

## Aide Memoire: Special Assessment Conditions for national school qualifications

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<b>To:</b>	Hon Erica Stanford, Minister of Education
<b>From:</b>	Dr Grant Klinkum, Chief Executive
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### Purpose

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1. This briefing provides an overview of Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) which support the fair assessment of national qualifications for students with specific needs that have not been able to be remediated through other means.

### Background

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#### *Overview of Special Assessment Conditions*

2. SAC can assist students in addressing various permanent or long-term medical, physical, sensory, or learning barriers to achievement in assessments for NCEA or New Zealand Scholarship. It helps students fairly demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding when being assessed without providing an unfair advantage over other students.
3. SAC is available for both internal and external assessments and includes:
  - Braille papers
  - Enlarged papers
  - Special papers
  - Signing supervisor
  - Signing reader
  - Computer use
  - Writer or typist
  - Separate accommodation
  - Extra writing time
  - Rest breaks.
4. Over 90% of SAC applications (see Appendix One for details) are approved in full or in part, indicating a mature understanding of the appropriate provisions required to remove barriers to fair assessment. This is the result of successive improvements to the application process, and

reduction of barriers such as access to computer use, and changes made in response to school feedback.

5. Since 2021, NZQA has worked with the Ministry of Education in developing the Ministry's SAC Action Plan to support Change One of the NCEA Change Programme — Make NCEA more accessible. The work programme addresses the following agreed objectives:
  - *Coherent use of Universal Design for Learning<sup>1</sup> (UDL)*. An inclusive/universal design approach for senior secondary assessment will reduce the needs of many students with current SAC entitlements by eliminating artificial and unnecessary barriers and making assessments more accessible.
  - *Transition to new SAC model*. A more equitable, responsive non-approvals model that acknowledges our confidence in the sector will be progressively rolled out as the new achievement standards are implemented. Schools and kura will advise NZQA what SAC they are providing to students, rather than requiring NZQA approval.
  - *Sector support and capability building in UDL*. NZQA supporting the Ministry in strengthening schools' and kura understanding of UDL and inclusive design in teaching and learning.
6. The SAC Action Plan followed a review which found the current application model:
  - *Mana-diminishing and disempowering*. Singles out students for special treatment and the associated stigma to inequitable uptake by ākonga Māori and Pacific students.
  - *Unsustainable*. The number of SAC approvals has almost doubled between 2015 and 2021, creating pressure on schools, kura and NZQA. Resourcing for schools of some SAC provisions is difficult and costly, such as a reader and separate accommodation.
  - *Out-of-step with our vision for quality teaching, learning and assessment practice*. Quality practice is strengths-based and inclusively designed for student variability at the outset.
7. In 2023, NZQA facilitated 32 SAC workshops about the findings and objectives of the Ministry's SAC review and the proposed specific changes to processes for schools and kura. They were attended by over 780 teachers and staff from approximately 320 schools, Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour and the Ministry of Education. These workshops were followed up by online Questions and Answer sessions for schools later in the year.
8. The school's identification and support for students needing SAC is reviewed as part of the Managing National Assessment (MNA) reviews of schools and kura to ensure the provision is being applied appropriately and fairly.

#### *Application process for Special Assessment Conditions*

9. SAC applications are made by schools and kura to NZQA on the student's behalf. NZQA then approves the entitlement to SAC provisions. Schools and kura administer these for internal assessment and NZQA for external assessments.
10. If a student has a SAC entitlement for NCEA assessments, this must also be made available to them for the Literacy and Numeracy | Te Reo Matatini me te Pāngarau assessments. The assessment of these co-requisites is intended to be as accessible as possible. All students working at the appropriate level should be able to be assessed. A formal SAC application

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<sup>1</sup> Universal Design for Learning is a research-based framework that helps teachers plan learning to meet the diverse needs of all students. Based on neuroscience and evidence-based education practices, teachers anticipate barriers to learning, and plan for a range of useful supports, options and tools so each student can select what works for them. For more information visit, <https://inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/universal-design-for-learning/>.

approved by NZQA is not required from a school, kura or tertiary organisation to provide this support for students for these co-requisites. This is particularly appropriate for students in years 9 and 10, who may not previously have undertaken NCEA assessments. Schools, kura and tertiary organisations determine the type and level of support that ākongā may require based on ākongā needs and the professional judgement of the teacher.

11. SAC entitlements are expected to reflect the support students use in their learning on a regular basis, and not just provisions they access when engaging in internal and external assessment.
12. There has been an increase in SAC applications across all deciles and ethnicities in recent years. The rate of increase has been greater for Māori and Pacific students, than for other ethnicities, and greater for schools with more socio-economic barriers to achievement than schools with fewer socio-economic barriers. This growth is partly attributable to actions NZQA has taken since 2015 to increase uptake of SAC.
13. Many kura have told us that they prefer to use aspects of UDL to address individual needs through internal assessment so do not engage in external assessment at the same rate as other schools and are not making any applications for SAC on behalf of their ākongā.
14. Like other small schools, kura face the same difficulty engaging in the SAC process as they lack specialist resourcing (e.g. Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour). They also have limited culturally appropriate diagnostic tools to assist them in identifying the nature of the difficulty a student may be facing.
15. NZQA monitors and engages with schools where the SAC applications are lower than expected based on the school profile, and where necessary provides support in the form of:
  - Information and guidance
  - Seminars
  - Engagement with School Relationship Managers
  - Follow-ups.

#### *Assistive technology and digital assessment*

16. Students are increasingly using assistive technology to support their learning in the classroom. Assistive technology includes tools (e.g. speech-to-text and text-to-speech applications) that support students with reading and writing. NZQA has been trialling and piloting assistive technology in digital assessment to improve accessibility for students.
17. The use of assistive technology during an assessment provides students with independence and more control over their assessment experience. It also reduces resourcing required to deliver assessment for schools (e.g. reader/writer or separate accommodation). In 2023, NZQA approved the use of Polly, a text-to-speech application, for Literacy (Writing) and Numeracy co-requisite assessments for all students as part of the digital assessment experience.
18. There has been an improvement in Literacy (Writing) from 2022. However, we do not believe that the use of Polly or SAC provisions are the determining factor for this increase; there has not been the same increase in achievement in Numeracy. At the time of the June 2023 Co-requisite results were released, we noted “that feedback provided to schools on the 2022 Writing assessments had resulted in improvements in achievement in the Writing standard. In the June 2023 Writing assessments, students were more likely to:
  - complete all three questions (required to meet the standard).
  - provide sufficient evidence by writing enough (they took note of the word count requirements / guidelines in the tasks).
  - organise / structure their writing appropriately.
  - respond directly, specifically and appropriately to the writing tasks / topics.”

## *NZQA's 2024 work programme*

19. NZQA is working to realise the SAC Action Plan objectives in 2024 by:
- i. Developing a strategy for broadening UDL capability within NZQA including developing a position paper on UDL and assessment.  
  
The outcome of these activities is strengthening the design of NCEA assessment processes and associated systems, tools, and resources, through the coherent use of Universal Design for Learning principles when developing assessment materials for learners.
  - ii. Trialling a new Notifications Gateway  
  
A new notifications gateway is being trialed for 2024 which aims to make it easier for schools and kura to tell NZQA about students who need Special Assessment Conditions (SAC).

### *Notifications Gateway*

20. The Notifications Gateway trial removes the requirement for NZQA approval and supporting evidence to be submitted. This model will progressively replace the current SAC application process as the new NCEA Levels 2 and 3 achievement standards are rolled out in 2026 and 2027.
21. The current Approvals Gateway can still be used for any applications at the school's or kura discretion — for example, if the SENCO is new or inexperienced, the application is for Braille papers or a signer, or in any cases where a decision by NZQA is preferred.
22. NZQA anticipates that there will be more students accessing SAC at Level 1 with the implementation of the Notifications Gateway trial. During the trial, NZQA is monitoring use of the Notifications Gateway to ensure that applications are appropriate to the needs of the students. An outcome of an audit could be that schools have to submit applications through the Approvals Gateway only.
23. Until widespread credible alternatives to reader/writer assistance become embedded through assistive technologies on our digital assessment platform there will be a greater demand for the use of reader/writers and separate accommodation.
24. While all applications for students in Years 12 and 13 must use the current Approvals Gateway in 2024, we have streamlined the process to:
  - ensure it is as straightforward as possible
  - reduce application time
  - encourage schools to submit evidence they have on the nature of the student's difficulty. (Most evidence needed to support SAC applications can be generated by schools using existing sources and is free for parents)
  - encourage notification where a student wishes to use a computer, without the need to supply evidence where digital assessment is not available or appropriate.



**Dr Grant Klinkum**

Chief Executive

18 January 2024

**Hon Erica Stanford**

Minister of Education

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## Appendix One

**Table 1: No of applications approved, received, and the percentage of the total student enrolled cohort, between 2018–2022**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Approved</b>	<b>Total Received</b>	<b>Percentage of total student enrolled-cohort</b>
<b>2018</b>	11,022	11,269	6.7%
<b>2019</b>	12,573	12,788	7.1%
<b>2020</b>	13,324	14,557	7.5%
<b>2021</b>	16,803	16,874	8.6%
<b>2022</b>	18,469	18,580	8.8%

The proportion of students approved for SAC against students with NZQA enrolments has increased by a third over the last 5 years. However, with the increase in school confidence in identifying students and NZQA's SAC application process, this proportion represents a 70% increase in the number of students applying for SAC.

**Table 2: Percentage of approved SAC applications, by provision category 2018 – 2022**

Year	Reader	Separate Accommodation	Extra Time	Rest Break	Computer & writer	Computer Use	Writer	Braille Papers	Enlarged Papers	Special Papers	Signing Supervisor	Signing Reader
2018	42.7%	90.4%	22.4%	11.8%	74.7%	NA	NA	0.1%	1.3%	1.3%	0.1%	0.4%
2019	42.4%	91.7%	21.7%	12.3%	75.6%	NA	NA	0.1%	1.1%	1.2%	0.0%	0.3%
2020	45.0%	92.8%	29.4%	13.2%	75.3%	NA	NA	0.1%	1.1%	1.5%	0.0%	0.3%
2021	40.0%	81.3%	29.1%	13.4%	NA	64.6%	63.2%	0.1%	0.9%	1.2%	0.0%	0.3%
2022	39.4%	78.0%	30.0%	14.0%	NA	57.6%	52.8%	0.0%	0.8%	1.1%	0.0%	0.3%

*Note a single application for a student may be made under multiple provision categories: a student may have a vision impairment and learning difficulties for example.*

In 2018-22 the overall pattern of approved provisions has remained consistent for most SAC categories, meaning there has been no significant shift in the type of support or incidence of SAC students against the overall population. However, given the 70% increase in the number of applications, the scale of provision that schools and NZQA need to provide in each category has increased. For example, the provision of writers has grown from 4711 students in 2018 to 7279 in 2022.

The provision of separate accommodation is automatically provided to any student approved a writer or reader so is linked to their reducing percentage. Provisions required for sensory entitlements are a very small.