of current practice activities (this includes a detailed explanation of how your role demonstrates substantial involvement in the practice area for which you are applying)
- Experience (including time periods and employment status eg two days part-time)
- Involvement with relevant professional organisations
- Relevant publications and presentations
- Academic qualifications
- Other – under this heading applicants can include anything else that is relevant to their application.

Reference criteria

Three references are required to support your application. All referees must have known the applicant for at least three years. At least one must be a legal practitioner with five plus years significant experience in the applicant's practice area.

A non-legal practitioner referee must have appropriate experience in a closely related field.

References (legal practitioner or not) must be able to attest to the applicant's: (a) involvement in the legal practice area for which accreditation is sought, and (b) competence as a legal practitioner.

Ineligible referees

The following cannot act as referees: partners, associates, employers, employees of the same firm as the applicant at the time of the application, relatives, Specialisation Board members, advisory committee members in the practice area, clients who cannot attest to points (a) and (b), current applicants in the same law area and LIV staff members.

Referee submission form

The LIV provides a form for submitting references on the LIV website www.liv.asn.au/AccreditedSpecialisation. Ensure referees can attest to the applicant's competence, readiness for specialisation and character. Note that previous referee submissions cannot be reused; however, the same referees can provide new attestations.



“An accredited criminal law specialisation is an asset to any practitioner and provides peace of mind for clients seeking quality representation.

As a regional practitioner, my criminal law specialisation has enabled meaningful access to justice for individuals facing the challenges of complex criminal proceedings in country Victoria.”

Stephen Peterson AccS(Crim)
Principal Lawyer, Stephen Peterson Lawyers

5. Exceptional circumstances

What additional documentation is required to apply for an exemption?

An applicant seeking an exemption must provide a letter to the Specialisation Board outlining the specific scheme rule they seek exemption from and the corresponding details required. Refer to the table below for required information for each rule.

Rule	Details required
Membership of the Law Institute of Victoria	The equivalent interstate law associate or body apply an applicant belongs to along with member ID and proof of membership.
Current Practising Certificate	Reason for not holding a current practising certificate.
Practical Experience	<p>Specifics of the years and months post-admission at 31 December of the application year.</p> <p>An outline of experience to satisfy Rule 4.4.1, including roles and responsibilities with time frames; pro rata period for part-time work; areas of work, including any litigation-related work; and employers, dates and locations of work.</p> <p>Contact details of suitable persons (name, email, and phone) to substantiate the practical experience outlined in the supporting letter.</p>
Referees	<p>Reasons why eligible references cannot be provided.</p> <p>Details of alternate suitable reference(s).</p> <p>A short self-reflection on your competence and readiness.</p> <p>Information on your current peer and professional network connections in lieu of references.</p>

Applications for exceptional circumstances should be submitted with the entry application form.

Please note, an exemption from eligibility criteria is at the full discretion of the Specialisation Board and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Exemption requirements for substantial involvement

Hours are one guide for calculating substantial involvement. However it is recognised that this may also be demonstrated in other ways.

If applying for special consideration under substantial involvement you are required to include the following information:

- How you demonstrate equivalent experience to a full-time employee over five years
- Detail work patterns, such as days of the week, types of work, part-time arrangements
- Decisions on work types due to fewer days worked, and the expectations and file load
- Responsibilities and functions adapted for a part-time role
- Other relevant roles, responsibilities or exposure in the industry that could be considered.

If you are relying on hours to demonstrate substantial involvement a breakdown needs to be included with the application.

Applications for exceptional circumstances are determined on a case-by-case basis.

Refer to section 4 of the Accredited Specialisation Scheme Rules for more information.

6. Accessibility policies

Are there arrangements for people with disability?

The Law Institute of Victoria acknowledges that suitable arrangements must be made to ensure that all people with disability are able to participate in LIV activities. This policy has been designed to comply with the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)* and applies to individuals who wish to attend an LIV event, LIV Continuing Professional Development activity or apply for Accredited Specialisation. Details of the policy specific to Accredited Specialisation are outlined below and has been designed to comply with the Disability Standards for Education which were formulated under the Act.

Supporting documentation

The supporting documentation must be provided by an appropriate professional and must include information about the condition, how it affects the applicant's ability to complete the examination under standard conditions, and whether the condition is permanent, temporary or ongoing. Candidates with a learning disability must provide a valid report from a psychologist or other qualified professional trained in assessing learning disabilities.

Approval of special assistance

The LIV will attempt to accommodate candidates as reasonably as possible. The nature of the assistance will be determined in consultation with the candidate. The following factors will be considered, applying the Commonwealth of Australia's Guidance Notes (2006) Disability Standards for Education 2005:

- The nature of the candidate's disability
- Information about how the disability affects the candidate's ability to participate
- The candidate's preferred special assistance
- The effect of the proposed assistance on the candidate
- The effect of the proposed assistance on others, including the LIV, staff and other candidates
- The costs and benefits of providing the assistance.

The LIV will ensure that the integrity of the Accredited Specialisation program and assessment requirements are maintained. The LIV may provide alternative assistance if it is effective in achieving the desired purpose.

Reasonable adjustments

Appropriate arrangements will be made in circumstances where a candidate has a pre-existing condition which would mean that normal assessment procedures would unfairly disadvantage them. This may apply to medical conditions such as dyslexia, arthritis or severe anxiety. Special examination arrangements may arise out of the Special Needs Policy.

Assessment arrangements

A candidate who is able to sit for a written examination or other form of assessment, but believes they may be disadvantaged in some way, may apply for a reasonable adjustment, on the following grounds:

- physical disability
- existing medical condition
- learning disability
- circumstances where the Special Consideration Policy refers to this Policy as a suitable outcome.

Arrangements may be granted to the conditions or procedures under which the candidate takes the examination or assessment. They do not allow for varying the requirements for passing the examination or assessment.

Example of arrangements may include:


- extra writing time
- extra reading time
- a rest period(s)
- provision of a scribe
- isolation provision
- provision of special equipment

When appropriate, consultation with an independent expert (eg medical practitioner, psychologist) may be sought in determining any arrangements and the applicant will be required to meet the costs of this procedure where required.

Apply for a reasonable adjustment

Once admitted into the program candidates can apply via the reasonable adjustment form for special examination arrangements. Applications must be received as soon as possible prior to the scheduled examination or assessment. No applications will be considered within 21 days of the scheduled examination or assessment unless an injury/illness or unforeseen circumstances (including death of family members) has occurred to the candidate within that time.

Applications will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

A man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, is sitting on a light-colored chair. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred office setting with bookshelves.

“...sitting the Accredited Specialisation exams was for the advancement of my own knowledge and skill in the area of wills and estates law, and to take control of the direction of my career.

The preparation for the exams gave me an opportunity to identify and close the gaps in my knowledge base and I believe I am a better practitioner having gone through the process of achieving Accredited Specialisation.”

Lav Chhabra AccS(Wills&Estates)
Principal, Perpetuity Legal

7. Accredited Specialisation fees

Application Fees

Early Bird Application Fee \$1350 (including GST)

Standard Application Fee \$1500 (including GST)

Special Consideration Application Fee \$300 (including GST)

Non-refundable. Remaining application fee balance will be payable if application is successful.

The application fee is payable via credit card at the time of application. If a third party is paying for the application please contact the LIV prior to submitting the application to be provided with a code to enable the processing of the application.

**Please note that early bird applications and outcomes will be advised to candidates earlier than standard applications.*

Withdrawal Fee

Administration Fee \$300 (including GST)

Withheld if an applicant withdraws their submission before they receive their notice of outcome.

Withdrawal Fee \$750 (including GST)

Any withdrawal made after the notice of outcome and before 30 June.

A refund of the respective amount will be made if a candidate withdraws prior to 30 June in the year of the application. After this date, no refund is available. The application fee will not be transferred to a future assessment program or year.

Ongoing Fees

Accredited Specialisation Fee \$440 (including GST)

Leave of Absence Fee \$110 (including GST)

All fees are subject to review and change each year. The Accredited Specialisation Fee is payable by 30 June annually.

Can I apply for a scholarship?

The LIV offers annual scholarships to support members with limited resources and to enhance pathways in the legal profession for First Nations people. Applicants must meet the Scheme eligibility criteria and will be evaluated by the Accredited Specialisation Board and other suitable committees.

Scholarships cover the assessment program application fee and fall into the following categories:

1. Community Legal Centre employees (excluding volunteers)
2. Sole practitioners/practitioners at firms with fewer than five total employees
3. First Nations - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lawyers

To apply, submit a one-page cover letter with your application, indicating the scholarship category and detailing the benefits and positive impact on your career, organisation and community. All scholarship supporting documents can be submitted in the *More Info & Uploads* section of the application form.

First Nations Scholarship eligibility requirements

For the purposes of this application, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is someone who is of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as an Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person and is accepted- as such by the community in which they live or have lived.

In addition to the above cover letter, a written confirmation of community recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity is required. Proof may be established with reference to AIATSIS or other similarly recognised body.

How are First Nations Scholarships evaluated?

Scholarship applications will be reviewed by a committee made up of the Accredited Specialisation Board, a representative from the LIV, and least one representative who has a connection with the First Nations community.

8. Candidate support and conduct

Learning support

Candidates will be provided with a range of learning support and resources to assist with preparations for the assessments as part of their application fee, including:

- Access to learning portal and candidate handbook
- Access to past assessment materials including written examinations, take home assessments and example oral assessments (note that written assessments do not come with model answers)
- Assistance with the formation of study groups
- Access to a list of Accredited Specialists who are willing to mentor both individuals and study groups
- Easy access to already linked legislation listed within each area's assessment guidelines
- Access to recordings of past LIV CPD programs
- Access to a selection of Law Institute Journal articles
- A study support and assessment techniques series

Assessment guidelines

Candidates should be familiar with the individual assessment guidelines.

Schedules 1-3 provide details on each specific assessment type including, criteria and assessment conditions.

Schedule 4-5 outlines the topics for assessment and relevant legislation.

Unacceptable conduct

Candidates must not:

- Disclose or discuss the contents of the Accredited Specialisation Assessment material with any other person except those working in the Accredited Specialisation Department of the Law Institute of Victoria, until all assessment tasks have been completed by all candidates.
- Contact committee members (including interstate committees) for specific advice regarding exam questions or exam outcomes.
- Engage in any other conduct which may negatively affect the fair and proper administration of the Accredited Specialisation program.
- Engage in abusive behaviour towards LIV staff or other assessment partners.

Candidates engaging in the above conduct or any other conduct deemed to be unacceptable may be excluded or disqualified from the program.



“Undertaking my Property Law accreditation was the most valuable experience in my career to date. It expanded my skill set and technical expertise in a broad and diverse array of property law areas. It elevated the complexity of matters I deal with in my daily practice, providing a platform for me to thrive in the fast paced and ever changing property law environment.”

Nafsika Starvaggi AccS(Prop)

Senior Associate – Property & Developments, Tisher Liner FC Law



“Achieving my Commercial Law Accredited Specialisation was one of the most challenging yet rewarding milestones in my legal career.

The experience deepened my expertise in my core areas of practice and boosted my confidence to tackle unfamiliar legal challenges with skill and agility. I gained invaluable insights and connected with a brilliant network of like-minded professionals in my study group.

Seeing the Accredited Specialist logo on my email signature, business cards, and banners reminds me daily of this accomplishment and the positive impact it has on my practice.”

Verity White AccS(Com)

Founder & Chief Contract Enthusiast, Checklist Legal



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Authorised and published by the Law Institute of Victoria, 2025
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