

2016

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE ALLOWANCE SCHEME HANDBOOK



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WHAT IS CLAS?

NSW Government agencies must provide language assistance programs for people who do not speak English well or at all to access government services. Multicultural NSW runs the Community Language Allowance Scheme (CLAS), which assists agencies provide language services. A formal nomination and examination process ensures that CLAS employees are proficient in their additional language.

CLAS draws on the language skills of agency employees. It remunerates employees who are selected for CLAS and use community language skills, as part of or in addition to their normal duties. CLAS recipients assist in the communication between other English speaking employees and clients who do not speak English well or at all.

WHEN TO USE CLAS AND WHEN TO USE INTERPRETERS

CLAS helps NSW Government agencies provide on-the-spot language assistance for simple matters. Some examples include answering counter inquiries, providing directions to another office or making appointments for a further visit.

For matters that will take a longer time to investigate, or require an in-depth or formal interview, agencies should use interpreters for two reasons:

- CLAS recipients may not have professional qualifications in interpreting which are highly desirable for more complex or extended interviews
- CLAS duties are additional to a full or part-time work load. Work through the CLAS scheme should not impact significantly on the employee's other work commitments.

Professional qualifications in interpreting are obtained through NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters).

QUALIFYING TO RECEIVE THE ALLOWANCE UNDER THE CLAS

Employees must be nominated by their employing agency to receive an allowance under CLAS. They can qualify for an allowance by passing an examination administered by Multicultural NSW, by having NAATI accreditation at interpreter level, or by having a NAATI language recognition award.

The allowance is not payable to employees who are employed as interpreters and translators or who work in positions where particular language skills are part of the essential requirements of the position.

As well as having appropriate language skills, employees must be:

- a. public contact staff, counter staff or other clerical staff who are required to deal with public inquiries
- b. identified as possessing another language skill that assists the work of the organisation
- c. available to use the language skill as required by the organisation
- d. recognised by their organisation as occasional or regular users of their language skills as an adjunct to their normal duties.

EXAMINATION ARRANGEMENTS FOR CLAS

An examination of language competency is conducted by Multicultural NSW and usually takes place annually. Public sector agencies are notified of the nominations.

It is the responsibility of the nominating agency to pay for the examination for their nominated employee/s.

If an agency requires an employee to be examined as a matter of urgency, the agency should contact Multicultural NSW.

ALLOWANCE

There are two levels of allowance - a base level rate and a higher level rate. A base allowance (currently \$1,345p.a.) may be paid to staff who speak a community language (such as Arabic, Croatian, Greek, Macedonian, Serbian, Spanish, Turkish and Vietnamese) and who, if nominated by their Agency, pass the CLAS language examination.

The base level rate is paid to staff who, in addition to the requirements of (a) to (d) on Page 2, are required to meet occasional demands for language assistance. Occasional demands mean that there is no regular pattern of demands that necessitate the use of the staff member's language skills.

The higher level rate is one and a half times the base allowance (currently \$2,021p.a.). It is paid to staff who, in addition to the requirements of (a) to (d) on Page 2, meet any of the following criteria:

- regularly meet high levels of customer demand involving a regular pattern of usage of the staff members' language skills.
- have achieved qualifications of NAATI interpreter level and above. This recognises that staff with higher levels of language skills will communicate with an enhanced degree of efficiency and effectiveness.

Refer to NSW Treasury Circular (NSWTC 16-10) for rates effective from 1 July 2016.

Agencies are responsible for determining which types of work attract the higher level of the allowance, besides the NAATI interpreter level identified above. In order to make this decision, agencies may initially request non NAATI accredited staff to keep records of CLAS usage. This will help establish whether there is a high level of customer demand relative to other CLAS recipients in the agency.

DETERMINING AGENCY NEEDS FOR CLAS RECIPIENTS

Agencies are responsible for implementing and monitoring CLAS in their agency. The following steps are a part of good practice and guide for CLAS in an agency:

- survey employees to determine the range of languages available and their locations. Make this part of the induction to assist in keeping records up-to-date
- survey employees at customer contact points to determine the need for language assistance by clients. Do this as part of the agency planning cycle
- analyse the language needs to determine which could be met by CLAS and those that require an interpreter
- integrate CLAS functions into a customer service plan
- nominate employees for CLAS or NAATI accreditation at interpreter level
- arrange for testing or request documentation of NAATI qualifications
- monitor and review the CLAS scheme in the organisation.

MONITORING AND REVIEWING CLAS

The continuing worth in an agency of CLAS depends on regular monitoring and reviewing its implementation. Monitoring could include the following:

- languages used
- the level of demand
- types of matters dealt with by CLAS recipients.

It may be useful for CLAS recipients to maintain a log of their CLAS duties.

The outcomes of monitoring should lead to a report reviewing the scheme that includes recommendations for the program in the following year. Recommendations could include:

- changes in the languages and/or the locations covered by CLAS
- changes in interpreter use
- changes in the level of payment
- cessation of CLAS payments to recipients where the circumstances are no longer justified

CLAS recipients need to continue to apply their language skill at the competency level required by CLAS. If the agency becomes aware that an employees language skills may no longer meet this competency level the agency has a responsibility to the employee and its clients to improve their competency level through further training. The agency may request the employee to undertake the CLAS examination.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF CLAS RECIPIENTS

CLAS recipients are responsible for the following:

- providing timely and accurate language assistance
- keeping informed about agency services and referral points
- determining if a matter is formal or sufficiently complex to warrant the use of interpreters and notifying the appropriate person to ensure that this assistance is provided
- keeping records of CLAS usage as required by the agency
- notifying their manager if the CLAS workload is excessive, and impacts on their normal workload
- attending any training and information sessions on CLAS at the instruction of the agency.

MANAGERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

CLAS is a tool that aims to increase the quality of customer service. In order to ensure that CLAS operates effectively, managers should ensure that the following aspects of CLAS are implemented:

- workloads of CLAS recipients includes time for CLAS work
- sufficient employees are nominated for the CLAS to enable customer demand for language assistance to be met without excessive impact on the normal work of particular CLAS employees
- CLAS workloads are spread equitably within work groups
- interpreters are used for matters that fall outside the provision of simple language assistance
- CLAS recipients attend training and or monitoring sessions organised by the agency.

TRAINING

Agencies are responsible for securing training and ongoing support for CLAS recipients.

Training should include the following issues:

- agency expectations of the CLAS and of CLAS recipients
- overview of the agency's functions and operations
- appropriate referral points for clients
- rationale for the selection of languages and locations
- guidelines for providing CLAS assistance and matters for which interpreters should be engaged
- monitoring CLAS use
- reporting arrangements for difficulties and complaints which fall outside the scope of the individual work unit.

Training in these issues should also be provided for managers and supervisors.

AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES

Agencies are responsible for the following matters:

- ensuring that CLAS is integrated into the agency's customer service policy, programs and strategies
- promoting the availability of CLAS to clients
- ensuring that appropriate language assistance is provided to clients
- determining the languages, numbers and locations of recipients under the CLAS
- determining the organisational needs and demands which warrant payment of each level of the allowance;
- providing training for CLAS recipients
- providing study assistance for employees who wish to upgrade their community language skills
- reporting CLAS implementation in the agency's annual report
- integrate CLAS monitoring and review into the agency's planning and reporting cycles.

REPORTING ARRANGEMENTS

The CLAS scheme is an integral component of an agency's cultural and linguistic competence, which must be demonstrated by all agencies under the Multicultural Policies and Services Plan (MPSP). Agencies should report on their achievements with CLAS in:

- annual reports
- MPSP report (if they are a Designated Agency under the MPSP)

FURTHER INFORMATION

- For information about the CLAS determination contact NSW Industrial Relations.
- For more information about testing for CLAS contact the Multicultural NSW.
- For information about how CLAS operates in particular agencies contact the agency's customer service unit/ branch/division or human resource section.
- For information about NAATI qualifications contact the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).

FORMS

The CLAS nomination form for the examination is in Adobe pdf format and requires the  Acrobat Reader >> plugin* to view and print.

(*Available as a free download from <https://get.adobe.com/reader>).

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