

Special Assessment Conditions Accessible Technology (SACAT): key learnings

The SACAT project was undertaken to make computer-based accessibility tools available in computer-based examinations for relevant candidates. This was intended to provide an understanding of accessibility tools to inform future design choices for digital examinations. The accessibility tools tested were:

- text-to-speech
- variable font size
- dyslexic friendly font (OpenDyslexic).

This project involved the use of an existing platform, which enabled NZQA to undertake an initial test without having to commit a large amount of resources.

Fifty-two students participated in this project.

Key learnings

1. A meaningful automated/digital text-to-speech system should be developed in conjunction with the creation of audio recordings by the human reader to address issues around participant autonomy vs system control during the assessment.
2. There are many accessibility features built into device operating systems; these offer a range of ways to interact with the devices, which are likely to involve fundamental differences from the way students not requiring special assessment conditions interact with them. These methods of interaction need to be learned by SAC learners.
3. Candidates should be provided with additional time to familiarise themselves with the AWIS interface before sitting the exam. This can be achieved through the development of exemplars that can be made available for candidates to practice on.
4. Technical support at schools is an essential component of computer-based examinations. Consideration should be given to the provision of technical support for these exams. This may also change the skillset required of the Exam Centre Manager or Supervisor roles.
5. The use of a recording studio and transcript reader in order to provide a New Zealand accent and correct Māori pronunciation proved inefficient and required resource-intensive tasks – consideration needs to be given to more efficient ways of doing this.
6. Testing should be undertaken early to identify any issues and address them in a timely manner and without causing stress for schools.
7. The security download prevented candidates from accessing anything other than the digital examination form on their computer or via the internet. This gave confidence to the supervisors as it was one less aspect for them to monitor.
8. The NAFs and Editors (Secondary Exams) have learnt that the possibilities and limitations of the AWIS platform, and the decisions that need to be made in redesigning our paper-based exam subjects in a web-presentation format.
9. Over the course of the pilot suggestions were made as to other tools that could be trialled including an all-in-one package that can read answers back as well questions and high colour contrast.