

# Special Assessment Conditions For NCEA Exams



## What are “Special Assessment Conditions” (SAC)?

SAC are changes to the regular examination conditions that students normally sit National Certificate of Educational Achievement NCEA examinations under. SAC include:

- Additional time to complete work.
- Reader or writer or both.
- Rest breaks.
- Separate accommodation.
- Use of technology to complete and present work (e.g., computer).
- Other (e.g., enlarged paper).

## Why might a student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) need special assessment conditions?

SAC may be needed for a student with ASD for the following reasons:

- Handwriting difficult to read.
- Behaviour disruptive to other students.
- Need regular breaks.
- Obsessive compulsive behaviours may take up exam time.
- Organisational skills and time management skills may mean they do not finish the exam in the usual time allocated.
- Concentration skills may be impaired in exam situation.
- Sameness in routines - if the student usually has a teacher aide they will probably need one during exams.
- Sensory issues associated with the exam conditions (e.g., large room, bright lights, sound of others' breathing, clock ticking, scratching writing sounds, room with different

lighting) may overwhelm the student.

- Use of a reader/writer could interfere with the concentration of other students.
- Heightened anxiety, impairing student's ability to demonstrate knowledge.
- Anxiety management techniques may disrupt other students (e.g., breathing techniques).

## What are the NZQA reasons for having a reader, writer or reader/writer?

- There is a discrepancy between what the student understands when they are reading and when they are listening.
- There is a discrepancy between what the student means when they are writing and when they are talking.
- Speed of reading is slow.
- Speed of writing is slow.
- Low accuracy of reading.
- Difficulties with reading comprehension.
- Communication is hindered by the student's spelling or punctuation.

## Why it is important to have a reader/writer?

It is important to have a reader/writer if the student has a specific learning disability that will impact directly on their ability to be fairly assessed. A reader/writer will help to ensure that the student is assessed fairly and can demonstrate their understanding, knowledge and skills.



### **What does a reader/writer do?**

The main aim of the reader/writer role is to help the student overcome their learning disability while ensuring exam conditions are maintained so that it is fair to other students. The reader/writer may read the exam paper to the student, or write down the student's spoken answers, or do both. The reader/writer will only perform the task that is approved by the SAC and will be in a separate room with the student, away from the other students.

### **What evidence is required for SAC?**

Each applicant for SAC is required to have a current "Evidential Report" (completed within the last three years) from an independent professional registered with the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER, <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/>). This person is likely to be a Registered Psychologist with a Level C (or Level 3) Assessor Qualification through NZCER. Assessors registered to administer Level C tests will have completed advanced testing courses and have had clinical experience in the use of tests. Level C tests include individual intelligence tests and personality scales. If a Level C Assessor is not available in the area, a correctly qualified Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTL) may conduct the assessment.

The evidential report must:

- Define and detail the extent of the learning disability.
- Say that the student is competent to perform in the exam, but will not be able to perform to the best of their ability due to the learning disability.
- Recommend SAC to address the specific needs of the student.
- Explain why the student qualifies for these conditions based on the

results of the tests that were conducted by the Assessor.

- Address the likely impact on the student's performance of not having the SAC.

For an idea of what an evidential report should contain and look like, there is a sample evidential report available for a child with diagnosis of ADHD on the Learning and Behaviour Charitable Trust website (<http://www.lbctnz.co.nz/resources/report.html>).

The evidential report recommending the SAC is needed before the first year of national qualifications (NCEA 1, Year 11) and is valid for three years, so should cover NCEA 2 and NCEA 3 also. NZQA recommends the report to be conducted late in Year 10.

When completed, the Evidential Report must then be given to the school. The school will then make the application for SAC on behalf of the student. With reference to the evidential report and any other evidence they have collected (e.g., extra help the school has provided for the student throughout the year), the school must demonstrate why SAC are required. The exam conditions should reflect the normal way in which the student works, and the need for such conditions should have been documented by the school over the years.

### **How do I get an evidential report for my child?**

There are several ways in which you could go about locating a Level C Assessor. If your child regularly sees a psychologist or has had contact with one in the past, you may want to approach them to act as an assessor. The school may have some idea of Level C Assessors in the area that



other families have used for the same purpose. Other parents may be able to recommend a Level C Assessor they have used.

When you have located a Level C Assessor, you need to tell them that your child requires an Evidential Report for Special Assessment Conditions for NCEA, and to give them a brief summary of your child's issues. You need to specify the questions that you want the Level C Assessor to answer. For example, the extent of the child's learning disability, whether the child is competent to sit the exam, how the learning disability will affect the child's performance in the exam, which SAC will address the specific needs of the child and an explanation for this based on the results of the tests conducted.

The tests used will depend on the questions being asked. The Level C Assessor should advise as to which tests will answer the questions, and should themselves be able to analyse the results of the tests. As well as testing the child, other tests may involve the interviewing of parents and teachers. The questions should be addressed, based on the test results, in the Evidential Report.

Ask the Level C Assessor for a quote for their services. You may receive a fee for the whole service or an hourly rate. If this is the case, you will also need an estimate of the time involved for the actual testing and for the writing of the report.

As with the purchase of any good or service, approach other Level C Assessors to obtain comparative quotes. When you have agreed on a quote, arrange a time for the assessment and pay when you have received the Evidential Report. This report should be given to the school by March of

the year in which the exams are to be undertaken.

### **What are the alternatives to the evidential report?**

If you cannot afford a Level C Assessor (and cannot get funding) or the school does not have access to a Level C Assessor in the region, you can apply for SAC using "Alternative Evidence".

Alternative evidence is required to include confirmation from the school of the following:

- That the student's learning has been assessed over the previous two years in order to identify the learning problem and the need for assistance.
- That the student can perform at a higher level with the assistance.
- That the student is receiving support to help with the problem.
- That a learning support programme specific to the child has been implemented by the school.

According to NZQA, it is the school's job to gather the alternative evidence.

Another reason for using alternative evidence may be that a student has moved from overseas and does not have evidence from a suitable qualified NZ professional.

### **What is the process of applying for SAC?**

While the same evidential report may be used for three years, a new application to NZQA for SAC must be made by the school for the student each year. If SAC are received by the student one year, it does not mean they will automatically receive the same conditions again the following year.



Documentation that is required for each application includes:

- Details of the learning difficulty (e.g., AS or Autism).
- How this may mean the student is impaired (e.g., concentration difficulties).
- The possible SAC that may be beneficial (e.g., separate accommodation, regular breaks, reader/writer).
- A current evidential report by a Level C Assessor.
- Evidence of the learning disability.
- Comments from teachers.

### **What is the SAC application timeline?**

*Please note that the dates below are estimates based on SAC applications for 2010. Consult your child's school for definite dates.*

November (in the year preceding the NCEA exams)

- If your child's school recognises that they may potentially be a candidate for SAC, you may receive a letter stating so, and requesting that you obtain an Evidential Report if you do not have one that is current.
- The school may begin to collect information to support your child's SAC application (e.g., the trialling of a Reader/Writer).

January

- If you have never before discussed SAC with the school, approach them at the start of the year. Discuss with the school SAC that may be appropriate for your child.
- If your child has a current Evidential Report, they will be able to have SAC for internal assessments (assignments that are due

throughout the year) for the rest of the year.

March

- If not earlier, copies of the Evidential Report should be given to the school by March to allow them to apply for SAC for external assessments (exams).
- Applications can now be made by the school for SAC for exams.
- If applications are to be made using Alternative Evidence, the school should be discussing and compiling the documentation required.

April

- The school will send the initial (mailed) application for SAC before May. This is for help in all assessments.

May

- The application is then processed and NZQA will reply with a tracking sheet (a summary of the applicant's information and whether they are approved or declined for SAC).
- The school will then respond (online) and specify the conditions that are required for each exam that the student is entered in.

August

- The school needs to check and confirm the information of the applicant, and make any amendments (online) by early August.
- The closing date for applying for SAC using Alternative Evidence is also early August.
- After early August, the only applications that will be accepted are those students with newly identified disabilities that will affect their performance during exams. These cases must be Level C assessed as there is no time to review Alternative Evidence cases.



### **What are my options if my child is denied SAC?**

The school may appeal a denial of SAC by the NZQA by writing to the Chief Executive within 14 days of the notification of that decision. Any decision made by the Chief Executive is final.

### **What does the Ministry of Education expect?**

From the website (<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/>), the information NZQA provides about SAC and reader/writers is directed at the school. NZQA advises the schools to identify children who would benefit from SAC. However, if you have not been approached by your school and believe your child would benefit from SAC, you could approach the school. NZQA also recommends that schools ensure that they have all of the required documentation to support the application for SAC, and that the school take care of the application process. The school should be involved with the hiring and training of the Reader/Writers and ensure that the student gets to know the aide and practice with them before the actual external NCEA exam.

### **When should I find someone to be a reader/writer?**

NZQA recommends that the external NCEA exam should not be the first time that the student and Reader/Writer meet, and suggests that they at least work together for the internal school practice exams. NZQA suggests that Reader/Writers should be trialled with potential SAC students in November of the year preceding the NCEA exams.

### **How do I find a reader/writer?**

It is possible that the school will have a list of possible Reader/Writers for your child.

When “reader writer ncea” was Googled (01/12/10), among the 2,650 hits were school newsletters with advertisements for Reader/Writers.

Altogether Autism suggests that if your child has an aide to help with schoolwork throughout the year (and if they are suitably qualified), it would be beneficial to also have this aide as the child’s Reader/Writer.

### **What are the qualifications required of the reader/writer?**

NZQA do not specify any qualifications that they require readers/writers to have. Altogether Autism suggests that families should ensure that the reader/writer knows about ASD before working with the child and understands the particular behaviours of the child.

### **What are the alternatives to SAC?**

The school may also help to manage the learning problem by increasing the internal assessment component of the student or by entering the student into fewer external exams.

*Information above obtained from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) website (<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/>)*

*Article written by Altogether Autism, with feedback from Anne Bevan, Autism Waikato.*

#### **Useful Websites**

[www.lbctnz.co.nz/resources/report.html](http://www.lbctnz.co.nz/resources/report.html)

[www.nzcer.org.nz](http://www.nzcer.org.nz)

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

