

# **Review of Special Assessment Conditions for National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)**

A report for the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA)

7 March 2014



## Contents

Executive summary .....	2
Highlights from the review .....	2
Review recommendations .....	3
1.0 Introduction .....	5
1.1 Purpose .....	5
1.2 Who the report is for .....	5
1.3 Secondary school context.....	6
1.4 Content.....	8
1.5 Publication and contact information .....	8
2.0 Background and context.....	9
2.1 Background .....	9
2.2 Strategic context.....	10
3.0 Review process .....	12
3.1 Review outcomes .....	12
3.2 Review methodology .....	12
3.3 Review principles.....	13
4.0 Findings on equitable access to SAC .....	14
4.1 Key findings.....	14
4.2 Applications levelled off .....	14
4.3 Three percent of students accessed SAC.....	14
4.4 Significantly more high decile schools accessed SAC .....	16
4.5 A small number of schools applied for many SAC entitlements .....	16
4.6 SAC is not equitably accessed .....	16
4.7 Most SAC applications are made for learning disabilities.....	17
4.8 Most SAC applications are approved.....	17
4.9 Not all SAC entitlements are approved at the same rate.....	18
4.10 SAC appeal data for 2013 is incomplete.....	19
4.12 No national data on impact of SAC on student achievement .....	20
4.13 The new application tool could improve availability of SAC data .....	21
5.0 Factors influencing equitable access to SAC.....	22
5.1 Key factors .....	22
5.2 SAC information and support.....	22
5.3 SAC administration model .....	23
5.4 SAC application tool .....	25
5.5 Independent assessments.....	25
5.6 Transition of students through school .....	27
6.0 Options for improving access to SAC .....	30
6.1 Key findings.....	30
6.2 Funding independent assessments .....	30
6.3 Further development of alternative evidence .....	31
6.4 Getting RTLBs to carry out independent assessments .....	33
6.5 Making better use of RTLBs .....	33
6.6 Applying early for SAC .....	34
6.7 Implications for schools .....	35
7.0 Findings on the future of SAC.....	38
7.1 Key findings.....	38
7.2 SAC and flexible assessment .....	38
7.3 Internal assessment and use of SAC.....	39
7.4 Future direction of technology and assessment.....	40
8.0 Recommendations .....	42
8.1 Recommendation aims .....	42
Appendix.....	44

## Executive summary

In 2012, a review of Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) was initiated to identify issues of access and equity, and to evaluate improvements that could be made to the SAC process and use of resources.

The review drew on data collected from stakeholder submissions, surveys and interviews, as well as NZQA data for 2013.

### Highlights from the review

The following are highlights from the review, broken down into four sections.

#### 1. Findings on equitable access to SAC

The review found access to SAC was not equitable, with students attending high decile schools significantly more likely to access SAC than anyone else.

It showed most students who applied for SAC were successful, with the majority of SAC entitlements granted to students with specific learning disabilities.

It also found SAC application numbers levelled off in 2013 after a 25 percent increase between 2011 and 2012.

Detailed findings from the review include:

- a student attending a decile 10 school was seven times more likely to apply for a SAC entitlements, compared with a student attending a decile one school
- a third of all schools (35 percent of schools) did not access SAC at all
- 349 schools applied to receive SAC entitlements for 4,507 students in 2013, compared with 321 schools applying to receive SAC entitlements for 4,405 students in 2012
- 87 percent of applications were approved or confirmed, with 178 students declined any SAC entitlements
- 71 percent of SAC applications were made for students with specific learning disabilities in 2013
- the rates of approved and declined applications were similar across all SAC categories (ie, sensory, medical, physical and learning).

#### 2. Factors influencing equitable access to SAC

The review identified several key factors that made it difficult for some schools to access SAC.

Factors include:

- complexity of the SAC application process
- timing of the application process (too late in the year)
- timing of SAC approvals (too late in the year)
- high cost to parents of having a Level C Assessor or registered psychologist assess their child (for a specific learning disability)
- resources required for schools to identify students, carry out school-based assessments, manage the SAC process and access community supports (such as readers and writers)



- the need for low decile schools to focus on priorities other than SAC, eg, broader student achievement goals and language, literacy and numeracy achievement.

### **3. Key options for improving access to SAC**

Several key options for improving access to SAC were identified in the review, with some found to have more benefits than others.

Key options for improving access to SAC include:

- providing government funding for independent assessments and focusing on getting assessments done early in a student's education
- supporting and increasing the use of alternative evidence, reducing the need for independent assessments
- involving RTLBs (Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour) in SAC, building on best practice occurring within the sector (eg, in early identification and setting up systems to share student information)
- using RTLBs as SAC assessors (an option requiring significant retraining)
- improving the SAC application tool, information, processes and support.

### **4. Key findings on the future of SAC**

Overall, the review found the Ministry and NZQA need to improve access to SAC to benefit more students in the short term.

In the long term, the agencies need to prepare schools for a future where technology was likely to solve many of the assessment issues apparent today and remove the need for SAC altogether.

Key findings related to the future of SAC, include:

- NZQA's strategic plan for technology will completely change the face of assessment practice in a decade
- the government's investment in technology is also altering teaching, learning and assessment practice, giving teachers a strengthened ability to meet the specific needs of students typically requiring SAC
- in the future, technology will make it easier to adapt the assessment process to meet a wider range of student needs
- in time, technology will enable teachers to use more flexible teaching, learning and assessment practices, particularly in relation to students typically requiring SAC
- there will always be a need for the early identification of students with specific learning disabilities and sensory needs.

## **Review recommendations**

**It is recommended that in the short term:**

1. the Ministry and NZQA work closely with schools to further develop the alternative evidence process for SAC applications made under the learning category – this work is to commence following the completion of the current examination cycle
2. NZQA makes the application tool more user friendly for 2014



3. NZQA improves the information, support and implementation processes for the current system, recognising that the current processes are seen by some as too complex and unclear
4. NZQA reviews the application deadlines to enable entitlements to be approved earlier through an application process open to schools from October to the end of term one
5. the Ministry works with RTLBs and schools to ensure early identification and ongoing support of students who need additional teaching, learning and assessment support
6. the Ministry works with RTLBs, NZQA and schools to make better use of the National Standards achievement data to identify students who may require SAC in the future, transferring information about students as they move through school and particularly as they leave year 8 and transition to secondary school
7. the Ministry incorporates discussions about SAC into current and future school support strategies (with an emphasis on the Ministry's Achievement, Retention Team's work with 141 priority schools in 2013, for example)
8. the Ministry reviews the material for schools on dyslexia and refreshes the information booklet to incorporate effective teaching, learning and assessment approaches
9. NZQA publishes data and analysis on access to and use of SAC annually as part of their regular statistics and data reporting cycle.

**It is recommended that in the long term:**

1. the Ministry and NZQA review the centralised application and entitlement policy and consider ways in which the process can become more school based with quality assurance, monitoring and support by NZQA
2. the Ministry reviews the current policy framework to ensure all students who require additional support have access to it
3. the Ministry and NZQA review the current policy framework to ensure teaching, learning and assessment practices optimise opportunities for success in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments and that technologies are used to support student learning (and are reflected in the Ministry's teaching, learning and assessment resources and professional development approaches)
4. the Ministry supports teachers to use 'teaching as enquiry' – authentic, flexible and reliable assessment (for learning) – as an integral part of effective teaching and learning
5. the Ministry and NZQA ensure future developments for on-demand and online learning and assessment strategies are developed to accommodate the needs of students with long-term conditions and learning disabilities to eliminate the need for SAC entitlements.

6.

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose

This report presents findings on a review<sup>1</sup> of Special Assessment Conditions (SAC), a process and set of assessment entitlements<sup>2</sup> managed by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA).<sup>3</sup>

The SAC process gives all New Zealand secondary schools a nationally consistent way to apply for assessment entitlements on behalf of students with particular needs.<sup>4</sup>

The SAC entitlements give students the additional support they need for equitable access to secondary school qualification assessment.

In 2012, the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and NZQA decided it was timely to review SAC over three months<sup>5</sup> to:

- report on current policy and practice
- identify any issues of access
- identify any issues of equity
- identify ways to improve the process
- identify ways to better use or reallocate SAC resources.

Scrutiny of how SAC is processed within the agencies, including the way evidence is collected, stored and verified, remained outside the scope of the review. The process of how the criteria are judged against evidence and the decision-making processes related to entitlement decisions and appeal decisions were also considered out of scope.

### 1.2 Who the report is for

This report is primarily written for the Ministry and NZQA. They are the agencies responsible<sup>6</sup> for setting assessment, qualification and examination policy and practice within New Zealand secondary schools, and providing secondary schools with information and guidance<sup>7</sup> on SAC.

This report may also interest the many people who take part, contribute to and use SAC, including:

- students, their families and whānau, and their support and advocacy groups
- school principals
- Principal Nominees for NCEA
- classroom teachers
- special education needs coordinators (SENCOs)

<sup>1</sup> Set up following agreement between the Ministry of Education's Group Manager, Special Education Strategy, Early Years and Learning Support, and NZQA's Deputy Chief Executive, Qualifications Division in October 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Such as reader, writer or reader-writer support; extra time; alternative formats; use of assistive technology (computers); other exceptional conditions such as rest breaks, home supervision, special papers.

<sup>3</sup> NZQA administers SAC under the Assessment and Examination Rules for Schools with Consent to Assess.

<sup>4</sup> Who have medical, sensory, physical or learning needs.

<sup>5</sup> June, July, August 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Under section 253(1) (j) of the Education Act (1989)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/assessment-and-moderation/managing-national-assessment-in-schools/special-assessment-conditions-guidelines/>



- heads of department: learning support<sup>8</sup>
- resource teachers and their management and governing bodies, particularly Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLb), Resource Teachers: Vision (RTV), Resource Teachers: Deaf (RTD) and Resource Teachers: Literacy (RTLit)
- the various specialists involved in providing the evidence needed for SAC applications, such as educational psychologists and other specialists and student assessors.

### 1.3 Secondary school context

This report reflects the secondary school context of New Zealand, recognising both the Ministry's and NZQA's aims and direction for the sector. For example, ensuring all secondary school students in New Zealand can access and have the opportunity to engage in high-quality teaching, learning and assessment is a top priority for both the Ministry and NZQA.

#### Teaching and learning

For the Ministry, one of its primary goals is to make sure the education system is responsive to the needs of every student and can help them identify what success looks like for them and support them to achieve that success.<sup>9</sup>

##### Access

Having a system where all students have access to high-quality teaching and learning is a key part of achieving this goal.

The legislation that governs New Zealand's education system<sup>10</sup> aims to ensure this occurs for all students, regardless of a student's educational need or disability.

*'With a view to realising this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning.'*

– United Nations Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 (Article 24)

The Ministry is committed to delivering on the New Zealand Disability Strategy by providing the best education for disabled people, so that every child, young person and adult learner will have equal opportunities to learn and develop.

It is also focused on delivering on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by ensuring all students enjoy equal access to secondary school.<sup>11</sup>

##### Opportunity

Having schools and classrooms where there is opportunity to engage and take part in high-quality teaching and learning is also key.

*The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* are curriculum documents based on principles such as cultural diversity, high expectations and

<sup>8</sup> And others with responsibility for developing and implementing SAC within their schools.

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Education *Statement of Intent 2013–2018*.

<sup>10</sup> Expressed in the Education Act (1989), the National Administration Guidelines, National Education Guidelines and National Education Goals.

<sup>11</sup> Article 24 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/convtexte.htm>



inclusion,<sup>12</sup> and are part of the Ministry's focus on ensuring high-quality teaching and learning occurs for all students.

The *Success for All* work programme builds on the curriculum with its clear government vision of achieving an inclusive education system and emphasises access for all students to fully accessible opportunities for learning and achievement. *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017* also builds on the curriculum, emphasising the importance of the Māori potential approach<sup>13</sup> and realising potential, identifying opportunity and tailoring education to the student.

Having a secondary school qualifications system that establishes standards in education and recognises a wider range of skills and knowledge is also a vital element of giving students greater opportunities for success.

New Zealand's National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) delivers on this goal by offering schools and students much greater flexibility<sup>14</sup> and opportunity to tailor the teaching and learning process.<sup>15</sup>

*'The New Zealand Curriculum, together with the Qualifications Framework, gives schools the flexibility to design and deliver programmes that will engage all students and offer them appropriate learning pathways.'*

*'The flexibility of the qualifications system also allows schools to keep assessment to levels that are manageable and reasonable for both students and teachers.'*

– The New Zealand Curriculum

## Assessment

Achieving the Ministry's goals for the education system relies on having a schooling system that uses assessment effectively at every level to improve both teaching and learning.<sup>16</sup>

That is, a learning system in which:

- every student in every school (English and Māori medium) progresses as far as possible, according to their own context
- all participants have a shared understanding of the role assessment plays in learning and are able and willing to both learn from, and contribute to, the process through effective participation within, and between, learning communities ...<sup>17</sup>

This focus builds on the Ministry's shift away from a narrow summative (end point testing) assessment approach to a broader focus on assessment as a means of improving teaching and learning (sometimes referred to as assessment for learning).<sup>18</sup>

For NZQA, the agency responsible for administering the secondary school qualifications system, the focus is to provide long-term strategic leadership in the area of assessment for qualifications such as NCEA, an important and complementary assessment focus.

<sup>12</sup> Other principles include Treaty of Waitangi, learning to learn, community engagement, coherence and future focus.

<sup>13</sup> Based on the Māori potential approach developed by Te Puni Kōkiri in 2004 as a public policy approach for government.

<sup>14</sup> Than what was available from the previous qualifications and assessment system of School Certificate etc.

<sup>15</sup> <http://ncea.tki.org.nz/About-NCEA>

<sup>16</sup> Learning Media for the Ministry of Education. (2011). *Ministry of Education Position Paper: Assessment (Schooling Sector)*.

<sup>17</sup> See above.

<sup>18</sup> See above.





It is also to ensure New Zealand qualifications are regarded as credible and robust, nationally and internationally, and to help students succeed and to contribute to New Zealand society.

In part, this is achieved by being reliable and consistent in the way the agency applies its rules and procedures, in its communications with schools and in the provision of accurate information.<sup>19</sup>

## **1.4 Content**

This report has seven main sections, starting with the introduction providing an overview of the purpose of the review, the key audience and the secondary school context.

Section 2 provides more context to the review, outlining the review background, strategic context, key principles, outcomes and methodology.

Sections 3, 4, 5 and 6 feature the review's key findings.

The report finishes with a section of recommendations (section 7) and the appendices.

## **1.5 Publication and contact information**

This report is available to read and download from the Ministry of Education and NZQA websites.

Go to:

- [www.minedu.govt.nz/SACreview](http://www.minedu.govt.nz/SACreview)
- [www.nzqa.govt.nz/SACreview](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/SACreview).

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/our-values-nga-mataponu/>

## 2.0 Background and context

The background and context of the review is summarised in this section and outlines the reasons behind the review.

### 2.1 Background

#### Application growth

A significant increase in the number of applications for SAC in recent years has been noted as a trend predicted to continue.

NZQA application data collected on the number of initial applications for SAC between 2011 and 2012, for example, showed an increase of 26 percent from 1,870 in 2011 to 2,535 in 2012.

*'Student(s) with permanent or long term medical, physical or sensory conditions and/or a specific learning disability that directly impacts on their ability to be assessed fairly in assessments for National Qualifications, may apply for entitlement to Special Assessment Conditions.'*

– NZQA

Anecdotal evidence also suggests the Ministry's 2009 decision to recognise dyslexia as a learning disability has caused increasing demand for SAC.

#### Application inequity

Evidence that higher decile schools are more likely to access SAC reflects inequity in the way SAC is being taken up throughout New Zealand.

For example, NZQA data showed more high decile schools than low decile schools applied for SAC.<sup>20</sup>

#### Public concerns about cost, equity and access

Public concerns about the cost, equity and access to SAC also surfaced in 2012.

Media reports, for example, began to highlight concerns from the public<sup>21</sup> about the cost of assessment for SAC applications, saying the private cost to parents raised issues of affordability, equity and accessibility.

*'Schools incur time and resource costs in making applications and this is where private and higher decile schools have greater capacity to engage.'*

*'Parents who can afford a full educational psychologist report make the school's job that much easier ...'*

Ministry and NZQA records showed concerns were raised about the following issues.

- Delay in SAC application result announcements
- Too little emphasis on identifying and verifying a student's needs
- Too much emphasis on identifying and verifying a student's disability or medical condition

- Stakeholder on Special Assessment Conditions for NCEA, 2013

<sup>20</sup> About three percent for high decile schools, compared with one percent of students in low decile schools in 2009, with similar figures for 2005 to 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Dyslexia Foundation of New Zealand.



- Inconsistent quality of the independent reports used to provide evidence of a student's needs and/or condition or disability
- NZQA decision-making lacking in transparency
- Poor quality of some school applications
- Unnecessary and sometimes unwarranted pressure from parents on schools to apply for SAC on behalf of their children
- Variable involvement of RTLBs and Ministry specialists in SAC applications
- Variation in the way schools pay for assessments for SAC applications
- Too much change to the SAC process by NZQA

## 2.2 Strategic context

### Ministry of Education

The Government's goals of achieving a fully inclusive education system by 2014 and increasing the number of 18-year-olds with NCEA or an equivalent qualification to 85 percent in 2017 are both relevant to this review.

The objectives of the Ministry's *Statement of Intent* are also relevant, which aim to improve outcomes for Māori and Pasifika learners, learners with special education needs and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds by improving the services and support available to these students.

*The New Zealand Curriculum* provides a clear outline of the characteristics of effective assessment.

*'The primary purpose of assessment is to improve students' learning and teachers' teaching ...'*

Effective assessment:

- benefits students
- involves students
- supports teaching and learning goals
- is planned and communicated
- is suited to the purpose
- is valid and fair.

*'With this in mind, schools need to consider how they will gather, analyse and use assessment information so that it is effective in meeting this purpose.'*

– The New Zealand Curriculum

### New Zealand Qualifications Authority

NZQA's *Future State Strategy 2012–2022*,<sup>22</sup> featuring five key work streams, provides some of the future context of this review.

*'You will all be aware of the way the world is changing and the ways in which technology is changing education.'*

The strategy's assessment work stream, for example, looks at the long-term aim of providing online and on-demand assessment mechanisms for NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship.

*'Trends such as BYOD (bring your own device) and blended classrooms are beginning to become the norm in New Zealand schools ...'*

The quality assurance work stream is focused on embedding and consolidating changes in quality assurance practice and continuous improvement, while the client experience work stream is focused on client responsiveness.

- NZQA chief executive Karen Poutasi to Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand, 2013

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Publications/Strategic-publications/Future-State-Plan-summary.pdf>



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The information management and information technology work streams will also, in part, seek a complete review of secondary assessment and qualifications.

### 3.0 Review process

The review outcomes, methodology and key principles are outlined in this section, providing an overview of the review process.

#### 3.1 Review outcomes

The review had five key outcomes.

1. To ensure access to the SAC process and conditions has the student at the centre.
2. To ensure SAC gives assessment needs priority in its process and the conditions provided.
3. To ensure SAC eligibility processes are transparent, fair, equitable and accessible.
4. To ensure SAC processes reflect the sector's direction for assessment within New Zealand secondary schools and align with the principles and values of *The New Zealand Curriculum*, *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and NZQA's *Future State Strategy 2012–2022*.
5. To ensure provision of SAC continues to uphold the credibility and robustness of the New Zealand qualifications system for secondary schools.

*'Assessment for the purpose of improving student learning is best understood as an ongoing process that arises out of the interaction between teaching and learning.'*

*'It involves the timely gathering, analysis, interpretation, and use of information that can provide evidence of student progress. Much of this evidence is "of the moment".'*

*'Analysis and interpretation often take place in the mind of the teacher, who then uses the insights gained to shape their actions as they continue to work with their students.'*

– The New Zealand Curriculum

#### 3.2 Review methodology

The review methodology involved collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.

##### **Qualitative data**

The Ministry and NZQA collated and analysed qualitative data from submissions, surveys and interviews, involving a range of key stakeholders including school staff, RTLBs, parents and advocacy groups, and professional organisations with an interest in SAC.

People who responded to the review included:

- 30 secondary schools that provided submissions and took part in interviews (in response to a request for feedback in the *Education Gazette* and the NZQA email link to Principal Nominees)
- five RTLB clusters that responded to the request for feedback in the *Education Gazette* on behalf of RTLBs and secondary schools in their clusters
- 143 SENCOS who responded to a survey (sent to 453 SENCOS using the NZQA email link)
- 209 RTLBs, or 28 percent of RTLBs, who responded to a survey (sent to 40 RTLB cluster managers)
- a representative group of psychologists and four individual psychologists
- 10 stakeholder groups representing parent, advocacy, disability and education organisations (who provided feedback through submissions and interviews in response to an email request for feedback)
- three parents or caregivers who provided individual feedback (in response to the request for feedback sent to the stakeholder groups).



### **Quantitative data**

The review also collated and analysed NZQA data on the number of SAC applications received and approved in 2013, as well as the schools that applied for SAC and the category applied for.

### **Overview of review activities by month**

June 2013

- Information about the SAC policy, practices and issues collected from the Ministry and NZQA
- Review principles, outcomes and methodology developed
- Requests for input into the review were sent out to gather feedback from schools, parent and advocacy groups, and professional organisations (using the *Education Gazette* and email)

July 2013

- Continued to send out requests for input
- Follow-up phone calls made to some schools, parent and advocacy groups, and professional organisations to seek clarification on answers to initial feedback and/or to seek further information
- Some stakeholders invited to take part in further interviews (ie, schools with high or low SAC applications)
- NZQA data collated

August 2013

- Surveys sent out to gather feedback on SAC from RTLBs and SENCOS
- NZQA data collated and analysed
- Survey data collated and analysed

September 2013

- Report drafted

### **3.3 Review principles**

The five key principles of the review were:

1. the student is at the centre
2. assessment needs (not medical needs or a diagnosis) are given priority
3. processes to determine eligibility for government services and support are transparent, fair, equitable and accessible
4. all processes related to secondary school assessment reflect the education sector's direction for inclusive teaching, learning and assessment and align with the principles and values of *The New Zealand Curriculum*, *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* and NZQA's *Future State Strategy 2012–2022*
5. all processes or eligibility criteria related to secondary school assessment are designed to uphold the credibility and robustness of the New Zealand qualification system for secondary schools.

## 4.0 Findings on equitable access to SAC

This section explores the key issue of equitable access to SAC, drawing on NZQA SAC data for the 2013 year and the views and experiences of secondary school staff (from 30 secondary schools), 143 SENCOs, 209 RTLBs, four RTLB clusters, psychologists, parents and 10 representative stakeholder groups.

### 4.1 Key findings

The key findings on equitable access to SAC included:

- applications levelled off
- three percent of students (in years 11 to 15) accessed SAC
- significantly more high decile schools accessed SAC
- a small number of schools applied for many SAC entitlements
- SAC is not equitably accessed
- most SAC applications are made for learning disabilities
- most SAC applications are approved
- not all SAC entitlements are approved at the same rate
- SAC appeal data for 2013 is incomplete
- most SAC applications are awarded for one year
- there is no national data on the impact of SAC on student achievement
- the new application tool could improve availability of SAC data.

### 4.2 Applications levelled off

NZQA data for 2013 show there was a small increase in SAC applications for the year. It shows 349 schools applied for 4,507 students to receive SAC entitlements.

These figures compare to 2012 figures showing 321 schools applied for 4,405 students to receive SAC entitlements and reflected a levelling off in application numbers after a 25 percent rise of new SAC applications in the 2011 to 2012 year.

### 4.3 Three percent of students accessed SAC

In 2013, about three percent of the age cohort in years 11 to 15 accessed SAC entitlements across all categories.

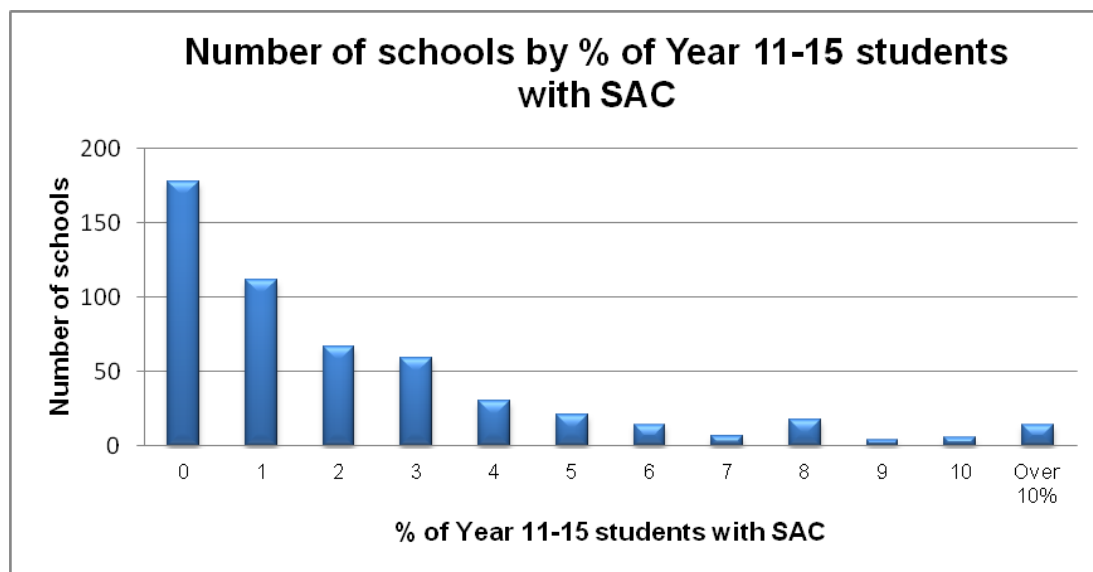
Graph 1 explores this finding in more detail, showing:

- 34 percent of schools did not access any SAC entitlements
- 45 percent of schools accessed SAC entitlements for one percent or less of their year 11–15 cohort
- 43 percent accessed SAC for between two and 10 percent of their year 11–15 cohort.

*'All students have the right to be provided with a fair and equitable assessment so that they can participate and achieve to their full potential.'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

Graph 1: Number of schools by percentage of year 11–15 students with SAC

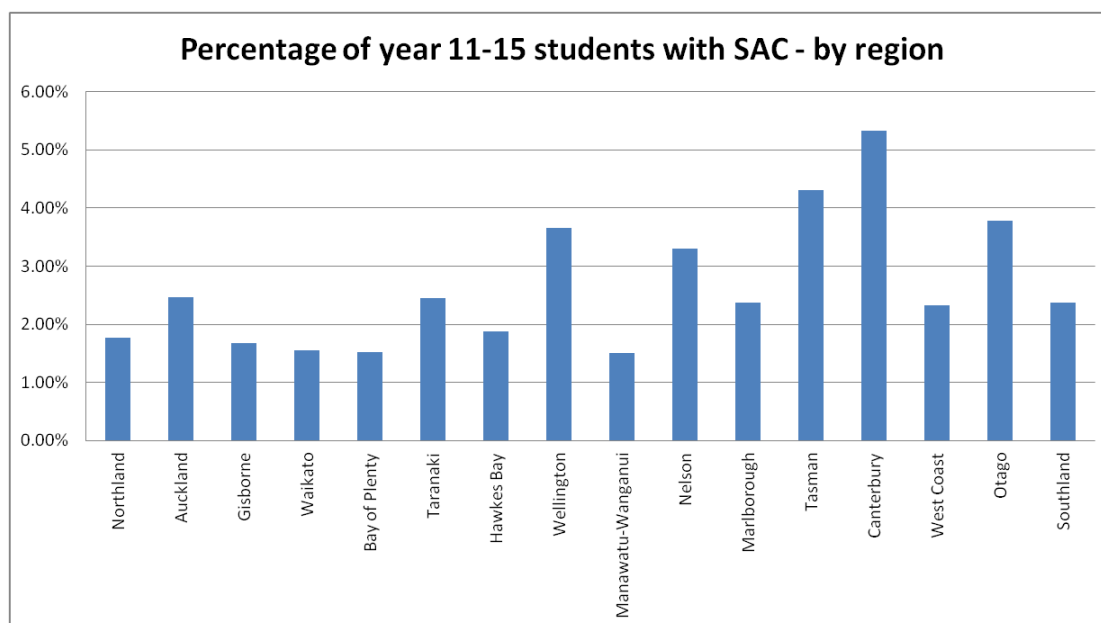


The review also found 14 schools accessed SAC entitlements for more than 10 percent of their year 11–15 cohort. These schools were Kelston Deaf Education Centre; van Asch Deaf Education Centre; students accessing BLENNZ services; seven large (in roll size), high-decile urban schools; and four smaller, mid-decile schools.

It found the large, high-decile urban schools in the group accessed SAC for between 11 and 20 percent of the cohort. It also found eight of the schools (excluding van Asch College) were located in the Canterbury region, with six in Christchurch.

The figures in Graph 2 (by regional council areas) show the percentage of year 11–15 students with SAC by region.

Graph 2: Percentage of year 11–15 students with SAC by region





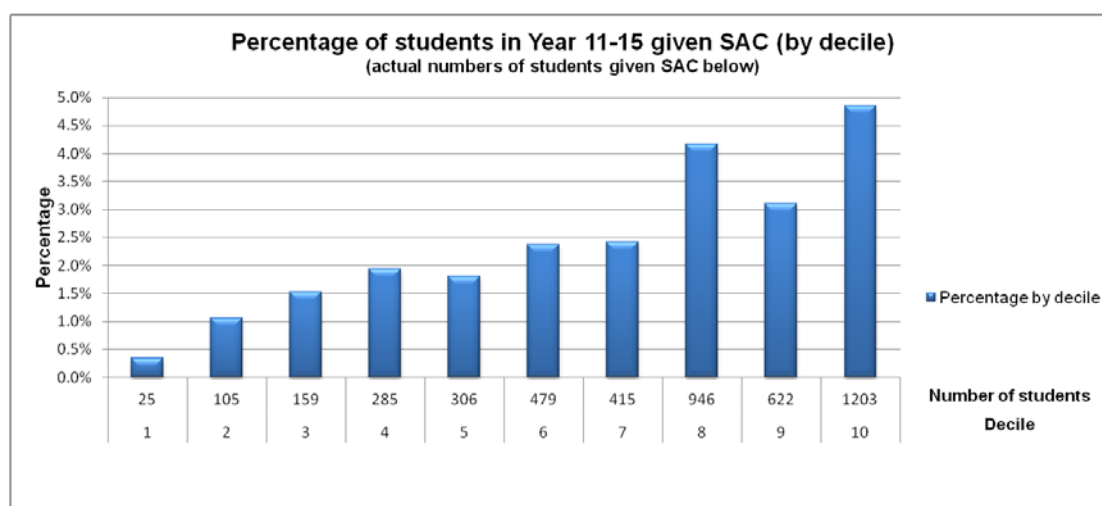
#### 4.4 Significantly more high decile schools accessed SAC

Graph 3 shows high decile schools accessed SAC entitlements at a disproportionately high rate compared with low decile schools in 2013. It confirms a pattern noted in the data of previous years.

The data shows decile 8 to 10 schools accessed SAC entitlements at a higher than average rate, at approximately four percent. In contrast, decile 1 to 3 schools accessed SAC entitlements at a rate of less than one percent. Data shows the rate for mid-decile schools (decile 4 to 7 schools) was two percent.

The data shows a student attending a decile 10 school was seven times more likely to have an application for SAC entitlements than a student attending a decile one school.

Graph 3: Percentage of students in years 11–15 given SAC by decile



#### 4.5 A small number of schools applied for many SAC entitlements

NZQA data also shows a relatively small number of schools applied for a large number of students (more than 50) to access SAC entitlements in 2013.

Of the 16 schools that made more than 50 applications, only four schools made applications for more than 10 percent of their cohort. These schools were large, private, urban schools.

#### 4.6 SAC is not equitably accessed

It is difficult to assess what percentage of students within the year 11–15 cohort could reasonably expect to get SAC entitlements.

Figures in the literature on the number of people in a population likely to have medical, sensory, physical or learning needs vary significantly across countries and education systems.

*'It appears that the label of dyslexia is only available to children whose parents can afford a private assessment ...'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013



SAC entitlements are granted to students who are able to work at level six (or above) of the national curriculum and on the grounds that an entitlement can be shown to mitigate the residual functional impact of a student's disability.

The data suggests that, where students are likely to have access to early identification and teaching and learning that remediates and accommodates well for their learning needs, they are able to continue learning at the appropriate age level. There is less evidence to suggest that positive teaching and learning throughout school mean that students avoid the need for SAC at senior school level.

The 2013 data collected throughout the review does clearly show high decile schools made more applications for SAC compared with low decile schools.

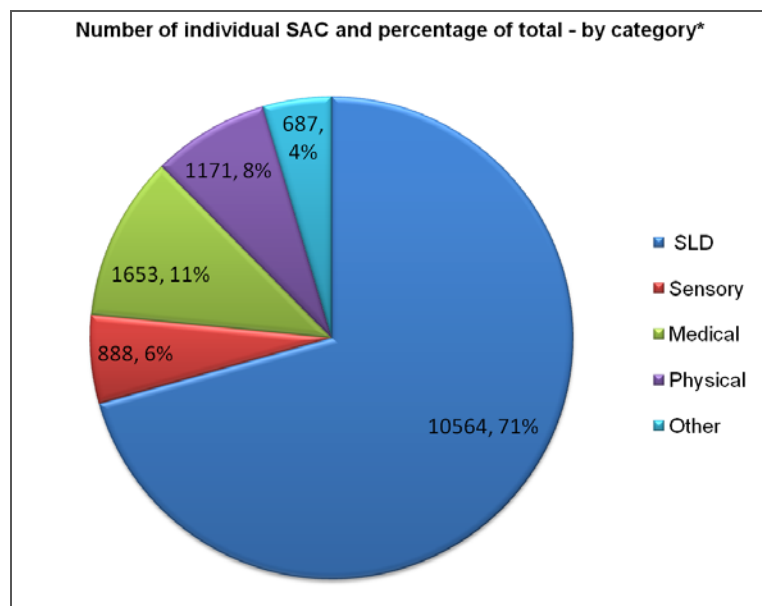
This gap is a cause for concern and highlights that SAC is not equitably accessed across the school population.

#### 4.7 Most SAC applications are made for learning disabilities

Students can apply for up to 10 entitlements across the four categories of need – sensory, medical, physical or learning. Generally, however, students receive two or three individual entitlements, such as a reader or rest breaks.

The 2013 data shows the majority of SAC applications (71 percent) were made for students with learning needs (also called specific learning disabilities or SLD) as shown by Graph 4.

Graph 4: SAC entitlements by number, percentage and category\*



\*This graph refers to the number of SAC entitlements (not student numbers). Many students apply for more than one SAC entitlement.

#### 4.8 Most SAC applications are approved

Latest SAC approval data shows the majority (87 percent) of applications (for specific entitlements) were approved (if first time applications) or confirmed (if ongoing applications), compared with 13 percent that were declined.



SENCOs surveyed in the review backed up this data, with the majority saying their SAC applications were usually or mostly successful.

Data reflected in Table A shows that the rate of approvals and the rate of declined applications were similar across all categories in 2013.

Table A: Individual SAC entitlements approved/declined by category

	<i>Learning</i>	<i>Sensory</i>	<i>Medical</i>	<i>Physical</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Approved or confirmed</i>	9,199 (87%)	808 (91%)	1,387 (84%)	1,030 (81%)	558 (81%)	12,982 (87%)
<i>Declined</i>	1,346 (13%)	80 (9%)	266 (16%)	141 (12%)	129 (19%)	1,962 (13%)

Table A also shows overall approval rates were similar across all SAC categories (between 81 and 91 percent), although there were more approvals in the sensory category (91 percent) and a higher rate of decline in the other (at 19 percent) and medical (at 16 percent) categories.

In 2013, 176 students had all their SAC applications declined, reflecting a decline rate of 3.9 percent.

Given the importance of achieving well in external examinations and the high expectation that SAC entitlements are central to achieving that goal, missing out on a SAC entitlement in the year of assessment for qualifications is significant for the students, families and schools concerned.

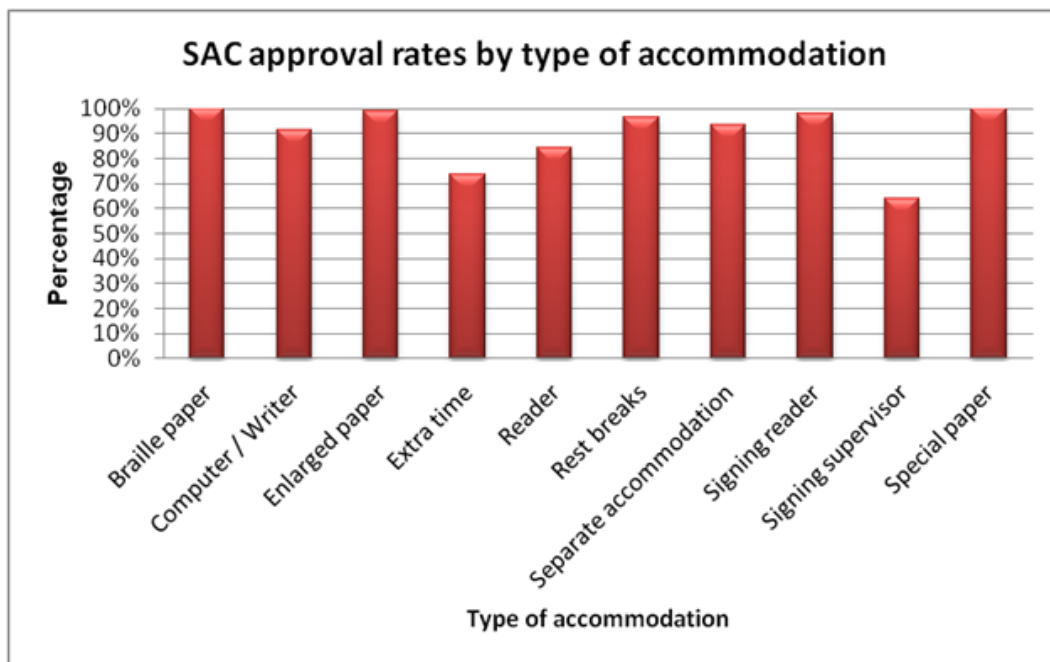
#### **4.9 Not all SAC entitlements are approved at the same rate**

The 2013 data also shows that not all SAC entitlements were approved at the same rate (see Graph 5).

For example, extra time, readers and signing supervisors were declined more frequently than other SAC entitlements.



Graph 5: SAC approval rates by type of entitlement (or accommodation)



This data suggests schools need more information and support for the three SAC criteria of extra time, reader and signing supervisor to better match eligible students to the right entitlements. Monitoring this information over time will be one way to measure progress in this area.

#### 4.10 SAC appeal data for 2013 is incomplete

Data showing how many initial decisions reached the appeal process in 2013 was not available for this review.<sup>23</sup>

However, the review did find four appeals went to the Chief Executive of NZQA in 2013 and none were upheld.

It found one student was given a new and separate entitlement by the Chief Executive (extra time when not using a writer/computer) based on new writing data submitted with the appeal.

The review also found some parents felt shut out of the appeal process and wanted the same opportunity to participate as was given to schools.

The current process requires that schools make an appeal to NZQA on behalf of students (without any direct communication between parents, caregivers and NZQA). Parents and caregivers are able to communicate directly with the NZQA Chief Executive following the initial appeal decision.

*'The appeal process is not clear and the reason for a student being declined is not specific enough for me to explain to a student or parent why the entitlement was turned down ...'*

- Stakeholders to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

<sup>23</sup> The completeness and accuracy of the 2013 data were affected by Wellington's July 2013 earthquake, when the application tool had to be turned off and the information collected manually by email.



#### 4.11 Most SAC applications are awarded for one year

The 2013 data shows the majority of SAC approved entitlements (78 percent) were awarded for one year out of a possible three.

Comments from schools suggest this figure was higher than they had experienced in the past.

For the purpose of the review, NZQA noted its rationale for awarding entitlements for the duration of one year – a rationale it also shared with schools.

SAC entitlements were granted for one year where NZQA determined that the SAC entitlements applied for needed to be trialled and were likely to change the following year.

An example of this scenario is noted below.

A student with dyslexia asking for a reader, computer/writer, as well as extra time, where there was little data to support the student's requirement for extra time.

In such a case, the student was likely to have his entitlement to a reader, writer and extra time approved for a year only or have his entitlement to a reader and writer approved for a year and his extra time declined.

In cases like this one, NZQA would grant the student's entitlements for a year to give NZQA the opportunity to better understand the impact of the entitlements on the student's progress<sup>24</sup> and to reconsider what entitlements were likely to work best the following year.

The aim of this approach was to avoid locking the student into a set of entitlements that did not adequately meet that student's particular needs.

#### 4.12 No national data on impact of SAC on student achievement

National data on the impact of SAC on students' NCEA achievement is not collected by NZQA and was not available for the review.

However, schools do review achievement data and feedback shows SAC was valued by the parents, schools and students who accessed it.

Parents and schools reported that SAC had a positive effect on students' achievement and life chances.

Schools also reported high success rates among students using SAC, saying it made a difference to students' self esteem and motivation, and improved the likelihood of students staying on at school.

SENCOs reported that SAC enabled students to demonstrate what they knew and were really capable of.

*'Our SAC data shows that most entitlements were granted for one year only.'*

*'This is contrary to the guidelines, which say SAC entitlements are generally given for three years and is different from what we have seen in the past ...'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

*'My son has great practical abilities. With SAC, he can get through school and gain the qualification he needs to get into a trade course. Without it, he wouldn't be able to get NCEA Level 2 ...'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

<sup>24</sup> Reflected in the student's needs analysis results.



Some also said that a process like SAC prompted teachers to provide students with the kind of additional support that was unlikely to have been provided without the formal requirements of SAC.

The national collection of performance information for students accessing SAC is recommended.

#### **4.13 The new application tool could improve availability of SAC data**

As part of the review, the NZQA's new application tool was looked at to understand how it worked, its functionality and its data-collecting potential.

The review found the tool, implemented in 2013, was still undergoing development, but it was already providing better access to information on SAC than had been available previously through the manual record-keeping system.

As a result, the review found the tool had the potential to give the Ministry and NZQA more opportunity to analyse SAC data and note trends over time in a more robust way.

In the future, for example, it could, if developed further, enable the Ministry and NZQA to:

- link SAC data to national student numbers
- link SAC data to student achievement data
- identify priority learner groups
- identify ways to improve access to SAC entitlements
- monitor the effect of changes made to the SAC process.

## 5.0 Factors influencing equitable access to SAC

This section explores the key issue of equitable access to SAC, drawing on NZQA SAC data for the 2013 year and the views and experiences of secondary school staff (from 30 secondary schools), 143 SENCOs, 209 RTLBs, four RTLB clusters, psychologists, parents and 10 representative stakeholder groups.

### 5.1 Key factors

The key factors influencing access to SAC identified by the review included:

- SAC information and support
- SAC administration model
- SAC application tool
- independent assessments
- transition of students through school
- school resourcing.

### 5.2 SAC information and support

The SENCO survey (with feedback from 143 SENCOs) and individual feedback from 30 schools show the information and support on SAC available from NZQA was experienced very differently by different people.

For example, the review found some schools appreciated the information and support offered by NZQA, noting that NZQA understood their issues and the issues of their students.

These schools commented that there was good, timely communication and that there was clear information about what was needed.

However, others experienced a lack of professional support or recognition of the professionalism of teachers.

They said there was little opportunity to share and co-create information in a way that suggested teachers were equal partners with NZQA or that teachers' assessment expertise was valued.

They also found NZQA information confusing, NZQA processes complex, support difficult to access and decisions hard to understand.

In turn, the review found schools' difficulty in meeting the SAC deadlines (set out in the NZQA timeline) made it more difficult for NZQA to process applications on time.

### Suggestions for improvement

*'We now have a direct phone contact when we have a query ...'*

*'Parents are still missing out on effective communication about SAC. It should come from NZQA ...'*

- Stakeholders to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

*'New Zealand has the most devolved education system in the world, but for less than 5,000 students we have a complex national process to determine quite small modifications to assessment.'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013



The review identified several opportunities for improvement, including the provision of more accessible information, smoothing the implementation process and giving schools new to SAC more support.

Schools also expressed a desire for improved communication between NZQA and schools – communication characterised by the spirit of partnership.

### 5.3 SAC administration model

There were also mixed views on the SAC administration model.

Some expressed support for the centralised, agency-led model, with stakeholders noting the current system protected students' right for support.

This was particularly the case for stakeholders of dyslexic students. In their view, it was less likely that schools would accept dyslexia as a learning disability without the recognition provided by NZQA as the government agency responsible for SAC.

Others who gave feedback to the review were less supportive of the centralised, government model, saying it fostered very little trust between NZQA (the government agency responsible for administering SAC) and schools.

Criticisms of the current model included:

- teachers were not treated as partners
- information was complex and was a barrier to teachers making good decisions
- decision-making was not transparent enough for teachers to understand the process
- school-based assessment data and alternative evidence was given less recognition or status compared with independent assessments
- the time required to make applications, and do paper work and school-based assessments.

### Suggestions for improvement

The review identified several ways for schools and the NZQA to improve the SAC process by building a model of high trust.

Schools made the following suggestions.

Allow schools to:

- make local decisions about giving students some accommodations such as extra time (up to a certain level<sup>25</sup>), rest breaks or stretching breaks and suitable accommodation, where NZQA resource was not required to provide extra supervision
- have teachers with Level C qualifications assess students within their own school rather than requiring someone with the same qualification who is independent of the school
- have principals verify no change to a condition with agreement from students and parents in place of medical practitioners (who have to verify medical and physical conditions annually)

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<sup>25</sup> For example, five minutes in each hour over a three-hour paper. Also refer to [http://www.rad.org.uk/files/ART226\\_Reasonable%20Adjustments%20and%20Special%20Conisderation%20Policies%20and%20Procedures.pdf](http://www.rad.org.uk/files/ART226_Reasonable%20Adjustments%20and%20Special%20Conisderation%20Policies%20and%20Procedures.pdf).





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- use their existing systems to identify students with learning disabilities and link this with alternative evidence for SAC applications.

## 5.4 SAC application tool

The review identified a range of differing views on the SAC application tool implemented in 2013.

Of the 126 SENCOS who responded to the question, 35 percent found the tool made the SAC process easier or much easier, while more than 60 percent said it had made the SAC process harder or much harder.

*'Once the correct data is available for a student it is easy to feed into the program ...'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

In general, SENCOS expressed a great deal of negative comment and considerable distress about the application tool in this first year of implementation.

*'It is not straight forward. The application process is completely different from last year and requires a lot more organisation to record the information.'*

### Suggestions for improvement

Suggestions for improving the application tool (collated throughout the review) have been sent to NZQA and are being used (alongside other feedback sent directly from schools to NZQA) to trial, improve and implement an updated tool for 2014.

*'It has not been easy to follow or to understand if the application has gone through and been accepted and things seem to have got lost in the system ...'*

As part of the trial, a group of schools will access the NZQA application tool at the end of the 2013 year to enter year 10 student information.

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

The goal is to ensure as many students as possible enter their first year of assessment for qualifications with certainty about their SAC entitlements. Entering student information in the year before assessment for qualifications will make this more likely.

Schools updating or confirming existing entitlements will be able to do so early in term one of the assessment for qualifications year.

These changes will also reduce the likelihood of NZQA's entitlement announcements clashing with schools' internal and external assessments commitments, and avoid SENCOS potentially having to double handle the information (once, at the end of the year to meet the schools' requirements, and, again, the following year to meet the NZQA requirements).

Schools will be updated on the trial as it develops.

## 5.5 Independent assessments

The review identified several issues related to the independent assessments needed for students applying for SAC under the learning category. For example, the cost and lack of availability of independent assessors were key issues. The need to clarify the assessment requirements was another.



## Cost

The cost<sup>26</sup> to parents of having a Level C Assessor or registered psychologist assess their child (under the learning category) was a concern for parents and schools, with rates noted to range from \$400 to \$700 for a single assessment.

The cost of independent assessments was found to be a particular barrier for parents in mid to low decile schools.

## Access

Qualified assessors were found to be unavailable in some parts of the country, despite efforts by SPELD New Zealand<sup>27</sup> to provide a national network of assessors.

This was noted as a key factor influencing access to SAC as travel time and costs were also required.

## Assessment requirements

Schools said parents were confused by the assessment requirements, noting they were unsure when to get their child assessed, or by whom, and wanted NZQA to publish a list of recommended assessors.

Parents and some psychologists said they needed better guidance of what was required from NZQA to keep independent assessments efficient, focused and to make them less costly.

## Report quality

Several schools reported concerns about the quality of the independent assessment reports.

Assessors, in turn, voiced concerns that their professional reports were not going directly to NZQA and were instead being interpreted by schools (as required by the application process).

Some assessors noted concerns that the SAC application process forced them to direct their assessments away from teaching and learning to focus on assessment for qualifications.

Assessors also said they were not always made aware of changes to SAC requirements, which affected their ability to deliver easily.

## Assessment criteria

Feedback from schools questioned the need for independent assessors to assess students' IQ or general ability for students already working at the appropriate curriculum level.

Assessors noted concern that IQ assessments could negatively influence teachers' expectations of students. Others believed NZQA needed to provide a clear statement

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26 The cost of assessment for other SAC categories is covered, in the main, by health services or ACC.

27 <http://www.speld.org.nz/>



on the purpose and rationale for a general ability score if it was to remain part of the evidence required in an application.

Assessors questioned the testing methodology for students' reading and processing speed and also wanted the assessment criteria used by NZQA to be clarified.

### **Student eligibility**

Some schools and assessors also felt the Ministry's broad working definition of dyslexia<sup>28</sup> gave parents a false expectation a child with dyslexia would be immediately eligible for SAC under the learning category.

Schools sometimes felt they unnecessarily bore the responsibility for managing parents' disappointment with NZQA when a student's application was declined for particular SAC entitlements.

### **Early identification**

Some assessors responding to the review noted that, with the right support early in life, many students with learning needs could avoid having to apply for SAC support at senior secondary level.

In turn, their parents would avoid the cost and difficulties associated with independent assessments focused for assessment for qualifications.

### **Suggestions for improvement**

Submitters to the review came up with the following suggestions for improving independent assessments.

- Provide government funding for independent assessments.
- Improve the independent assessment process by encouraging assessors who engage with SAC to feed back on the online form called *Mandatory Data Summary Sheet for Registered Assessor* (a consultation process currently under way).
- Keep assessors updated on SAC through improved information sharing and training, ie, a regular NZQA newsletter and/or regular meetings for assessors.

## **5.6 Transition of students through school**

Another issue identified in the review was the need to better share information about student learning needs, progress and achievement as students transition through school and into secondary school.

### **Suggestions for improvement**

Suggestions put forward for resolving this issue:

- Increased involvement of RTLBs in identification and transition through school of students with specific learning disabilities
- Ministry-led professional development and information teaching, learning and assessment approaches for students with dyslexia

*'We need more help to understand the learning needs of these students and to make sure that they are followed up when they leave our school ...'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/AllAges/UsefullInformation/Dyslexia.aspx>



- Better use of National Standards information to identify students with learning needs and to support the better flow of information about students

## 5.7 School resourcing

The review found widespread concern that schools had too few resources to adequately identify possible applicants for SAC, process SAC applications and manage the SAC process well.

SENCOs surveyed noted that students with learning needs were the students most likely to miss out on the support they needed (recognising 71 percent of SAC applications were made under the learning category).

### Time and cost

SENCOs identified the time and cost issues included:

- the time to do the paper work and applications (80 percent said it was a barrier or significant barrier to students with learning needs getting SAC)
- the cost of independent assessments (77 percent said it was a barrier or significant barrier)
- the time to complete school-based assessments and gather evidence (62 percent said it was a barrier or significant barrier).

*'I can see that, in a large school such as ours, the SAC process – data gathering, processing applications, training of reader-writers, liaising with staff, communicating with parents and provision of assistance ... is fast becoming a full-time position.'*

– Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

### Other issues

Schools identified other resourcing issues, including:

- the lack of clarity in information about requirements and criteria
- the lack of resources for finding, paying for and training readers and writers
- the lack of resources for doing assessments for applications, including tools and people
- the difficulty of using the application tool.

Review feedback showed that SAC entitlements were more likely to be applied for when a school had allocated someone the responsibility for the SAC process in their school.

*'Our school really struggles to find support staff to be exam assistants for SAC students.'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

### Impact of under resourcing

For some schools the resources, particularly personnel, needed for SAC meant they did not use the process or try to access SAC entitlements on behalf of their students.

Feedback also showed that for some schools SAC was not the most important priority or considered the best means for raising achievement in their schools. Others did not have access to a suitable community of people to provide the reading and writing tasks they may need.

### SENCO experience

One SENCO summarised her experience managing the SAC process on behalf of 38 students in her school.



She noted 150 hours between November and January, which involved:

- checking all education psychologist reports
- communicating with parents and caregivers
- doing needs analyses in preparation for the next year, based on all of the tracking done on students during the year
- writing memos for all staff involved with all students on the SAC register
- talking through subject choices with families
- convincing timetablers to consider individual needs
- following up with families, caregivers and educational psychologists to secure all the relevant permissions and to discuss realistic expectations for their children.

She also noted the times spent on SAC entitlements per term as a school, as noted here.

- Term 1: 207 hours
- Term 2: 398 hours
- Term 3: 294 hours (with 78 hours in the first three weeks alone)

### Issues for low decile schools

Overall, the review found low decile schools, and in particular decile 1 schools, rarely accessed SAC. Access to independent assessments was found to be one of the perceived barriers.

However, low decile schools were also prioritising other important educational issues over SAC.

Some of the higher priority issues faced by low decile schools were:

- prevalence of low language, literacy and numeracy development preventing students from achieving at the appropriate curriculum level
- difficulty identifying specific learning difficulties because of issues such as low language and literacy development, low expectations, variable teaching quality, student transience and/or disengagement
- resource demands associated with applying for and managing SAC applications
- availability of people in the community who can be trained as readers or writers
- identification and monitoring of student learning information as students move through the school system
- other explanations for a student's lack of progress, eg behaviour problems or disengagement from school that masked learning difficulties
- limited knowledge of learning difficulties and SAC within the community
- other approaches being used for raising overall student achievement
- building expertise for teaching, learning and assessment.

*'The widespread inequities within the present system are largely driven by an application process that costs schools and often families considerable time and money.'*

– Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

## 6.0 Options for improving access to SAC

This section explores the key issue of equitable access to SAC, drawing on NZQA SAC data for the 2013 year and the views and experiences of secondary school staff (from 30 secondary schools), 143 SENCOS, 209 RTLBs, four RTLB clusters, psychologists, parents and 10 representative stakeholder groups. It finishes by looking at schools' readiness for benefiting from improvements to the current system.

### 6.1 Key findings

The key options considered for improving access to SAC identified in the review included:

- funding independent assessments
- further development of alternative evidence
- getting RTLBs to carry out independent assessments
- making better use of RTLBs
- applying early for SAC.

### 6.2 Funding independent assessments

Directly funding the independent assessments required to apply for SAC (under the learning category) was one way many in the sector recommended improving access to SAC.

#### Estimated cost of funding independent assessments

The review explored the costs associated with funding independent assessments.

- It would cost approximately \$552,000 to fund independent assessments in decile 1 to 3 schools (based on all schools accessing SAC at the same rate as decile 8 to 10 schools do now<sup>29</sup>) and using \$500 as an estimated cost of an assessment.
- It would cost approximately \$3.37 million to fund independent assessments in all schools, using the same figures as above.
- There would be flow-on costs of increases in providing examination support by NZQA if entitlements increased. The 2012/2013 cost for examination assistants, readers and writers, and separate accommodation is approximately \$800,000 for about three percent of the year 11 to 15 age cohort. Approximately \$1.1 million would cover the costs across all schools at the same rate as decile 8 to 10 schools now. The examination support costs for 5.8 percent of the current age cohort would be about \$1.55 million, and at eight percent the cost would be \$2.1 million.
- The government examination bulk grant covers internal NZQA costs of processing SAC applications and may have to increase if applications rise significantly over the next few years.
- The cost of allocating funding for applications would need to be included.

*'All schools need to have access to a pool of funding that is specifically for [managing SAC], otherwise other priorities steal this right from students that learn differently ...'*

– Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

<sup>29</sup> At four percent of the student population.



- The costs that schools have for implementing SAC in their schools have not been calculated.

This option could work for schools that had identified students likely to need SAC, but had not applied because of the cost of the independent assessments.

### **Drawback of this option**

Funding independent assessments (by itself) was unlikely to work for schools that:

- are not set up to identify students who could be eligible for SAC under the learning category
- lack the resources needed for other aspects of the SAC application and administration process
- lack the community resource to provide readers and writers
- need to prioritise other initiatives to raise the educational achievement of students.

The process of allocating funding for applications could be complex and costly.

Also high decile schools are already able to cover the cost of independent assessments and other related costs from within their schools and communities.

## **6.3 Further development of alternative evidence**

Further development of alternative evidence, which involves schools collecting the evidence to be used to apply for SAC under the learning category, was another option for improving access to SAC identified in the review.

### **Benefits of using alternative evidence**

Alternative evidence collected in 2012 (for students applying for SAC under the learning category) was of a high quality.

SENCOs said the NZQA application tool was well suited to collecting and reporting on alternative evidence.

Schools were increasingly using assessment tools to identify the teaching and learning needs of students. Those tools could also be used to collect alternative evidence and identify students eligible for SAC.

Schools were able to solve the problem of not having good access to suitable assessors because of cost or local availability.

### **Issues related to the use of alternative evidence**

However, schools raised a range of issues related to the use of alternative evidence throughout the review.

- Alternative evidence took time and needed to be collected annually (in contrast to independent assessment data, which NZQA acknowledged as relevant for up to four years).
- Schools found that using independent assessors was a more efficient way to collect data.

*'It seems to me that it is unnecessary to have this information-gathering [by psychologist] exercise duplicated, if we have already done it at school ...'*

– Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013





- SENCOs reported that teachers were more likely to give credibility to an assessment carried out by an independent psychologist.
- Schools reported concerns that NZQA was less likely to find alternative evidence as credible or rigorous as the results of an independent assessment.
- Access to the tools and tests required to carry out high-quality assessments within schools was also a concern.

### **Data on the use of alternative evidence**

Data collected from the review shows applications for SAC that drew on alternative evidence were slightly less likely to be approved in 2013 (at a rate of 77 percent compared with an overall approval rate of 86 percent).

However, the review also found an increasing number of schools were collecting and using alternative evidence successfully.

Using this approach, they were able to cut down the time they used to spend translating independent assessment for SAC applications and NZQA.

The review also found:

- more than 95 percent of SENCOs said they had systems set up to identify and support students with learning difficulties in year 9 and 10 (for the purpose of tailoring teaching, learning and assessment to better suit the students' needs)
- nearly 85 percent of SENCOs surveyed in the review said they used specific tools to screen and identify students with learning difficulties
- approximately 80 percent felt that their school was identifying students with learning difficulties in year 9 and 10 well or very well.

This evidence and information could be better used for SAC applications.

### **Suggestions for improving the use of alternative evidence**

Several options to improve the use of such data were identified in the review, including:

- building up schools' understanding of the information required to make SAC applications on the basis of alternative evidence
- building up NZQA, Ministry and schools' knowledge of how screening tools could be used to make SAC applications for particular SAC entitlements
- further developing NZQA's existing approach to alternative evidence to raise its credibility and better link it to the teaching, learning and assessment process occurring within schools
- developing the expertise within schools to enable teachers to collect alternative evidence for the purpose of applying for SAC, but also as part of the teaching, learning and assessment process already occurring within schools
- developing the expertise within schools to collect and use flexible assessment approaches, including assessment for qualifications
- building up the existing alternative evidence approach to enable it to become a more viable alternative to independent assessment for schools to use
- clarifying NZQA's evidence requirements for alternative evidence
- using the expertise from schools currently implementing alternative evidence successfully
- NZQA and Ministry resourcing the development of a toolkit, professional development and ongoing support for staff wanting to do alternative evidence.

## **Experiences in other countries and jurisdictions**

The review looked at other countries with similar education systems for insight into the use of alternative evidence and independent assessment data.

It found a mix of approaches. Some countries and jurisdictions<sup>30</sup> opted to manage the system at the national level and had retained the use of an independent assessment requirement.

Others had devolved decision-making and management to schools, appointing trained, school-based assessors to carry out needs assessments, determine eligibility and maintain a record of the process for auditing by the country's equivalent to NZQA.

Sometimes the school-based assessors held an equivalent qualification to New Zealand's Level C Assessor qualification. In other settings, assessments were carried out by teachers using an approach similar to SAC's approach to alternative evidence.

### **6.4 Getting RTLBs to carry out independent assessments**

Getting RTLBs to carry out the independent assessments required for SAC was one option raised throughout the review.

RTLBs were seen as the professional group best suited to the independent assessor role because of their professional skills and knowledge in the area of learning and behaviour.

They were also considered a good choice because of their involvement in the early identification and remediation of students with serious learning needs (at primary school) and for their expertise in adapting classroom learning environments and teaching practices for students with such needs.

#### **Drawback of this option**

However, drawing on RTLB survey results, the review found improvement to the SAC process was unlikely to come from involving RTLBs as independent assessors.

Very few RTLBs had Level C Assessor qualifications and were not generally involved in SAC processes. The Ministry confirmed that Level C Assessor training was not part of RTLB training. Upskilling RTLBs in this role would require significant retraining. It would also reduce the level of support they already provided to students with learning and behaviour difficulties.

### **6.5 Making better use of RTLBs**

The review identified several ways RTLBs could improve access to SAC by building on good practice and without the need to change their role significantly.

#### **Improving the transition process**

RTLBs could help schools improve the way they share student information at transition time.

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<sup>30</sup> United Kingdom, Canada, some states in the US, and New Zealand universities and polytechnics.

RTLBs surveyed in the review reported:

- half worked in schools with well developed systems for passing on information as students moved from primary to secondary school
- nearly half of the RTLBs had been involved in helping schools to set up systems for the identification and support of students with learning difficulties in year 9 and 10
- only 24 percent thought schools were doing this well or consistently well
- about half thought practice was variable in the schools they worked in
- about 10 percent considered it was done poorly
- nearly 15 percent said they did not know.

RTLBs knew many of the factors that contributed to a good transition.

In the survey, RTLB identified:

- communication and data transfer from contributing school by year 9 deans and SENCOs
- identification of learning needs using a range of school assessment tools (eg, asTTle, PROBE)
- processes for collecting information and observations from year 9 teachers in the first and second terms.

### **Identifying students with learning needs**

The review found RTLBs could also help schools improve the way they identify students with learning needs by helping schools to:

- use dyslexia screening tools
- discuss SAC and share information at parent and student meetings
- improve information sharing among schools.

### **Other support**

RTLBs felt they could also assist schools in the following ways.

- Provide support to access assistive technology.
- Give literacy and numeracy advice.
- Train teachers' aides and local resource people.
- Provide access to screening assessment tools.

### **Improving RTLBs' understanding of SAC**

The survey found improving RTLBs' understanding of SAC, and linking that to the early identification and support for students with specific learning disabilities, was another important step in making better use of the RTLB service.

Survey data showed only 35 percent of RTLB were familiar with SAC and how to apply for SAC, while 53 percent knew what SAC was but were unfamiliar with the application process.

## **6.6 Applying early for SAC**

Throughout the review, SENCOs talked about the benefits of having students apply early for SAC (ie, at the end of year 10 for the majority of students who were to be assessed for qualifications in year 11).



They had several suggestions about how this could work well. For example, they said being able to access the NZQA application tool at the end of the year (to enter year 10 student information) would avoid double-handling the information (once, at the end of the year to meet the schools' requirements, and, again, the following year to meet the NZQA requirements).

*'At this time [late in the year] I am also gathering data on Year 9 and Year 10 students. If we could enter applications in before they start Y11 it would save stress later ...'*

Providing access to the application tool at the end of the school year had the added advantage of reducing the load on the system in term one the following year and would enable NZQA to spread their entitlement processing.<sup>31</sup>

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013

It would also reduce the likelihood of NZQA's entitlement announcements clashing with schools' internal and external assessments commitments.

The early input of student information would make the process less stressful for students and schools. It was clear from the review that giving schools access to the application tool from October to the end of term one (the following year) would benefit schools. It would also have the benefit of giving NZQA more time to make entitlement decisions and provide schools with the feedback needed to modify SAC applications.

## 6.7 Implications for schools

The review found schools were at different stages of readiness when it came to making use of proposed changes to the current system of SAC.

Schools tended to fall into three categories.

### Schools successfully accessing SAC

Schools that successfully accessed SAC tended to have many of the following characteristics.

- Well resourced (at the school, parent and community levels)
- High decile, urban, and a less diverse ethnic and socio-economic mix in the student population
- High student achievement (in the areas of language, literacy, numeracy and overall academic achievement)
- Identified students with specific learning disabilities as the group at risk of underachievement
- Systems to identify students early and track their progress
- Teaching, learning and assessment practices that are adapted to suit the individual needs of students' specific needs
- A history of support for specific learning disabilities
- Good networks of family and community support for students with specific learning disabilities from contributing schools
- Contributing schools with the same characteristics
- A good understanding and experience of using SAC
- A preference for using external examinations

<sup>31</sup> NZQA is trialling this with a group of schools in 2013.



The current SAC system worked well for these schools and most schools in this group access SAC with little difficulty now, although having better access to information, a more user-friendly application tool and perhaps increased autonomy for managing SAC entitlements would be helpful to this group of schools.

### **Schools accessing SAC with some challenges**

The review identified a second group of schools that successfully accessed SAC despite some challenges.

These schools tended to:

- be resourced adequately with community input
- be middle decile, with students of mixed ethnicity and socio-economic background
- attain mixed student achievement (in the areas of language, literacy, numeracy and overall academic achievement)
- identify a range of groups within their schools at risk of underachievement
- have students (eligible for SAC) sometimes identified by contributing schools
- have students (eligible for SAC) sometimes not identified until transition to secondary school
- have their contributing schools using varied approaches to specific learning disabilities
- have screening and identification processes at the year 8–9 transition period that are important focuses for the school
- have challenges accessing readers and writers in the community
- have challenges getting access to the internal resource to manage SAC
- face a range of other special education and learning issues within the student population
- place significant demand on the SENCO function
- have some experience and success using alternative evidence in their SAC applications for students under the learning category
- provide a wide range of course and assessment options.

The review found these schools knew about SAC, were varied in their use of SAC and indicated the most difficulty in accessing and supporting SAC.

These schools would benefit from further development of alternative evidence used to apply for SAC. This would enable them to build on what was working well now and provide these schools with the opportunity to integrate the alternative evidence process with any existing process for screening and assessing students in year 9. Within this group of schools is the expertise to contribute to the further development of alternative evidence.

These schools would benefit from further support from RTLBs and any moves to provide them with better access to information, a more user-friendly application tool and perhaps increased autonomy for managing SAC entitlements.

### **Schools not accessing SAC or for a small number of students only**

This group did not access SAC at all, or for a small number of students only, and had many of the following characteristics.



- Low decile, with students from mixed ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds
- Lower student achievement (in the areas of language, literacy and numeracy, and overall academic achievement)
- Significant focus on raising achievement across the whole school and raising community expectations of achievement
- Involvement in Ministry and other initiatives aimed at raising student achievement
- At early stages of identifying students who require differentiated teaching, learning and assessment, and may be eligible for SAC
- Low awareness in the community of specific learning difficulties and of SAC
- Students not generally identified at contributing schools with specific learning needs or the information less likely to move with the students
- Community availability of readers and writers low
- Where students with sensory or physical needs accessed SAC, there was more likelihood that students with learning needs would access SAC suggesting an awareness effect
- Some schools had little knowledge of SAC
- Used internal assessment more

These schools would benefit from increased support to identify and support students with special assessment conditions and specific learning needs integrated within their approaches for raising achievement of students. The involvement of RTLBs in conjunction with system change approaches would support students with specific needs to be identified and supported through the school system and, where appropriate, assessed for SAC.

Any initiatives focused on improving the information available to schools, smoothing the application process and supporting schools to use flexible assessment approaches would be helpful to these schools. They will need a high level of support to develop alternative evidence to take part in the application process.

## 7.0 Findings on the future of SAC

The final issue raised in the review was whether or not assessment for qualifications could be successfully undertaken without SAC.

This section reflects on the background of SAC and the assessment opportunities offered by NCEA. It focuses on stakeholder feedback on internal assessment and touches on NZQA's strategic direction for assessment for qualifications.

### 7.1 Key findings

The key findings on the future of SAC can be summarised under the following themes:

- SAC and flexible assessment
- Internal assessment and use of SAC
- Future direction of technology and assessment

### 7.2 SAC and flexible assessment

#### Background to SAC

SAC was originally developed to align with, and support, the examination-based assessment system of School Certificate, University Entrance, Bursary and Trade Certification Board qualifications.

It was developed to enable students to be assessed on a specific day of the year, in one place, in a timed situation, using a single national examination, with reading and writing as students' primary means of expressing what they know and can do.

#### Introduction of NCEA

With the introduction of NCEA, secondary school assessment changed from a norm-referenced approach to one emphasising standards-based assessment.

Under NCEA, students can have their skills, knowledge and competencies assessed in new ways – through a broader range of authentic, reliable and valid assessment methods.

Information collected throughout the review suggests schools were still developing their assessment skills and are yet to realise the range of assessment opportunities offered by NCEA.

#### Barriers to flexible assessment noted by SENCOS

SENCOS identified several barriers to using more flexible assessment approaches.

They suggested the approaches were time consuming and relied on having access to special equipment such as computers, video cameras and editing software.

*'Why is SAC required for internal assessment using a computer or extra time, when use of technology is normalised and there are no time constraints for assessments?'*

- Stakeholder to the Review of SAC for NCEA, 2013



They voiced concerns about authenticity and questioned whether or not the more flexible approaches would meet the moderation requirements of NZQA. Feedback from some schools revealed some scepticism about relying too much on naturally occurring evidence, and teaching and assessing students using more flexible conditions, for example, in a way that was not strictly timed or that provided open book access.

Schools were concerned they wouldn't be able to achieve the assessment standard required unless they assessed students under formal written test conditions.

SENCOs agreed, however, that students typically eligible for SAC were likely to benefit from more flexible teaching and assessment practices, particularly students able to carry out an assessment task, but less able to write about it.

### 7.3 Internal assessment and use of SAC

The review found some schools were making the decision not to apply for SAC and choosing instead to assess students using the flexibility offered through internal assessment.

This approach offered schools flexibility in time, use of technology (assessments could feature use of read-aloud technology and voice recognition), rest breaks and the format for responding to assessments (for example, through use of Braille or text-to-voice).

*'The assessment conditions should reflect their learning conditions and there will be more natural supports for assessment if the process is well integrated and aligns with the key messages in the national curriculum about designing a local curriculum that supports every student to enjoy learning success, whatever their starting point.'*

- Ministry of Education, 2007

Internal assessment could involve an individual only or a small group of students at one time. It also provided options for students to repeat an assessment.

Internal assessment more easily takes account of, and recognises, naturally occurring evidence such as teacher observations and professional judgements of a student demonstrating a science experiment, technology project or social interaction, for example.

For students, it could involve using oral approaches, TV style reporting or visual tools that would reduce the need for responding to some standards in a written format.

Some schools questioned the need for SAC entitlements, such as a computer and extra time for internal assessment, when the technology was already available and internal assessment (by its nature) removed many time constraints.

*'As long as we persist with the current paper based assessment paradigm, there is little incentive [for schools] to invest heavily on changes involving technology... NZQA intends to change the current paradigm ...'*

- NZQA Chief Executive Dr Karen Poutasi, 2013

NZQA data (collected outside this review)<sup>32</sup> shows low decile schools used internal assessment more than high decile schools.

Such data suggests schools could find it advantageous to build on their knowledge and use of internal assessment to meet the needs of students eligible for SAC.

<sup>32</sup> NZQA Annual Report on NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship Data and Statistics. (2012).





Internal assessment can be used to realise the vision of the national curriculum although external assessment is still part of assessment for qualifications. As external assessments are an important part of the way subject endorsements and course endorsements are calculated, it is very important that the use of internal assessment does not restrict students' pathways to achieving their future academic and vocational goals and directions. Using the flexibility of internal assessment is therefore only part of the solution to assessment for qualifications for students requiring SAC.

## 7.4 Future direction of technology and assessment

In a speech to the Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand in April 2013, NZQA Chief Executive Dr Karen Poutasi said she expected that within eight to 10 years NZQA would have made the technology and system changes required to enable students to engage in credentialing assessment activities anywhere, anytime, online and on-demand.<sup>33</sup>

These plans are also outlined in the NZQA's *Future State Strategy 2012–2022* and will have a major effect on how senior secondary students' achievements are assessed.

The developments in technology have the potential to change the face of assessment practice and give schools greater autonomy in how assessment is delivered and tailored to meet the needs of individual students.

In her speech, Dr Poutasi went on to describe the potential advantages of the future changes for students.

- Assessment could be undertaken shortly after learning, providing the best opportunity to maximise what a student has learned
- Students are assessed when they are ready
- Students can focus on one standard at a time
- Results can be provided shortly after the assessment, enabling assessment to be used for learning
- Students can learn at their own pace
- They create an opportunity to personalise learning
- Students can take responsibility for their own learning
- These changes will do away with the massive logistical exercise at the end of the year

*'Because the question often asked by schools when we discuss technology and education is "what about assessment?" schools regularly tell us that as long as we persist with the current paper based assessment paradigm, there is little incentive to invest heavily in changes involving technology.'*

*'I am hopeful that today I will be able to provide you with some assurance that NZQA intends to change the current paradigm ...'*

- NZQA chief executive Karen Poutasi to Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand, 2013

These developments, together with government's significant investment in digital networks and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning through technologies, will have a significant impact on teaching, learning and assessment practices in New Zealand, giving teachers a strengthened ability to meet the specific needs of students typically requiring SAC.

In the future, it is possible students with medical conditions can be assessed when they are well, anxiety will be better managed by giving students a say over when they will be assessed and separate accommodation will be more easily arranged.

<sup>33</sup> Also outlined within the NZQA document *Future State Strategy 2012–2022*.



In this new context, text-to-voice, voice-to-text and other technology supports will be used by all students to express their ideas and what they know and not require a separate process for a particular group of students.

Students with specific learning disabilities and sensory needs will still require early identification and support throughout schooling. They will need flexible teaching and learning and authentic assessment to ensure they can take advantage of the technology developments for assessment for qualifications in the future.

The challenge for the Ministry and NZQA will be to improve access to SAC to benefit more students in the next few years and support schools for a future without the need for a SAC process in the longer term.

## 8.0 Recommendations

This section outlines the aims of the review recommendations and ends with the short-term recommendations achievable in 2014 and the review's long-term recommendations.

### 8.1 Recommendation aims

The aim of the short-term recommendations is to provide the Ministry and NZQA with options for making SAC more user friendly and the evidence requirements clearer, and to better link SAC with the assessment practices occurring within schools.

At the same time, the review has developed several long-term recommendations to ensure some of the broader issues raised in the review are addressed as part of the Ministry's and NZQA's future work in the areas of teaching, learning and assessment and the government's significant investment in digital networks and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning through technologies.

The recommendations reinforce the review findings that, in the longer term, SAC will change as teachers become more skilled in using authentic, flexible and reliable assessment practices and as that practice becomes better integrated into high-quality teaching and learning. In turn, this high-quality teaching and learning practice will be based on early identification of need, ongoing support and systematic transfer of information about students' progress and achievement.

In the future, SAC will have had its time when the needs of students with special assessment conditions and learning disabilities can be met within the new assessment paradigm forecasted by the NZQA. It will have had its time when assessment and technology work hand-in-hand to deliver assessment to 'anyone, anywhere, anytime, online and on-demand'.

This direction recognises that the aim of New Zealand's education system should not be equity of access to SAC, but rather equity of access to authentic assessment, which is integrated into high-quality teaching and learning.

### 8.2 Review recommendations

#### **It is recommended that in the short term:**

1. the Ministry and NZQA work closely with schools to further develop the alternative evidence process for SAC applications made under the learning category – this work is to commence following the completion of the current examination cycle
2. NZQA makes the application tool more user friendly for 2014
3. NZQA improves the information, support and implementation processes for the current system, recognising the current processes are seen by some as too complex and unclear



4. NZQA reviews the application deadlines to enable entitlements to be approved earlier through an application process open to schools from October to the end of term one
5. the Ministry works with RTLBs and schools to ensure early identification and ongoing support of students who need additional teaching, learning and assessment support
6. the Ministry works with RTLBs, NZQA and schools to make better use of the availability of National Standards achievement data for identifying students who may require SAC in the future, transferring information about students as they move through school, and particularly as they leave year 8 and transition to secondary school
7. the Ministry incorporates discussions about SAC into current and future school support strategies (with an emphasis on the Ministry's Achievement, Retention Team's work with 141 priority schools in 2013, for example)
8. the Ministry reviews the material for schools on dyslexia and refreshes the information booklet to incorporate effective teaching, learning and assessment approaches
9. NZQA publishes data and analysis on access to and use of SAC annually as part of its regular statistics and data reporting cycle.

**It is recommended that in the long term:**

1. the Ministry and NZQA review the centralised application and entitlement policy and consider ways in which the process can become more school based with quality assurance, monitoring and support by NZQA
2. the Ministry reviews the current policy framework to ensure all students who require additional support have access to it
3. the Ministry and NZQA review the current policy framework to ensure teaching, learning and assessment practices optimise opportunities for success in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments, and that technologies are used to support student learning (and are reflected in the Ministry's teaching, learning and assessment resources and professional development approaches)
4. the Ministry supports teachers to use 'teaching as enquiry' – authentic, flexible and reliable assessment (for learning) – as an integral part of effective teaching and learning
5. the Ministry and NZQA ensure future developments for on-demand and online learning and assessment strategies are developed to accommodate the needs of students with long-term conditions and learning disabilities to eliminate the need for SAC entitlements.

## **Appendix**

### **Overview of Special Assessment Conditions**

#### **Introduction**

This section provides an overview of the SAC process as it works today.

#### **Eligibility and entitlement**

Special Assessment Conditions are entitlements granted by NZQA to help secondary school students with particular needs to be assessed against standards for the award of qualifications such as NCEA.

SAC entitlements range from reading assistance, to extra time, to exam papers written in Braille.

#### **Criteria for applying for SAC**

Secondary school students who meet the following four criteria are eligible to apply for SAC entitlements.

1. Has needs and/or a condition that impacts on the student's ability to be fairly assessed.
2. Has needs and/or a condition that is permanent or long term.
3. Has a sensory, medical or physical condition, and/or a learning disability.

#### **SAC entitlements**

The way each student uses his or her entitlements depends on the student's specific needs, the entitlements received and the assessment activities the student wants to use them for.

For example, an assessment activity requiring a student with chronic back pain to sit for long periods of time may entitle that student to rest breaks. Alternatively, a student who is hearing impaired and struggles to hear or read written English instructions may be entitled to a supervisor who is capable of signing.

Also refer to Table B for the range of SAC entitlements available and their uses.

Table B: SAC entitlements and their typical uses

<b>SAC entitlements</b>	<b>Typical uses</b>
1. Computer or writer assistance	When students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a specific learning disability (SLD) or a condition such as dyspraxia, cerebral palsy or blindness that makes it difficult to write</li> <li>• experience pain or discomfort from writing.</li> </ul>
2. Extra time	When students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a SLD that makes it difficult to read, write, process information and/or concentrate</li> <li>• experience language delay</li> <li>• need time to use reading tools, such as a magnifying glass, or need written instructions in place of verbal instructions.</li> </ul>
3. Home supervision	In exceptional circumstances, when students are not able to attend school.
4. Reader assistance	When students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can't read written English or Māori at a sufficient level (and who need a reader who uses sign-assisted English)</li> <li>• have a SLD or condition such as a vision impairment that makes it difficult to read.</li> </ul>
5. Rest breaks	When students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• experience pain and discomfort from prolonged sitting</li> <li>• need to breastfeed</li> <li>• need personal care and assistance</li> <li>• experience mental processing difficulty due to a head injury, or experience anxiety in formal assessment.</li> </ul>
6. Separate accommodation	When students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• find it very difficult to concentrate and/or control their impulses</li> <li>• need to take medication</li> <li>• need stability and routine</li> <li>• experience extreme anxiety during formal assessment</li> <li>• may have seizures</li> <li>• need personal care and assistance</li> <li>• experience twitches, verbal tics, behaviour difficulties or outbursts.</li> </ul>
7. Signing supervisor	When students can't hear instructions.
8. Signing reader	When students can't hear instructions and/or can't read English at a sufficient level.
9. Special papers (enlarged, coloured or Braille)	When students are blind or visually impaired.
10. Other	When students need additional tools or technologies to supplement their entitlements.



## **Length of SAC entitlements**

Typically, a student is granted three years' access to SAC entitlements. However, students whose needs are temporary or uncertain, or whose entitlements have been amended by NZQA, will receive year-long entitlement to SAC. These applicants have the option of confirming or changing their requested entitlements the following year.

In addition, students with three-year SAC entitlements whose needs change part way through that three-year period are also expected to lodge an updated application when he or she requires something more than what was originally granted.

Usually this is worked out during the annual needs assessment process, which schools carry out every year for all students approved to receive SAC entitlements.

## **Number of entitlements**

There is no limit to the number of entitlements a student can apply for. However, each entitlement must be linked to a student's demonstrated need and backed up by good-quality documentation and evidence.

Also, entitlements are not approved:

- when the integrity of the assessment may be compromised
- when the entitlement would compromise the assessment objectives of the standard
- when the entitlement would provide unfair advantage over other candidates.

For example, NZQA will not offer a student a writer for an assessment requiring the student to write in a foreign language.

## **Use of SAC entitlements**

Students can use their SAC entitlements throughout the school year during internal or external assessment. Students can also choose to use them in some assessment situations and not in others.

## **SAC decisions**

NZQA is the government agency responsible for assessment for qualifications and makes all the decisions about student eligibility for SAC.

Every year, NZQA sets up a small team of qualified panellists to consider every application according to its individual merits, using information provided through the application process and any relevant assessment information from within NZQA, such as results data or NZQA Exam Centre Manager reports on the use of SAC from the year before.

## **Supporting documentation**

NZQA requires a wide range of documentation from schools and provides guidance on what is required for different students.

For example, NZQA would recommend a student with ADHD applying for separate accommodation under the medical category to provide a current medical report (or documents outlining the student's medical history), as well as records from the student's school.

A student with cerebral palsy applying under the physical category for rest breaks (for personal care), separate accommodation, extra time, and a computer and writer would need to provide current medical and/or specialist reports, as well as records from the student's school.

A student with dyslexia applying under the specific learning disability category for reader assistance, computer use and extra time, for example, may need to provide the following documentation.

- Teacher comments
- Evidence of a confirmed learning disability (eg, from an independent assessor)
- Education psychologist records/report
- Psychometric assessments/report

### **Documentation requirements**

For students with medical, sensory and physical needs, the documentation is required to show the student's current needs. In some cases (eg, for students with degenerative conditions) schools need to monitor and keep records that track that student's condition and their changing assessment needs.

Documentation also needs to demonstrate that the SAC entitlements applied for would actually enable a student to show what they know and can do in an assessment situation and that, without the entitlements, the student would be unable to show what they know and can do.

In addition, students with learning disabilities need documentation written by a suitably qualified independent assessor, such as a psychologist or a Level C Assessor (which notes the professional's name and qualifications and can cost between \$400 and \$700).

A Level C Assessor is someone qualified and recognised by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER)<sup>34</sup> who has the professional skills to provide NZQA with the evidential data and documentation it needs for granting SAC entitlements.

Such documentation has to be no more than four years old. It has to feature information such as a psychometric assessment, results from testing, as well as clear evidence of a student's learning disability. Schools also have to supply up-to-date results from trialling SAC entitlements with a student. The results have to demonstrate how the entitlements effectively address the student's assessment needs.

### **Alternative evidence**

Alternative evidence is evidence about a student's learning needs collected by a school.

Alternative evidence must be up-to-date and include results from trialling SAC entitlements with a student. The results have to demonstrate how the entitlements effectively address the student's assessment needs.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/pts/registration-levels>





Alternative evidence can be used when a student's family or school can't afford to pay for an independent assessment or when there are no qualified assessors available locally.

It is typically collected and filed (for auditing reasons) by heads of learning support and SENCO.

NZQA provides guidance on alternative evidence and recommends schools collect:

- any historical psychometric test data generated by valid tools
- school report data showing discrepancies between a student's cognitive ability and his or her academic performance
- a student's history of interventions, such as Reading Recovery, RTLB, or RTLit results
- results from assessments and standardised school tests showing persistent learning difficulties
- examples of uneven performance, with strengths highlighted in some areas and significant weaknesses shown in others
- any history of difficulty with acquiring and developing literacy skills
- any discrepancies between oral language ability and written language (demonstrated in tasks and in tests such as PAT)
- any discrepancies between oral/aural comprehension and reading comprehension (demonstrated in tasks and in tests such as PAT)
- proof that the student's disability hasn't resulted from disabilities such as vision or hearing impairments
- documented evidence of a student's reading ability (from tests such as PROBE)
- documented evidence of a student's writing and spelling ability
- documented evidence of a student's processing ability and requirement for extra time
- results of an annual needs assessment.

## **Application process**

### **Information for SAC applications**

The information required for SAC applications varies and depends on the needs of each student. Here is a general list of what NZQA can ask for.

- Information about the student (name, age, year level, student number)
- Information about the student's disability or medical, physical or sensory condition
- Information about the student's learning disability
- Information from independent testing carried out by a specialist such as an RTLB, an RTLit or an educational psychologist
- Evidence about the student's progress at school from classroom teacher notes, school reports, test results and student achievement data
- Needs analysis, identifying the tangible impact of SAC entitlement on the quality of a student's work carried out by a SENCO or someone knowledgeable about teaching, learning and assessment



A needs analysis involves:

- collecting a range of evidence and information about a student's progress and achievement at school over a year
- analysing the impact of having access to SAC on the student's progress and achievement
- making a decision to apply to change the existing entitlements or leaving the range as it is.

The documentation and evidence is intended to help NZQA maintain a fair, robust assessment system. It is also intended to help NZQA meet its responsibility for granting entitlements to SAC without providing unfair advantage over other candidates.

### **Application timing**

The deadline to submit a student's application for SAC entitlements (for use that same year) is the end of term one each year.

Submitting applications as early as possible in the year gives eligible students the opportunity to use their SAC entitlements straight away to best advantage in both internal and external assessments.

NZQA proposes to trial opening initial applications for entitlement in October of each year for students entering their first year of assessment for qualifications the following year.

### **External exam preparation**

By mid-August each year, schools need to get back in touch with NZQA through the online facility to let NZQA know how each SAC student intends using their SAC entitlements in their external exams.

They also need to identify who will provide students with reading, writing or signing support during exams and inform their NZQA Exam Centre Manager.

### **Roles**

Schools have the biggest role to play in the SAC process. Usually, they start by identifying all the students in their school who need additional support to complete secondary school qualifications such as NCEA. They are responsible for collating all the necessary information, gaining permission (where required) and keeping accurate records for each student.

Every application takes a lot of research, information gathering, analysing, cross-checking and processing. It also demands familiarity with NZQA's documentation requirements, application tool and application timeline.

Overall, it is a time-intensive and important role and one that is best carried out by schools with school-wide systems and processes for identifying eligible students early, gathering the necessary documentation and using the tool to apply for SAC entitlements.

Students play an important role in determining how they want to use their SAC entitlements (once they know what they are for the year), noting their preferences in



writing and sharing the information with the relevant school staff (ie, the Principal's Nominee).

Parents, families and whānau play an important role in providing information. They may need to add their child's private health and education records to their child's application (or give their permission for schools to access these records and share them with NZQA on their behalf). They may also need to pay for specialist reports.

NZQA also plays a major role as the administrator.

### **Application process**

Here are the key steps of the application process.

- Step 1:** Schools identify the students who need SAC entitlements for the year.
- Step 2:** Schools identify the SAC application category and criteria for each student.
- Step 3:** Schools contact parents, families and whānau to get permission to gather the information and evidence required to support a student's application.
- Step 4:** Schools gather their own evidence and information to support the application for each student.
- Step 5:** Schools collate and review the information and evidence for each application to check the information is accurate, relevant and complete.
- Step 6:** Schools check each application is filed and kept on record as required to meet any future audit requirements.
- Step 7:** Schools submit student applications, using the application tool (before the end of term one).
- Step 8:** Schools update NZQA online for each student's specific exam requirements between July and August.

### **Application tool**

Schools apply to NZQA through a specially designed tool on behalf of their students and their families or whānau.

Before 2013, schools applied in writing using a manual system involving spread sheets and paper-based forms. The new tool is part of NZQA's commitment to continuous improvement of its services. It is intended that the tool will be improved and become easier and more time- and cost-effective to use.

Schools must use a computer with a Windows operating system, although an alternative process has been developed for Mac users.

The tool has been designed to guide schools through the application process and enable school staff to submit information that is both accurate and full enough to enable panellists to make a quick decision.

### **Application costs**

The exact cost of an application varies according to a student's particular needs and is spread between NZQA, schools, and families and whānau.



NZQA doesn't charge anyone for the service it provides and covers a range of external assessment costs such as the provision of special papers, supervisors for students in separate accommodation and exam assistants who act as readers and writers.

Schools cover the administration and processing of applications, as well as any school-based testing required for SAC.

Families and whānau, and sometimes schools cover the cost of any independent tests carried out by specialists such as educational psychologists, which can cost up to \$700 per report.

## **Decision-making**

NZQA uses the same decision-making process for every application.

The process starts with one NZQA panellist reviewing all the information provided for a single application (received through the NZQA application tool).

Next, that same panellist assesses the information against the NZQA criteria, requesting additional information where information is missing. The panellist then makes his or her decision based on the information at hand.

If an NZQA panellist decides to decline an application, another NZQA panellist must then go through the entire decision-making process and reach the same conclusion.

That means no application is declined on the basis of one panellist's review and decision. When one panellist has declined an application, another panellist will always review that same application. It will only be declined if they both reach the same conclusion.

In the situation where one panellist declines an application and another panellist approves it, that is the final decision.

The process is a model that has been benchmarked against similar processes used in Australia.

## **Application decisions**

The NZQA timeline states that NZQA will write to schools between May and June each year, confirming whose application is approved (in full) or approved with changes, and whose application has been declined.

## **Appeals**

Schools have the right to appeal an NZQA decision to decline a SAC application and can use the NZQA application tool to lodge each appeal.

## **Grounds for appeal**

Schools can make an appeal on any grounds. However, the usual reasons are:

- new information has come to light (since the original application was made and declined) that better shows a student's eligibility for SAC entitlements
- disagreement with the outcome based on the information provided in the original application.

## Appeal timing

A school must lodge an appeal within 15 business (school) days of receiving NZQA's notice to decline a student's application. All schools wishing to make an appeal are supported by the NZQA SAC Administrator who is available to provide advice and facilitation.

## Appeal process

NZQA contracts a team of three independent experts (usually educational psychologists) to analyse and review every appeal.

NZQA uses the following process to review every appeal, following these key steps.

- Step 1:** NZQA expert panellist reviews the application material, including any new evidence provided.
- Step 2a:** Panellist approves entitlement on review of the appeal evidence, updating schools through the online tool, or
- Step 2b:** Panellist declines entitlement on review of the appeal evidence, and passes it to a second panellist
- Step 3:** A second expert panellist reviews the application material and approves or declines the entitlements, updating schools through the online tool.

## Review processes

A school, or parents dissatisfied with the outcome of an appeal, can write directly to the NZQA Chief Executive. They must do so within 15 business days of receiving NZQA's notice to decline a student's application. The Chief Executive refers the application to a third expert panellist not previously involved in the decision-making to assist them reach a decision. The Chief Executive's decision is considered final.

## Help and advice

NZQA have people available to give schools guidance and advice. They have also developed online information that anyone can access (although currently there is no printed material on SAC available to schools or parents, families and whānau).

### *People*

NZQA have an administrator available for general SAC information, application queries and advice about appealing a decision. Schools can also direct SAC queries to NZQA through their School Relationship Manager.

Contact the SAC Administrator at:

- [SACAPP2013@nzqa.govt.nz](mailto:SACAPP2013@nzqa.govt.nz) (application mailbox for 2013, will change in 2014)
- [SAC@nzqa.govt.nz](mailto:SAC@nzqa.govt.nz) (general enquiry mailbox)
- 0800 697 296

### *Online information and updates*

A range of information about the process, eligibility and time frames is available from the NZQA website, at: [www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz).



NZQA also publishes information about SAC in formal circulars and keeps schools updated on SAC (and other information) through a fortnightly email update called *EmailLink for Schools*.

*Advice and support*

NZQA staff are available (on request and at their suggestion) to meet groups and individuals in schools and the community to explain topics such as the SAC process, the online application tool, people's roles in the application process, and the documentation and evidence requirements.

To date, NZQA have talked:

- to RTLB clusters
- at national seminars for SENCO
- at regional meetings for educational psychologists and individual staff members at schools
- to interest groups and representative groups such as the Deaf Education Centres, the Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ) and Regional Health Schools.

People can request NZQA visit and/or present to their group or school by contacting the NZQA general enquiry mailbox and 0800 number.



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