



The New Zealand Psychological Society

Te Rōpū Mātai Hinengaro o Aotearoa



INSTITUTE
of
EDUCATIONAL *and* DEVELOPMENTAL
PSYCHOLOGY

**Submission
to the
Ministry of Education
on
NCEA Special Assessment Conditions**

on behalf of the

**Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology of the
New Zealand Psychological Society.**

While most assessments conducted by the Members of the Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology (IEDP) who contributed to this response have been to assess the need for Special Assessment Conditions (SAC) for Learning Disabilities (and most commonly the referral is perceived dyslexia) there are also assessments completed for students with Brain Injury, and physical difficulties such as cerebral palsy, hemiplegia and dyspraxia.

Members of the Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology have raised the following points for the consideration of the review panel:

- Members of the IEDP recognise that there has been a significant increase in the demand for SAC and attribute this to increased parental awareness and to the fact that the Ministry of Education (MoE) recognised dyslexia in 2007. This has led to an increase in assessments requested by parents of Primary school aged students, who are now attending secondary schools. We are concerned that the Ministry of Education's definition of Dyslexia is very wide and makes it difficult to limit the number of students who meet the definition, thus raising parental expectations that support will be required.
- In addition schools are struggling to provide appropriate programming to these students at Primary School level. Provision of such programming would likely support many students to achieve at a level where SAC would not be required. Schools which are using programmes to support students with specific learning disability are often using packaged programmes which do not have a wide body of evidence to support the fact that they follow "best practice".
- There have been a number of changes to Special Assessment Conditions over the last two years. It is understood that this has been in response to need to manage the increasing number of applicants for SAC. However, the changing goal posts have made it difficult for assessors, schools and parents to understand the requirements from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). The IEDP would like to suggest that the NZQA clearly establish the criteria for students to gain SAC.
- Members of the IEDP have raised concerns that the amount of assessment required to support an application to NZQA for SAC has increased resulting in an increase in the cost to parents. This is of concern as this increasingly makes it difficult for parents from less financially secure backgrounds to access the assessments. This is of particular concern given that there have been recent references in the media to the lack of access to SAC's by students in lower decile schools.
- There are also inconsistencies in terms of the ways in which the assessments are funded. There is one decile 1 school which funds the full assessment cost. Some lower decile schools contribute towards the assessment, with parents meeting the remainder of the cost. In other schools RTLB contribute towards the costs. In RTLB clusters where there are psychologists or level C assessors employed, the assessment is completed and funded by the RTLB. It is suggested that the Ministry of Education need to consider an equitable access to funding for assessments for SAC.

- Members have commented that there is sometimes a high degree of pressure on assessors to find in favour of the provision of SAC, even when the assessor can see that there is little chance of the student passing even with SAC. Some members are aware of schools submitting applications for students for whom the assessor had not recommended SAC and it is understood that some of these have been successful in the current round, while other students who have had success in Level 1 with the support provided have been declined.
- Members have raised concerns that some assessors (Both psychologists and level C assessors) do not understand the assessment requirements, identifying that the student has dyslexia and as a result they require SAC. This is despite the fact that they may be achieving at an average level overall (as in some gifted students), or the fact that they may be approaching the level where they would meet the definition of intellectual disability, and will be unable to achieve in external examinations.
- It is of concern that there are some students who are eligible for some SAC (for example writer) who are not entered in external examinations and for whom schools do not formally apply for SAC but for whom reader writer, additional time and a re-explanation of the test question being provided. There are known instances of students passing level 1 and even level 2 when they clearly don't have the skill to achieve at the standard required to pass the standard.
- Discrepancies between the SAC permissible for NZQA and for Cambridge can make assessments challenging when a student is attending a school where both examination systems are offered, with schools making applications which are rejected by NZQA when they have been provided the previous year for Cambridge.
- The application form used by NZQA in 2013 (SACAppTool Data Summary Table) requests information which is not in fact available. This included Reading Speed information (the Neale Reading Test was specified but the literature on the construct of reading speed does not support this being a reliable measure). Most reading tests do not calculate reading speed. In addition information requested from the WIAT is not in a form usually presented in a psychological assessment report, indicating that there may be lack of understanding in the technical data being requested.
- Schools find it very difficult to provide the Alternative Evidence. The teachers doing the assessments are not generally able to access the assessments required to provide some of the data requested, specifically overall cognitive ability and Processing Speed, and find some of the difficulties in providing other data, such as reading speed. There are also costs involved in accessing the assessments required. Some of the easy to use assessment tools are not considered to meet 'best evidence' criteria (for example the Lucid assessment tools) despite them having been marketed widely to schools.
- Because the completion of both the assessment for Alternative Evidence, and the updated assessment data required at the time of the application are time consuming, schools prefer the assessment to be completed by a psychologist or a level C assessor. Should NZQA require schools to provide alternative evidence and updated assessment information some consideration needs to be given as to how schools are to fund the teacher time required to do this.

- In the experience of IEDP members many school staff have difficulty in understanding the assessment tools and data and this has resulted in incorrect data being provided to NZQA.
- IEDP members are divided over the need for a one size fits all assessment and reporting process, with some suggesting that given that as psychologists are professional, registered and qualified, there does not need to be a rigid, one - size fits all type of process for assessing the need for SAC. However others point out that not all assessors are psychologists and that there is a range in the quality of reports provided.
- There is some debate amongst members about the appropriateness of IQ testing. It is noted that students with specific learning difficulties often score well on non-verbal tests and lower on verbal, working memory and processing speed tests. This can “average out” to a low average IQ score which doesn’t reflect the student’s potential. This can give a false impression to the school and the student about their ability. However many psychologists who use the WISC IV as their assessment tool now report the General Ability Index, which is considered a more realistic indication of the students ability.
- Some members of the IEDP suggest that some consideration should be given to the endorsement of the NCEA certificate with the SAC provided as there is potential for employers to not be aware of the level of support provided for the student/employee to achieve at the level indicated.
- NZQA could consider providing a newsletter and or training to those assessors who routinely complete assessments for SAC, ensuring that the information required for the application to be processed by the school is provided.

While members of the IEDP recognise that this submission may appear to be negative, this is because of the nature of the need to review. We would like to state that we have been very pleased with the accessibility of the team at SAC and the fact that they are always approachable and supportive of our collaborative efforts. We appreciate that over the last 2-3 years NZQA staff have been placed in a difficult situation and appreciate that they have been willing to engage in productive dialogue with us in this regard.

For further information or queries please contact Fiona Ayers, Chairperson of the Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology of the New Zealand Psychological Society.

Fiona Ayers
Chair of the Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology
New Zealand Psychological Society

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