



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY  
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## Improving equity of access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) for NCEA in low decile schools

Date:	28 March 2018	NZQA Priority:	High
Security Level:	In confidence	Report No.	CR17099

	Action Sought	Deadline
Minister of Education	<p>a. <b>note</b> the further actions that NZQA, with support from the Ministry of Education, is undertaking to improve equity of access to SAC in low decile schools.</p> <p>b. <b>note</b> that NZQA has undertaken further analysis of the types of SAC provision approved across all deciles and found that there are generally similar patterns across the deciles in terms of the particular types of SAC being sought.</p> <p>c. <b>note</b> that NZQA will undertake targeted research with low decile schools by the end of July 2018, into how the current application process and the school-based evidence tools are working, to ensure that students do not face barriers to fair access to SAC.</p> <p>d. <b>note</b> that NZQA has no concerns with the release of this advice in full at this time.</p>	Immediate

### Contact for Telephone Discussion (if required)

Name	Position	Telephone	Cellphone	1 <sup>st</sup> Contact
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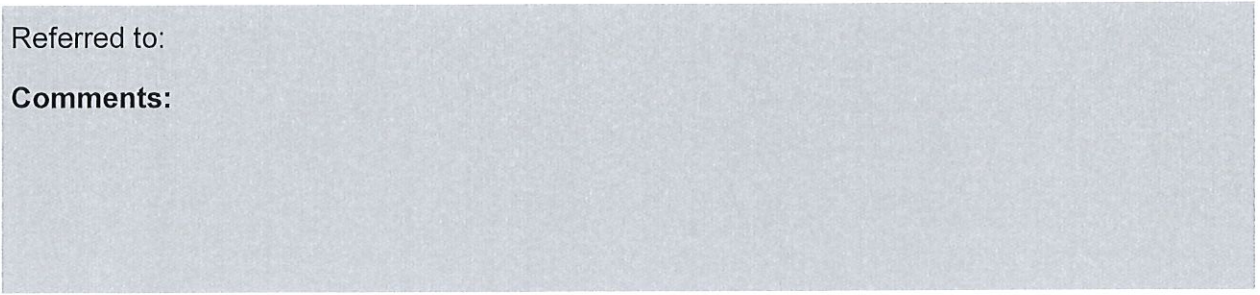
The following departments/agencies have seen this report: √ Ministry of Education

#### Minister's Office to Complete:

- |  |                                    |  |
|--|------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Noted                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Seen      | <input type="checkbox"/> Approved            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Needs change            | <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn | <input type="checkbox"/> Overtaken by Events |
| <input type="checkbox"/> See Minister's comments | <input type="checkbox"/> Declined  |  |

Referred to:

**Comments:**



## Improving equity of access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) for NCEA in low decile schools

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### Recommended Action

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It is recommended you:

- a. **note** the further actions that NZQA, with support from the Ministry of Education, is undertaking to improve equity of access to SAC in low decile schools.
- b. **note** that NZQA has undertaken further analysis of the types of SAC provision approved across all deciles and found that there are generally similar patterns across the deciles in terms of the particular types of SAC being sought.
- c. **note** that NZQA will undertake targeted research with low decile schools by the end of July 2018, into how the current application process and the school-based evidence tools are working, to ensure that students do not face barriers to fair access to SAC.
- d. **note** that NZQA has no concerns with the release of this advice in full at this time.



Karen Poutasi (Dr)  
Chief Executive

28/...3/...18

NOTED/APPROVED

Chris Hipkins  
Minister of Education

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## Improving equity of access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) for NCEA in low decile schools

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### Purpose of Report

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1. This report provides an update on NZQA's forward work programme, with support from the Ministry of Education (the Ministry), to improve equity of access to SAC with a particular focus on lower decile schools. The report also provides you with the findings of data analysis into the type of SAC support provided across the decile bands in 2017.

### Background

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2. The purpose of Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) is to support students with medical, sensory, physical, or a specific learning disorder to be fairly assessed for NCEA. SAC is used by students for both internal and external assessment. The types of support can include reader or computer/writer, separate accommodation, enlarged or braille papers, New Zealand Sign Language interpretation, rest breaks or extra time.
3. NZQA is responsible for managing the SAC application process and has instituted major changes in the process over the last three years to make it easier for schools to gather the information that is needed to make applications for appropriate SAC provisions for individual students.
4. NZQA has provided you with an analysis of SAC applications over the last four years [CR16945-Addressing equity of access to Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) for NCEA in low decile schools, 29 January 2018] and a summary of the work underway across the Ministry and NZQA. The previous briefing noted that whilst the number of SAC applications has increased significantly in the last four years, including in low decile schools, the proportion of applications received is much lower for low decile schools compared to high decile schools.
5. NZQA is piloting digital assessment formats that will incorporate aspects of assistive technology designed to overcome the functional impact of reading and writing impairments within the assessment environment. This initiative explores the use of accessibility tools (such as text-to-speech, variable font size, etc) in computer-based examinations for candidates with SAC entitlements to a reader and computer. The use of this technology should, over time, alleviate the pressures on resourcing reader or writer support.

### Comment

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#### *Update on NZQA's 2018 actions for improving the uptake of SAC in low decile schools*

6. The actions that NZQA initiated in 2015 with support from the Ministry led to a marked increase in the uptake of SAC from low decile schools. Whilst these actions have continued and intensified, the rate of applications from these schools has not increased when compared with 2016. However, the percentage of applications approved for low decile schools has risen significantly, from 88.7 percent in 2016, to 94.3 percent in 2017. The increase reflects the improved understanding of SAC amongst these schools through engagement with the Ministry funded Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) service, and the programme of workshops and support for schools, and through the changes that have been made to simplify the process for identifying the information needed for the SAC application.

7. There are a small number of schools in deciles 1-3 with lower than expected approval rates, and most of these are the result of the statistical effect of small student numbers. However, we are undertaking further analysis of those schools where this is not the case to identify what further assistance we can provide. Approval rates improve as schools become familiar with the process and the information needed to ensure that the SAC provision is appropriate for the student. For example, SAC is sometimes requested for candidates who are not yet at the curriculum level needed to successfully undertake a NCEA.
8. The actions underway build on the sector engagement programme developed over the last three years and the feedback we receive from schools and is designed to:
  - reduce barriers to accessing SAC, by making it as easy as possible for schools to submit applications for students who need this type of support to enable fair assessment;
  - raise awareness of the profiles of students who may benefit from SAC and assist schools to identify these students, particularly in lower decile schools; and
  - connect schools with learning support through the RTLB service.
9. We will continue this year to support low decile schools (and schools with a lower than expected SAC uptake) through invitations to regional workshops and individual follow up through NZQA's School Relationship Managers (SRMs). Feedback from participants highlights the value of the regional workshop programme in supporting schools. We are continuing to refine the workshops based on the feedback we receive from participants and from our own understanding of SAC data. We are providing two specific types of regional workshops on SAC, tailored to the needs of schools. The first of these is targeted at new Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and new RTLB cluster staff. The purpose of these workshops is to ensure that new staff are aware of the SAC provisions and how to apply for them.
10. The second of these workshops is targeted at more experienced SENCOs, to help them identify students who may need SAC assistance, clarify what information and supporting evidence is needed to help them submit good applications. The Ministry is ensuring that the RTLB cluster staff are made aware of these workshops when they are scheduled during the year. The feedback we have received from SENCOs, particularly from low decile schools, is that the workshops help them identify applicants in their school who would benefit from assistance from SAC.
11. NZQA is now developing a third type of workshop, with input from the RTLB cluster staff. These will be developed in response to specific regional needs and will provide a greater opportunity for SENCOs to describe the full range of issues they are facing and where they need more support. We will be strongly encouraging schools with lower than expected uptake of SAC to participate.
12. NZQA raised SAC as an item for discussion at the Principal's Nominee seminars which NZQA ran throughout February and early March 2018. The Principal's Nominee in each school is responsible for maintaining and monitoring quality assurance practices within the school to ensure the validity and credibility of assessment for qualifications. The seminar provided an opportunity to reflect national trends in SAC to the sector so that schools could benchmark themselves and their practice and learn from other schools.
13. We know that there is a correlation between a number of sensory, physical or medical disorders that we provide SAC support for and a low socio-economic status. To raise the awareness of this correlation, we have contacted each of the professional bodies (e.g. the Occupational Therapy Board, the Physiotherapy Board and the Psychologists Board etc), to explain what SAC is and who it's for. We have created a new page on our website for

independent professionals so that they better understand the evidence needed to support sensory, physical and medical applications and are better able to advise us of the most up to date assistance available. This will also enable us to better understand the types of assistance currently available to students with a range of conditions which might have a place in removing barriers to fair assessment.

#### *Targeted support to decile 1-3 schools with low uptake of SAC*

14. NZQA is actively following up with schools with low or no uptake of SAC in previous years. Following up with schools with comparatively low levels of SAC applications in previous years has identified that there are a range of broader issues which include the effects of transience, lack of transitions data and previously unaddressed learning difficulties. We will continue to use these interactions to identify any obstacles, barriers or enablers that the two education agencies through their respective roles (the Ministry through learner support, and NZQA through facilitating fair access for students to SAC) could assist with, and to gain a better understanding of what the school thinks are the reasons for their uptake levels. All low decile schools have been contacted individually to invite them to our SAC workshops. Similar follow up is planned for schools with higher than anticipated levels of SAC engagement.

#### *Targeted support for wharekura*

15. NZQA has previously talked to wharekura about their comparatively lower uptake of SAC. As a result of their feedback we have been progressively translating key resources into Te Reo. We have recently translated one of the key diagnostic tests used by PATOSS (the professional association of teachers of students with specific learning difficulties) into Te Reo. Work is underway to provide other sector-facing forms in Te Reo and these will be progressively published on NZQA's website this year. These tools enable wharekura to gather the information for the SAC application using the school based evidence facility, which was developed to ensure that parents were not burdened with the costs of an independent psychologist's report.
16. We have been working alongside the Ministry with some wharekura to identify appropriate testing tools to assess literacy needs of Māori students. We are also arranging two additional seminars this year targeted specifically at Principal's Nominees in wharekura. The first seminar is being held in Northland in April and a second is planned for the Bay of Plenty in June. The Ministry is also working to encourage RTLB clusters to work more closely with the wharekura.
17. Comment from some wharekura indicates that students in Māori-medium schools, who might in mainstream schools be receiving SAC, are usually on an Individual Education Plan. This is developed in consultation with the student, their whānau and their school. This provides wrap around support to meet the student's needs and may be a factor for wharekura's relatively low uptake of SAC.

#### *Other work*

18. NZQA is also meeting with schools which have higher rates of uptake of SAC, commencing in April 2018. Although SAC applications are considered by a panel of independent psychologists, NZQA wants to ensure that all schools are making appropriate applications. These schools may have particular expertise in meeting the needs of students with learning disorders, and where these schools are low decile, this work may also assist in identifying further opportunities to support other lower decile schools with lower uptake rates by sharing good practice.

19. NZQA continues to learn from other jurisdictions' best practice in this area and to benchmark our own practice. NZQA attended the annual meeting of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Certification Authorities (ACACA) Special Provisions sub-committee on 22 – 23 March 2018. This has a focus on assistance to students with special educational needs.
20. The feedback that we receive from schools indicates that the changes that NZQA has made to the SAC application process and the tools for school-based evidence have reduced barriers for students accessing SAC. However, it is timely given that these changes are now reasonably well established, to undertake specific research with low decile schools into how the processes are working and what further changes might be necessary to further reduce any barriers. NZQA intends to complete this by the end of July 2018.

#### *Analysis of the type of SAC support approved in 2017 across all deciles*

21. Many learners are approved for more than one type of support. For example, separate accommodation is needed when a student has a reader or is using a computer/writer because these situations require either the student or the examination assistant to speak.
22. We have conducted statistical analysis of the distribution of the types of SAC provision across the deciles. In general, there are no outliers of concern in the provision of the two most common special assessment conditions; computer/writer or reader assistance. We will investigate any apparent anomalies that are identified in other types of provision that are less commonly requested.
23. NZQA will continue to analyse the SAC data to supplement the information gathered through our direct engagement with schools during 2018.

#### **Next Steps**

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24. Redacted under section 9(2)(f)(iv).
25. NZQA will undertake targeted research with low decile schools by the end of July 2018, into how the current application process and the school-based evidence tools are working, to ensure that students do not face barriers to fair access to SAC.
26. NZQA will also conduct some analysis of the range of provisions accessed by students undertaking both internal and external assessment across all deciles. This analysis will determine whether the lower numbers of students accessing SAC in lower decile schools could be influenced by their lower participation in external assessment.
27. NZQA will continue to report back to you regularly on the 2018 SAC work programme.