



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit**  
*State Examinations Commission*

Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí, N37 TP65.  
*Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 TP65.*

# Reasonable Accommodations at the 2023 Certificate Examinations



**Instructions for Schools**



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**2023**  
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## 2023 Reasonable Accommodations Key Dates

	AVAILABLE FROM	CLOSING DATE	DECISION TIMEFRAME
Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied 2023 – Reactivation Form and New Accommodations Form	Early October 2022	11 November 2022	Mid-February 2023
Leaving Certificate/ Leaving Certificate Applied 2023 Late Application Form	February 2023	7 April 2023	May 2023
Junior Cycle 2023 – Standard Application Form	Mid October 2022	13 January 2023	April 2023
Junior Cycle 2023 – Late Application Form	February 2023	7 April 2023	May 2023
Emergency Application Form - LC and JC	May 2023	June 2023	June 2023

### Contact Details:

If you need help with any aspect of the application process, please contact us as follows:

Phone: 090 644 2782/2783/2784/2785/2786

E-mail: [race@examinations.ie](mailto:race@examinations.ie)

Web: [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie)

NEPs and the SEC are currently working on a webinar the details of which will be provided as soon as possible.

**It is essential that you familiarise yourself with the contents of this document before completing the appropriate RACE application form.**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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The scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE) facilitates access to the certificate examinations by candidates who would have difficulty in accessing the examination or communicating what they know to an examiner because of a physical, visual, hearing and/or learning difficulty. The scheme assists candidates who have special educational needs to demonstrate what they know and can do in certificate examinations, without compromising the integrity of the assessment. The focus of the scheme is on removing barriers to access, while retaining the need to assess the same underlying skills and competencies as are assessed for all other candidates, and to apply the same standards of achievement as apply to all other candidates.

The scheme provides accommodations for candidates with a variety of complex special educational needs including learning difficulties as well as permanent or temporary physical, visual, hearing, medical, sensory, emotional, behavioural or other conditions.

The RACE scheme was fundamentally reformed for the 2017 examinations and we would like to thank all schools for their co-operation with the administration of the revised application process. Some of the common problems encountered when processing previous years applications are outlined in detail in Section 4.3 of these instructions and should be referred to in completing the 2023 application process in order to avoid these mistakes.

The changes introduced in 2017, and subsequent enhancements, mean that candidates with special educational needs now have greater certainty about the supports they can expect to have for Leaving Certificate. There is also greater access to the scheme by candidates whose needs are as a result of a learning difficulty. The SEC continues to explore the broader use of assistive technology to support independent access to examinations and is open to considering applications to use alternative types of assistive technology.

This document sets out the detailed instructions for the administration of the scheme for this coming year and is largely unchanged from last year.

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## 2. ABOUT THESE INSTRUCTIONS

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The intended audience for the 2023 RACE *Instructions for Schools* is school principals, learning-support teachers, resource teachers and other school staff who are involved in making applications for reasonable accommodations on behalf of candidates in their school. The instructions apply to recognised second-level schools and to other settings entering candidates for the certificate examinations such as Back to Education and VTOS schemes and providers, and private schools and colleges.

The 2023 RACE *Instructions for Schools*, which covers all aspects of the RACE scheme, is the definitive handbook on RACE. The previous circulars which underpinned the RACE scheme



(Department of Education Circulars 40/94, 11/00 and 70/00 and SEC Circular 24/12) are revoked and replaced by the information contained in this document. The scheme continues to be underpinned by the *Report of the Expert Advisory Group 2000*, but it should be noted that the *Framework of Principles* from that report has been updated to take account of developments in the use of language and terminology in the area of special educational needs. It has also been updated to standardise and simplify the language and terminology used in the previous Framework of Principles, and to state the Principles in more positive language. The revised ***Framework of Principles is at Appendix A*** and the ***Expert Advisory Group Report (2000) is at Appendix B***.

The RACE *Instructions for Schools* will be amended and reissued each year. This version is relevant only to RACE applications made in respect of the 2023 Certificate Examinations. All questions arising in relation to RACE for candidates for the 2023 examinations must be considered by reference to the information contained in these instructions, and not from any earlier edition.

Please familiarise yourself with the detail in this document before considering individual cases and completing any RACE application forms.

The purpose of the 2023 RACE *Instructions for Schools* is to:

- help you understand both the principles and the legislative and administrative framework that underpin the RACE scheme;
- explain the objectives of the reforms to the scheme from the 2016/17 school year;
- provide details of further enhancements to the scheme;
- provide details of the types of access arrangements that can be provided in line with the scheme;
- guide you through the application process.

In addition to the above, information is provided about the oversight and quality assurance measures which govern the scheme. Feedback from the 2022 quality assurance and scheme governance processes is also included at Section 4 in order to inform the administration of the scheme in schools. Schools selected for review this year under the quality assurance arrangements will be provided with further details about the process as needed.

As well as making applications for RACE, school authorities also have a key role in upholding the integrity of the scheme and of the examinations. Additionally, they play a crucial role in explaining the RACE scheme to students and their parents/guardians. This will at times include explaining why certain accommodations that they may be seeking are not necessary or appropriate for their son or daughter. To assist schools in this task, the SEC has developed a companion *Guide for Students* about the RACE scheme. A supply of the updated *Guide for Students* is being provided to all schools and is available to download from [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie).

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### 3. CONTEXT OF THE RACE SCHEME

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Any organisation providing a service to the public has a duty to make the service equally available to as many people as possible. If a person with a disability is prevented from accessing the service in the normal way, the organisation providing the service has a duty to do all that is reasonable to accommodate that person in accessing it. Many (but not all) of the access arrangements available in the state examinations arise from our duty to provide reasonable accommodations to candidates.

Access to the state certificate examinations is facilitated by developing examination papers and other test instruments that are designed to be as accessible as possible to the broadest range of candidates, including those with special educational needs. All examination materials are reviewed in the course of their development with a view to eliminating inappropriate barriers, and careful consideration is given as to whether the means of assessment rely on a skill or competence that is not properly part of the focus of the assessment but which could exclude candidates with certain disabilities.

In addition, the SEC has for many years facilitated access to the certificate examinations by candidates who would have difficulty in accessing the examination or communicating what they know to an examiner because of a physical difficulty, including visual and hearing impairments, a medical or other condition or a learning difficulty. The access scheme is referred to as the scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations or RACE.

In brief, the purpose of the scheme, as stated in the introduction, is to allow candidates who have special educational needs that interfere with their capacity to engage with the standard examination arrangements to demonstrate what they know and can do, without compromising the integrity of the assessment. This involves them being held to the same standard as other candidates with regard to what the examination is intended to measure. This basic purpose is fleshed out in more detail in the *Framework of Principles* at Appendix A.

The SEC has an obligation to ensure that non-standard arrangements are only provided to those who need them, so that the examinations system continues to be fair to all candidates and to be operated with integrity. The provision of accommodations under the scheme must not put the status or reputation of the certificate examinations at risk.

The underlying principles of the examination accommodations scheme put in place by the Department of Education and operated by the SEC are similar to those that underpin arrangements in other jurisdictions with broadly similar disability rights legislation to that of Ireland. All such schemes focus on the need to remove barriers to accessing the examinations, while retaining the need to assess the same underlying skills and competencies as are assessed for all other candidates, and to apply the same standards of achievement as apply to all other candidates.

The National Council for Special Education has pointed out the importance of understanding that a child can have a disability but not have any special educational needs arising from that disability which require additional supports in school.

In the same vein, the SEC must highlight that the existence of a learning or other difficulty does not automatically mean that a candidate requires accommodations to access the certificate examinations. Even though candidates may have some difficulty with reading, writing or spelling, they may not require the provision of any special facilities if they can read the examination papers at the required level and write legibly. Each application is considered on its merits in line with the conditions of eligibility and the criteria that apply to the specific accommodation sought.

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## 4. REVISED RACE SCHEME

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Following a comprehensive review, focussed on system quality and delivery issues, the SEC implemented major changes to the scheme for the 2017 examinations, which are outlined at 4.1. below. Following the successful introduction of the reformed RACE scheme in 2017, the structure of the scheme for 2023 is largely unchanged. Any enhancements to the scheme for 2023 are clearly flagged in section 4.2.3 and throughout these instructions.

The reforms to the scheme have been designed to provide a better service to schools, parents/guardians, and ultimately, to candidates with physical, learning and other special needs who may require supports in order to enable them to access the Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle examinations.

### 4.1 Key Features of the RACE Scheme

- a) Accommodations that were provided at Junior Cycle will be reactivated at Leaving Certificate subject to confirmation by the school authority of an identified and continuing need.**

Schools retain devolved authority for recommending the supports to be put in place at Junior Cycle and now also have devolved authority to recommend the supports to be put in place at Leaving Certificate. It is expected that, in most cases, the school's recommendation in the case of Leaving Certificate will be to reactivate the same supports as were provided to the candidate at Junior Cycle. In the case of reactivating arrangements that had been in place for Junior Cycle, the SEC will accept the recommendation of the school based on the school's judgement that the need for supports persists and in general there will be no need for schools to undertake further testing. Unless some exceptional circumstance arises, the SEC will accept all such reactivation recommendations. This new model of decision making will give certainty from an earlier stage of students' post-primary education as to the supports that they will have in the state examinations should they continue to be needed.



**There is one exception to this as follows:**

A candidate who had an individual special centre at Junior Cycle and who continues to require a special centre will be approved for a shared special centre at Leaving Certificate.

Also, it should be noted that, in cases where the severity of a candidate's difficulty has decreased due to interventions, the reactivation of accommodations approved at Junior Cycle should reflect this. For example, in cases where interventions have led to an improvement in the candidate's ability to read or type, an individual reader should be reactivated as reading assistance or a scribe should be reactivated as a word processor or recording device.

In particular, we do expect that a candidate granted access to a scribe at Junior Cycle should, following interventions at school during senior cycle, have become sufficiently proficient in the use of a word processor or recording device to enable them to make use of one of these accommodations at the Leaving Certificate examinations.

While it may seem self-evident, schools should note that accommodations approved under the Emergency Application process for Junior Cycle will not be reactivated for Leaving Certificate. The SEC will not approve such applications.

**b) The category of 'Specific Learning Difficulty' has been broadened to a category known as 'Learning Difficulty'.**

This brings RACE into line with the overall needs-based approach to the provision of support to students with special educational needs, advocated by the National Council for Special Education in 2014. There is no longer a need for the school or candidate to provide cognitive ability scores or to otherwise confirm that a candidate has a specific learning difficulty in order to be eligible for RACE. Eligibility should be assessed based on level of need, without a requirement for a diagnosis of a specific condition. The change to a needs-based approach enables greater access to the scheme by candidates with general learning disabilities and brings RACE into line with the overall needs-based approach for the provision of support to students with special educational needs. Where testing is required as evidence of eligibility, at Junior Cycle or in the case of an application for new accommodations at Leaving Certificate, the testing arrangements are the same as before. So, the need for a reader, for example, will continue to be evidenced by reference to the candidate's attainment in a standardised reading test and error rates in reading examination papers.

Other key features of the RACE scheme, which are set out in greater detail in the remainder of the document, can be summarised as follows:

- c) The role of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has changed. NEPS are no longer involved in centrally considering applications. Instead, the role of NEPS is to:**
- provide training to schools on the RACE scheme;

- provide advice, information and support to schools that are considering whether to make RACE applications, particularly in relation to complex or difficult applications;
  - engage with the SEC on governance of the RACE scheme including quality assurance of RACE applications at both individual and school level.
  - engage with the SEC in considering Complex Case referrals on learning grounds.
  - provide advice to SEC regarding the criteria and testing for RACE supports
- d)** A candidate who had an individual special centre at Junior Cycle and who continues to require a special centre will be approved for a special centre at Leaving Certificate. However, depending on the nature of their need, this approval may be for a **shared**, rather than an individual, special centre. Candidates may previously have been placed in an individual special centre when a **shared** special centre might have been sufficient. In allowing Junior Cycle accommodations to be reactivated at Leaving Certificate, the SEC will continue to work with schools to rationalise the numbers of individual examination centres. Section 5.5 deals with this in detail.
- e)** In order to ensure that the scheme is underpinned by good practice, schools must, as part of the application process for Junior Cycle, provide evidence of need by indicating that learning support and interventions have and will continue to be made by the school to support learning for the individual applicant and by providing details of same. In order to have the same supports progressed to Leaving Certificate, schools are required to confirm that the need that led to the granting of supports persists, and that the supports provided to enable access at Junior Cycle are required to enable access to Leaving Certificate. Details of learning support interventions that have been used to address the student's difficulties must be provided.
- f)** Applications will be subject to central quality assurance checks during and following the application process, and schools have access to an SEC referral and advisory service to assist them in difficult decisions.
- g)** A separate application process applies to Leaving Certificate candidates who did not have any accommodations at Junior Cycle or who are applying for a change to the accommodations provided at Junior Cycle.
- h)** An Independent Appeals process continues to be offered. Following the completion of an appeal, any candidate, parent/guardian who considers that their case has not been processed correctly, can make a complaint to the Ombudsman (if they are over 18) or to the Ombudsman for Children (if they are under 18).
- i)** In order to better manage the scheme and to provide timely access, if necessary, to the Independent Appeals Committee and to the Offices of the Ombudsman and Ombudsman for Children, all closing dates will be strictly applied. The SEC will not accept applications on the regular application forms which are received after the closing date. There is a separate process for dealing with late applications and again the closing date for receipt of the late application forms will be strictly adhered to.

- j) In order to affirm system integrity, the SEC will arrange audio-recording in individual special examination centres in a number of schools at the 2023 Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle examinations.

## **4.2 Further enhancements to the RACE scheme since its introduction.**

### **4.2.1 – Enhancements from 2017 to 2022**

#### **Writing Accommodations**

Clarity has been provided regarding the distinctions between the three accommodations available to eligible students who have writing difficulties; i.e., use of a word processor (laptop or tablet) ; use of a recording device; access to a scribe. A student unable to make use of a word-processor in their examinations will be provided with use of a recording device as an alternative. A higher barrier of access applies for access to a scribe. Access to a scribe will only be sanctioned if there is a valid reason why use of a recording device is not an appropriate accommodation (e.g. in the case of a candidate with a severe speech impediment).

#### **Guidelines for Writing Accommodations in cases of Physical Disabilities**

In response to requests from schools, the SEC has provided instructions on assessing students for writing difficulties on grounds of a physical disability including clarification in relation to writing speed. These guidelines apply to students being assessed for reasonable accommodations for the first time, i.e. at Junior Cycle or in the case of new Leaving Certificate applications. There is no need for schools to undertake any additional assessment of students who had writing accommodations to enable them to access their Junior Cycle provided that the school authority is satisfied that the need for the accommodation persists. The guidelines are based on international best practice and have been the subject of consultation with experts on dysgraphia; dyspraxia and Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD). See Section 9.4.

#### **Reading Assistant V Individual Reader**

We have endeavoured to provide more clarity for schools on the distinction between a reading assistant and individual readers (please refer to section 5.1.1 and 9.3.4 for further information).

#### **Assistive Technology**

The SEC recognises the role of assistive technology in enabling independent access to the examinations by students who are eligible for RACE. The SEC encourages use of available assistive technology to support independent access. The range of assistive technologies which candidates can apply to use under the scheme are

- Access to a word processor, laptop or tablet.
- Access to a recording device.
- Access to an exam reading pen\* as an alternative accommodation to a reader/reading assistant for candidates eligible for these.

In addition, the SEC provides Digital Coursework Booklets, for completion by students eligible to use a word processor in the subjects listed below.

Leaving Certificate
History
Geography
Home Economics
Religious Education

These four electronic documents outlined above are designed for completion using a word processor and will provide a better examination experience for candidates with writing difficulties. The digital coursework booklets will be provided, on request, to candidates approved for the use of a word processor. Schools should send an e-mail to ***dcb@examinations.ie*** providing the candidate's name, PPSN and date of birth, the subject requested and reason for the request. The digital version will be issued once the SEC is satisfied as to the eligibility of the candidate for accommodations under the RACE scheme.

It should be noted that in many other subjects, all candidates use a digital booklet, so in these subjects no specific provision is needed for candidates approved for the use of a word processor. The subjects which have digital coursework booklets as standard are Leaving Certificate; Agricultural Science, Economics, Political & Society, Classical Studies and Applied Mathematics.

Students taking the Junior Cycle final examinations in 2023 will not be required to complete Assessment Tasks for the relevant subjects in line with the adjusted assessment arrangements.

The SEC is also open to considering applications to use alternative types of assistive technology. See Section 6.3 of these instructions.

*\*An exam reading pen is a small hand-held device which students use to scan words, phrases or sections of the examination paper and have the text converted to speech which they listen to using ear-phones. Unlike ordinary reading pens, an exam reading pen does not have the functionality to explain the meaning of words or to translate words as this functionality would undermine the integrity of the examinations. Candidates may have a Reader or Reading Assistance for any subject that is not compatible with an exam reading pen.*

#### **4.2.2 Extension of RACE Scheme to provide deferred examinations**

In 2019, the SEC introduced, on an interim, pilot basis, a limited provision for supporting Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied candidates who experienced the death of a close relative during the period of the written examinations under the emergency provisions of the RACE Scheme. For the 2022 Leaving Certificate, the SEC extended the eligibility for the deferred examinations to candidates unable to sit their examinations in the main sitting due

to serious accident, injury or illness. (For 2022 candidates who were absent from examinations on public health grounds due to Covid-19 also had access to deferred examinations).

For reference only, as the scheme for 2023 is under review, the criteria, principles and requirements of the scheme are set out in full in SEC Circular 34/22, available on the SEC website. The overarching principles, in providing deferred examinations to those who needed them, is safeguarding integrity and maintaining confidence in the Leaving Certificate to ensure equity and fairness for all candidates. The criteria for serious medical conditions have been informed by research into international best practice in other jurisdictions with similar examinations systems to Ireland. Candidates who experienced serious accident, injury or illness had the option to defer some or all of their examinations depending on the timing, nature and severity of their condition. Medical certification, which had to be from a medical consultant or hospital, had to include both evidence of the condition and the degree to which it impacted on the candidate's ability to attend for their examinations.

The SEC is currently evaluating the extension of RACE scheme to provide the deferred examination scheme for the 2023 examinations, with all arrangements guided by prevailing public health advice. There will be no second sitting of the Junior Cycle examinations.

#### **4.2.3. Enhancements to the RACE scheme in 2023**

##### **Additional time for Visually Impaired to complete Practical Examinations.**

We have extended the provision of additional time for candidates with visual impairments to complete practical examination as set out in paragraph 5.3.1 below.

##### **Pilot Scheme for Examinations Papers in PDF format to Leaving Certificate candidates with visually impairments.**

On a pilot basis the SEC will provide examination papers in read only PDF format to Leaving Certificate candidates who are being provided with other RACE accommodations on the grounds of their visual impairment. Access to these pilot arrangements will be strictly limited to candidates who are visually impaired and under the care of the Visiting Teachers Service. The SEC will evaluate this pilot scheme following the 2023 examinations. No other applications for this accommodation will be considered in the pilot phase. See Section 9.3.8 for further details.

## Colour Identifier

Candidates who are colour blind may need a colour identifier. This is most likely to be needed in the subjects Leaving Certificate Geography and Junior Cycle Geography and Science but could arise in other subjects. In questions that require candidates to be able to distinguish between colours (for example, where elements of a diagram are being identified by their colour) the candidate may ask the colour identifier such questions as “can you tell me what colour this is?”, or “can you tell me which of these lines is the red one?”. As this need will not arise often in the examination, the colour identifier should be the superintendent of the main centre or special centre.

## 4.3 Common issues with 2022 applications

The SEC very much appreciates the co-operation shown by school principals, resource and learning support teachers and other school staff involved in the RACE application process. As with all processes there has been a period of adjustment for schools in engaging with the application regimen particularly due to the disruptive impact of Covid 19. In order to assist in preparing for the process for the forthcoming year it might be useful to highlight some of the more common issues that were encountered with the application process particularly at Junior Cycle.

- a) Accommodations being recommended for candidates who were clearly ineligible in line with the criteria. The scheme is a devolved model which allows schools discretion to make applications for students who are eligible for the scheme. There are a number of supports available to schools in their decision making such as consultation with the SEC, with NEPS or the VTS, or referring the case for decision through the Complex Cases process. **If the student is not eligible then no application should be made.**
- b) Some schools failed to adequately address the requirement to provide evidence of need and did not provide sufficient, or indeed in some cases, any information about the continuum of learning support being provided to the candidate to support their learning in school. RACE accommodations should be part of an ongoing need that the candidate has that impacts on their daily learning in school as well as in the examinations. It is expected that schools will provide details on the application form of the learning support intervention strategies that they have used or are using (e.g. SNIP, paired reading, etc). **Ensure that Section 2 of the application form is always completed in full and Section 5 where relevant.**
- c) Recommending an individual reader for candidates whose level of need would be adequately supported by the provision of reading assistance or a reading pen. **Recommend the accommodation that reflects the candidate’s needs.**
- d) Schools recommending access to a scribe as an alternative to a recording device or word processor due to the unavailability of recording devices or word processors in the school. **This is not an appropriate reason for access to a scribe. If a candidate requires a word processor or recording device, this should be available to them in the school.**
- e) Scribes being recommended inappropriately. Scribes will only be approved in exceptional circumstances. The SEC expects that candidates approved for a writing accommodation will use either a word processor or a recording device. There is a higher threshold of

eligibility for access to a scribe. To be eligible for a scribe, a candidate must firstly qualify for a writing accommodation by reference to the criteria. There must then also be an impediment to the candidate making use of either a word processor or a recording device. The SEC must be satisfied that this impediment is valid. The default alternative for any candidate that is unable to make use of a word processor in examination conditions is to use a recording device. Access to a scribe is not a matter of personal preference. The candidate must be eligible. **Do not recommend access to a scribe unless the candidate cannot use a word processor or a recording device.**

- f) Evidence of eligibility for reading accommodations not in accordance with the requirements i.e. text not being read from a second subject; being read at the incorrect level; insufficient number of words being read (450 to 550 words) and errors not calculated. **Ensure that all testing instructions are followed.**
- g) In speed of reading tests, the recommended maximum duration is 10 minutes. Candidates are reading in excess of this recommended maximum. **Ensure reading speed tests are no longer than 10 minutes.**
- h) Evidence of eligibility in the case of writing accommodations and the waiver from the assessment of spelling, punctuation and certain elements of grammar are not in accordance with the requirements i.e. word count of insufficient length; errors not calculated; handwriting speed not presented as words per minute. **Ensure that all testing instructions are followed.**
- i) Standard achievement tests not administered on an individual basis. **Administer all tests on an individual basis for RACE.**
- j) Writing test results not presented in word per minute. **Present the results of writing tests in words per minute.**
- k) In some applications there were no accommodations recommended by schools or conflicting accommodations were applied for. **The school must make a recommendation for accommodations in line with the scheme.**
- l) Schools sending in sections of forms, rather than the full application form. **A full application form must be submitted for each candidate.**
- m) Accommodations approved for candidates not being provided for all written examinations including the LCVP written examination and the LCA, ICT written examination, both of which take place in May each year. Other than in the case of late or emergency applications, the SEC will have issued decisions for all fully completed applications by mid-February 2023. **Schools must arrange to provide the approved accommodations for all examinations, as appropriate, and not just those taking place in June.**
- n) The quality assurance process in 2022 also highlighted a number of cases where a scribe and/or an individual reader were approved by the SEC on recommendation from the school but these supports were not actually being availed of, by the candidate, in the examination. **Candidates must return to the main examination centre if they do not use the accommodation that led to the granting of a special examination centre.**

Schools should note that such issues can delay the processing of applications and hence the issuing of a decision and can create unnecessary anxiety for candidates and their parents/guardians. It should also be noted that submitting an application on behalf of a



candidate who is clearly ineligible can create an expectation that supports will be sanctioned and promote disappointment when the application is refused. It would be fairer on the candidate and their parents/guardians to be advised that they are not eligible for RACE by the school at the earliest opportunity.

### **Complex Cases**

The Complex Case referral process is available to assist schools in mediating decisions in more difficult cases (Section 8.3). Non-compliance by schools with the RACE instructions could lead to instances of candidates being provided with accommodations for which they are ineligible. This could provide them with an unfair advantage over other candidates and threaten the integrity and reputation of the State Examinations and the school.

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## 5. SCOPE OF THE RACE SCHEME

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### **5.1 Range of Accommodations**

Applications for reasonable accommodations are considered in line with the published *Framework of Principles* and can only be approved in accordance with the principles and requirements of the scheme. The means by which a candidate normally studies or communicates, the supports provided by the school and his or her eligibility in line with the published criteria, and/or other conditions of eligibility, and the range of supports available under the scheme will largely determine the access arrangements which can be provided. In this context, a candidate must have a need to work in a particular way based on their special educational needs rather than any personal choice that they might make. Applications for the 2023 RACE scheme will continue to be made on one of four grounds as follows:

- (1) Learning Difficulty
- (2) Hearing Difficulty
- (3) Visual Difficulty
- (4) Physical Difficulty\*

*\* this category is taken to include medical, sensory, mental health and behavioural difficulties as well as physical difficulties.*

The SEC appreciates that schools may make applications for candidates with complex needs whose difficulties span a number of the grounds for making a RACE application. The range of accommodations available to candidates for the 2023 examinations under each of these categories is set out in the following section. The following is a summary only and you are directed to Section 9 where each accommodation is explained in more detail, including eligibility criteria as appropriate.

#### **5.1.1 Learning Difficulty**

- A reading assistant, who, on request, read occasional words or phrases from the examination paper to the candidate without elaboration or explanation. The vast

majority of candidate's needs will be met through the provision of reading assistance, delivered by a reader shared in a small examination centre between 2-4 candidates.

- An exam reading pen which can be used by the candidate to scan the examination paper. It converts the text to speech which candidates can listen to using ear-phones. Candidates may have reading assistance for any subject that is not compatible with an exam reading pen.
- An individual reader, who, on request, will read the entire or any part of the examination paper to the candidates without elaboration or explanation. On the basis that a shared reader will be appropriate to the needs of most candidates individual readers should be recommended on an exceptional basis only based on the educational needs of candidates
- A word processor or recording device to record the candidate's responses or, in very exceptional circumstances, access to a scribe.
- A waiver from the assessment of spelling, punctuation and certain elements of grammar in language subjects.

The reading accommodations should reflect, as far as is possible, the candidate's normal way of working and level of need, and best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their schooling to work independently.

### **5.1.2 Hearing Difficulty**

- Use of a personal CD player with a personal induction loop in the main examination centre for the aural examination.
- A special examination centre for the aural examination.
- A modified aural examination in a language subject for students with significant hearing loss who cannot hear the examination content on a CD. In such instances an examiner reads the examination content to the student in a separate centre.
- Exemption from the aural examination in language subjects, if modified aural is not appropriate for the candidate.
- Exemption from the aural component of the Music examination for Leaving Certificate candidates only. At Junior Cycle, all elements of the specification are integrated throughout the paper so there is no defined aural section and therefore an exemption is not feasible.
- A sign language interpreter, to sign an examination paper, without elaboration or explanation.
- Being examined by an oral examiner who has been briefed in dealing with candidates with a hearing/speech impairment
- Exemption from the oral tests, if support arrangements are unsuitable.
- Seating the candidate close to the superintendent and/or the CD player in the main examination centre can be arranged by the school (See Section 5.4).

### **5.1.3 Visual Difficulty**

- Standard examination paper enlarged to A3 size.
- Modified examination paper (visual elements removed or simplified), enlarged to A3 size.

- Braille version of modified paper.
- A reading assistant, who, on request, read occasional words or phrases from the examination paper to the candidate without elaboration or explanation. The vast majority of candidate's needs will be met through the provision of reading assistance, delivered by a reader shared in a small examination centre between 2-4 candidates.
- An exam reading pen which can be used by the candidate to scan the examination paper. It converts the text to speech which candidates can listen to using ear-phones. Candidates may have reading assistance for any subject that is not compatible with an exam reading pen.
- An individual reader, who, on request, will read the entire or any part of the examination paper to the candidates without elaboration or explanation. On the basis that a shared reader will be appropriate to the needs of most candidates individual readers should be recommended on an exceptional basis only based on the educational needs of candidates
- A word processor or recording device to record the candidate's responses or, in very exceptional circumstances, access to a scribe.
- Use of drawing aids such as parallel motion drawing boards and smaller drawing sheets in the Junior Cycle subjects Graphics, and Wood Technology and in the Leaving Certificate subjects DCG, Construction Studies, and Technology.
- Candidates who are colour blind may need a colour identifier See section 4.2.3 for details.
- Low vision aids, magnifiers and reading lamps normally used in the classroom can be arranged by the school (See Section 5.4).
- On a pilot basis read only PDF examination papers to Leaving Certificate candidates (paragraph 4.2.3 refers)

The reading accommodations should reflect, as far as is possible, the candidate's normal way of working and level of need, and best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their schooling to work independently.

#### **5.1.4 Physical Difficulty** (including medical, sensory, behavioural and mental health difficulties)

- A word-processor, standard or voice-activated or a recording device to record the candidate's responses or, in very exceptional circumstances, access to a scribe.
- Use of drawing aids such as parallel motion drawing boards and smaller drawing sheets in the Junior Cycle subjects Graphics, and Wood Technology and in the Leaving Certificate Subjects DCG, Construction Studies, and Technology.
- Junior Cycle Home Economics only – exemption from the practical and/or project.

## **5.2 Explanatory Notes on Statements of Results and Examinations**

### **Certificates**

When an element or elements of an examination have been waived, so that the purpose of the examination regarding that element or elements has not been met, or the method of examining has been significantly altered, this will be indicated by the presence of an explanatory note on the candidate's *Statement of Provisional Results and Certificate of Results*. In approving accommodations for a candidate, the letter of decision will inform the candidate of the content of any such explanatory note in relation to the subject(s) concerned. Details of the types of explanatory notes are given in Section 9.

## **5.3 Time in Examinations**

The following section sets out the ways in which the timing of the examinations has been or can be modified to meet the needs of candidates.

### **5.3.1 Additional Time**

Additional time in which to complete the written or practical examinations (not to be confused with rest breaks) is not an accommodation that can be sanctioned in its own right under the RACE scheme. The following section describes the limited circumstances attached to the award of additional time in the examinations. Other than in Leaving Certificate Irish, English, History and Geography (see 5.3.2 below), additional time, at a rate of 10 extra minutes per scheduled hour, or part thereof, of each examination paper, may be provided to candidates in the following circumstances:

1. Candidates for whom the use of a scribe has been sanctioned - as there is a time overhead in dictation and otherwise in dealing with a scribe.
2. Candidates who are eligible for RACE supports arising from a visual impairment – such candidates should be under the care of the Visiting Teacher Service.
3. Candidates who meet the eligibility criteria for the use of a mechanical aid but who are unable to make adequate use of these aids under examination conditions. An example of this is given below.\*

Regardless of the circumstances or combination of circumstances, additional time is limited to a maximum of 10 minutes per scheduled hour, or part thereof, of examination to a maximum of 30 minutes per examination. For example, a candidate with a visual impairment, sitting a 2.5-hour examination, will be entitled to additional time of 30 minutes. A candidate with a visual impairment, sitting a 2.5-hour examination, and using a scribe, will still only be

entitled to additional time of 30 minutes in that examination. Additional time for visually impaired candidates will be automatically applied to examinations at the approval stage. There is no requirement to apply separately.

*\* This is a limited accommodation available in very exceptional circumstances. An example of when this might be allowed is in the case of a student sanctioned to use a word processor to type their examinations. In their preparations for the examinations, they may encounter difficulties in using the device. In exceptional circumstances the SEC may sanction them to write their examination instead. Additional time in these circumstances must be specifically applied for and approved by the SEC. The SEC must be absolutely convinced of the bona fides behind any claim that a candidate is unable to make use of a device (word processor, recording device, etc.) and this may include a visit to the school by SEC personnel or by NEPS. Under no circumstances will a candidate be granted the use of a word processor (or other device) be allowed extra time to type their responses on grounds of slow typing speed.*

### **5.3.2 Adjustments to the Published Leaving Certificate Examination Timetable**

Additional time of 20 minutes per examination paper was introduced in 2000 for all candidates in the Leaving Certificate subjects, Irish, English, History and Geography. This was introduced to meet the needs of candidates with special educational needs by making the time element of these examinations less critical. It remains the case that the examinations in these subjects are 20 minutes longer than the time they were designed to require. Therefore, any further additional time allowed in the examinations in these subjects is limited to 10 minutes over and above that shown on the published timetable.

### **5.3.3 Rest Breaks**

To provide for emergency situations and to provide for a candidate's medical needs, schools have discretion, to grant rest breaks or rest periods, **not exceeding 20 minutes per examination**, to candidates with significant physical and/or medical conditions. **Rest breaks do not represent additional time in which to complete the examination.** You do not need to and should not apply to the SEC to allow individual candidates to take rest breaks. **However, rest breaks should be considered exceptional and the SEC expects low numbers of rest breaks to be approved in a class group. The SEC will intervene with any school if it believes that the discretion to grant rest breaks is being abused.** Breaks should be granted based on your knowledge of what is in the best interests of the candidate.

The following rules apply to rest breaks:

- Candidates will normally be expected to remain in the centre during the rest break. However, there may be a particular need for the candidate to leave the examination centre during the rest break. If this happens you must ensure that the school authority has made a satisfactory arrangement for them to be supervised. Candidates should not be supervised by the attendant.
- Candidates are not permitted to read, write or complete any other examination related activity during the rest break.
- During rest breaks the exam paper and script should be closed on the desk.

- Based on their needs, candidates may take one or more rest breaks during each examination.
- The total of the rest break(s) granted by the school must not exceed 20 minutes per examination.
- During a rest break, the clock is effectively stopped for the candidate involved and the time taken during the rest break(s) is added at the end of the examination.
- The candidate should be accommodated in the main examination centre and must only be in a special examination centre if that accommodation has been approved for another reason.
- Rest breaks must be supervised by the superintendent or a member of the school authority for the full duration of each rest break.

A note, signed by the principal, must be provided to the superintendent by the school authority authorising standard rest breaks and providing the reason.

Should the school authority become aware of an increasing number of rest breaks being applied for or approved, they must immediately bring this to the attention of the SEC.

In very extreme cases the SEC will consider an application for rest breaks in excess of 20 minutes – a separate submission setting out the circumstances should be made to the SEC (See 5.3.4 below).

#### **5.3.4 Alterations to the Standard Timetable**

The following is for information only as any change to the scheduled start of an examination must have prior approval from the SEC. In exceptional circumstances (illness, bereavement/funeral attendance, etc.), the SEC will consider requests to adjust the start time of an examination to a different time on the same day provided that:

- a) the candidate has not had sight of the examination paper or knowledge of the examination paper contents and
- b) the candidate has not had contact with other candidates or any person who may have had sight of the examination paper or have knowledge of the examination paper contents and
- c) the candidate has been supervised by the school authorities or superintendent from the start time of the examination as per the official timetable.

Where a candidate requires a break for medical attention; is taken ill during the examination; or, due to some other extreme circumstance, needs a rest break in excess of the 20 minutes that can be allowed by the school, (e.g. candidate undergoing a medical procedure), it may be possible to extend the examination time to compensate for loss of time provided the candidate is supervised by the school authority at all times. (This is outside the circumstances that give rise to rest breaks at 5.3.3 described above).

In such circumstances, you must contact the SEC for advice as to how to proceed. In emergencies, you should contact the SEC at the earliest possible opportunity. See section 4.2.2 the extension of the RACE scheme to provide deferred examinations.

## 5.4 Accommodations that can be arranged by School Authorities

In addition to the arrangements for rest breaks detailed above, school authorities have discretion to make certain other arrangements, as set out below, based on their knowledge of what is in the best interests of the candidate. You do not need to apply to the SEC to put these arrangements in place. You simply provide a note to the examination centre superintendent confirming the arrangements that are required. However, should any of these arrangements give rise to the need for a special examination centre or the potential for any alterations to the examinations timetable then you must contact the SEC.

The accommodations that can be arranged by the school are:

- Rest breaks not exceeding 20 minutes as set out in section 5.3.3. – please note the strict rules which apply to the granting of rest breaks.
- Taking of medicine, food or drinks into the examination centre where this is required by the candidate for medical reasons.
- Allowing the candidate to move/stretch within the centre.
- Use of a special desk or chair normally used in the classroom.
- Use of low vision aids, magnifiers and reading lamps used normally in the classroom by candidates with visual impairments.
- Ensuring that a candidate with a hearing impairment is positioned close to the Superintendent and/or to the CD player in the main examination centre for the aural examination.
- Assistance of a helper\*:

A helper in the practical tests, is a person who may carry out general 'housekeeping' type duties, e.g. lifting and carrying utensils and equipment (please refer to section 9.4 for further information).

In the written tests, a helper may assist a candidate with physical needs in any written exam which requires drawing sheets to clamp the drawing sheets to a board (please refer to section 9.4 for further information).

If schools are in any doubt about the level of assistance that may be provided, please contact the SEC for clarification.

\* It should be noted that the SEC is not responsible for any cost associated with the provision of a helper in the practical or written tests.



## 5.5 Special Examination Centres

In 2022, over 8,000 special examination centres were established. The establishment of special examination centres creates a demand on schools to recruit and appoint suitable personnel to act as readers, scribes and superintendents in these centres as well as the obligation to provide sufficient suitable accommodation. The SEC appreciates the challenge that this level of provision of special centres poses for school authorities and is keen to ensure that this provision is manageable.

The purpose of this section is to provide clear instructions on the establishment of special examination centres, both individual and shared, and the assignment of candidates to special examination centres. The most significant point to note is that **approval for a special examination centre does not automatically mean that the candidate will be sitting in an examination centre on his or her own**. This rule applies to all RACE applications, both new applications and applications to have supports reactivated from Junior Cycle to Leaving Certificate.

Special examination centres are provided in the case of candidates who cannot be accommodated in main examination centres for a variety of reasons, from needing the assistance of scribes and readers to having particular emotional and behavioural needs.

Some of the accommodations possible under the RACE Scheme do not require any special centre arrangements, e.g. waiver from the assessment of spelling, punctuation and certain elements of grammar in language subjects; brailled/modified examination papers; colour identifier, etc.

When the granting of reasonable accommodations gives rise to the need for access to a special examination centre, the general approach will be to approve access to a shared special examination centre. The SEC will only approve individual examination centres in very specific circumstances as follows:

1. For candidates who are recording their answers (i.e. using a scribe or recording device).
2. For candidates who need an individual reader (as opposed to reading assistance).
3. For candidates who have a contagious medical condition.

**If a candidate is approved for an individual special examination centre due to one of these specific circumstances and then does not use the accommodation that has been approved, he or she will lose access to the individual special centre. For example, if a candidate for whom the use of an individual reader or scribe has been approved, does not use the individual reader or scribe, he or she will be obliged to sit the examinations in the main examination centre.**

Shared special examination centres are to be used by candidates approved for reasonable accommodations for the following reasons:

1. Use of a word processor, reading pen or other aids.
2. Reading assistance (in a shared special centre established for this specific purpose).
3. Emotional or behavioural difficulties.
4. Non-contagious medical conditions.

Schools **do** have discretion to move candidates assigned to shared special centres between a school's allocated shared special centres. This can be done to accommodate the particular needs of the candidates but must not give rise to the opening of additional centres.

In allowing Junior Cycle accommodations to be reactivated at Leaving Certificate, the SEC will work with schools to rationalise the numbers of individual examination centres. Candidates may previously have been placed in an individual special centre when a shared special centre might have been sufficient. A candidate who had an individual special centre at Junior Cycle and who continues to require a special centre will be approved for a special centre at Leaving Certificate. However, depending on the nature of their need, this approval may be for a shared, rather than an individual special centre.

Schools are required to plan their provision on the basis of the following numbers of candidates being accommodated in special centres:

- Reading assistance - 2 to 4 candidates accessing reading assistance.
- Exam reading pen - 2 to 4 candidates.
- All other shared special centres - up to 8 candidates.

Colour identifier; Candidates approved for this accommodation (with no other accommodations) must be accommodated in the main examination centre.

Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate candidates should not be accommodated in the same shared special centre due to the difference in start times for examinations.

Schools **do not** have discretion to assign a candidate to an individual special examination centre, nor to move a candidate from a shared special centre to an individual one.

In cases where 2 or more shared special centres have been approved, schools should endeavour to amalgamate such centres as the exams progress and the number of candidates in each centre declines or where subject choices allow. Schools should be mindful of this when planning accommodation for the examinations.

Some candidates, because of their difficulties, are uncomfortable sharing an examination centre with other candidates and may, in the past, have been accommodated in an individual special centre. Unless there is a very valid reason against it, such candidates should be accommodated in a shared special centre by deploying portable screens to the side of the candidate so that no other candidate may be observed in the centre. The screen should be

placed in such a way that the candidate may observe, and be observed by, the superintendent at all times.

Schools are required to have the necessary accommodation available to accommodate all candidates on whose behalf special centres are applied for. Under no circumstances will the SEC pay for accommodation.

All decisions in relation to special centres will be made by the SEC by reference to these instructions.

## **5.6 Outside the Scope of RACE – Trauma and Adversity**

Schools should note that the SEC is severely constrained in what it can do to accommodate the life circumstances of individual candidates. Each year, the certificate examinations give rise to many situations where a real human factor must be balanced against the requirements of equity to the general body of students. While the SEC would wish to do all it can for candidates who have had to cope with adversity in their lives, there is also the need to apply uniform and objective criteria to the marking of candidates' examination work. At the certificate examinations each candidate's work is marked according to the common marking scheme for the subject concerned. This is to ensure equitable, consistent and fair treatment for all candidates.

There may be a misconception that examiners can allow in some subjective way for the life circumstances of individual students. This is not the case. Examiners are confined to applying the marking scheme to the work actually produced at the examination. An examiner has no scope to deviate from the marking scheme.

In 2019, the SEC introduced, on an interim, pilot basis, a limited provision for supporting Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied candidates who experienced the death of a close relative during the period of the written examinations under the emergency provisions of the RACE Scheme. Under the extension of the emergency provisions of the RACE scheme, in advance of the 2022 Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate written examinations, the SEC extended the eligibility for the deferred examinations to candidates unable to sit their examinations in the main sitting due to serious accident, injury or illness. Candidates who were absent from examinations on public health grounds due to Covid-19 also had access to deferred examinations. These measures were announced and implemented under Circular 34/22.

As previously advised, school should contact the SEC at the earliest opportunity when an emergency occurs to establish what, if any arrangements are possible.

Under the existing provisions of the RACE Scheme, every possible effort will continue to be made by the SEC to accommodate candidates who experience accidents, or other trauma either immediately before or during the examinations. There are arrangements that can be made between the State Examinations Commission and the school in the best interests of an ill or injured candidate provided the candidate is able to proceed with their examination on the scheduled date. These arrangements might include supervised rest breaks during the

examinations; access to a smaller examination centre; and alterations to the start and end time of the examinations as long as the examination is taken on the date as on the published timetable. The National Educational Psychological Service also assists schools and students in crisis situations during examinations.

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## 6. GENERAL PRINCIPLES IN ASSESSING ELIGIBILITY FOR ACCOMMODATIONS UNDER RACE

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Learning support teachers, resource teachers and other school staff working with students with special educational needs are best placed to identify students who may require accommodations to enable them to access the certificate examinations. The examinations system, which includes the RACE scheme, must be fair to all candidates and must be operated with integrity. The assessment of eligibility for reasonable accommodations will be based on appropriate evidence of need.

When it comes to the RACE scheme, there should be no surprises either for the school or for the candidate at the time of application.

- The expectation is that RACE applications will be made on behalf of candidates whose special needs have already been identified and who have been provided with appropriate learning interventions on an ongoing basis as part of a continuum of support in the school.
- The access arrangements made for the examinations should be reflective of the arrangements necessarily made by the school to support learning for students with an identified need. These arrangements should enable independent access to the examinations i.e. the use of assistive technology, to the greatest possible degree.
- Candidates must be eligible for the supports applied for in line with the criteria and other conditions of eligibility. In general candidates should not have to practice or get used to an accommodation being recommended on their behalf as the accommodations being applied for should reflect their normal way of working in the classroom.
- If you are considering making an application for a student who did not have an identified special need prior to the RACE application process, then you must be convinced of the student's need, and eligibility for accommodations under the RACE scheme, and be able to justify this.
- You must also consider what other interventions the school will put in place in order to support the learning of a student whose special need has been identified through the RACE application process. If the school does not consider that any interventions or learning supports are necessary, then you should also consider whether he or she is eligible for RACE.

### **6.1 Grounds for Making a RACE Application**

Applications will be accepted on the following grounds:

- (1) Learning Difficulty
- (2) Hearing Difficulty

(3) Visual Difficulty

(4) Physical Difficulty\*

*\* This category is taken to include medical, sensory, behavioural and mental health difficulties as well as physical difficulties.*

The SEC appreciates that schools may make applications for candidates with complex needs whose difficulties span a number of the grounds for making a RACE application.

### **All Grounds — Leaving Certificate—Application to Reactivate Supports**

The supports provided at Junior Cycle will be provided at Leaving Certificate, subject to confirmation by the school authority of an identified and continuing need. The SEC will accept the school authority's judgement as the basis of the recommendation to provide the same supports again for Leaving Certificate and, other than in exceptional cases, does not expect schools will need to seek additional evidence or undertake further testing.

### **Learning Difficulty Grounds — Junior Cycle Applications and Applications for New/Different Supports at Leaving Certificate**

The testing regimen required to assess eligibility for RACE is streamlined and simplified by the changes to the scheme as you are no longer required to distinguish between specific and general learning difficulties. There is therefore no need to undertake tests of general cognitive ability for the purposes of the RACE scheme.

In considering whether to make an application on grounds of learning difficulty, you should identify candidates who, because of a difficulty with reading, writing or spelling, would have significant problems in accessing the examination papers and/or communicating what they know to an examiner. Before making an application in respect of such a candidate, you are required to undertake testing to assess eligibility in line with specific qualifying criteria, such as attainment scores and error rates.

### **Physical/Visual/Hearing Difficulty Grounds — Junior Cycle Applications and Applications for New/Different Supports at Leaving Certificate**

In considering such applications, you should assess the nature of the disability, the impact of the difficulty on the candidate and the needs arising as a result. You will need to gather and retain evidence of need such as medical reports, other professional reports, etc. In response to requests from schools, the SEC has provided guidelines on assessing students for writing difficulties on grounds of a physical disability including clarification in relation to writing speed. These guidelines apply to students being assessed for reasonable accommodations for the first time, i.e. at Junior Cycle or in the case of new Leaving Certificate applications. There is no need for schools to undertake any additional assessment of students who had writing accommodations to enable them to access their Junior Cycle provided that the school authority is satisfied that the need for the accommodation persists. The guidelines are based on international best practice and have been the subject of consultation with experts on dysgraphia; dyspraxia and Developmental Co-ordination Disorder (DCD).

In general, teachers (whether assigned to learning support or resource teaching or other roles) are best placed to advise on the impact of non-learning difficulties on individual candidates for examination and to recommend appropriate accommodations that best remediate this impact without compromising the integrity of the assessment.

In the case of candidates with a visual and/or hearing impairment you should, as has always been the case, engage with the staff of the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) before making an application for supports.

## 6.2 School Assessment of Eligibility Process

- In general, only the accommodations listed in this document are available under the RACE Scheme. (**Note: See 6.3 regarding assistive technology**)
- Professional advice can be sought from special-needs professionals working in schools, such as NEPS psychologists and staff of the VTS.
- Where evidence of eligibility is required to be assessed, this evidence should not be sent to the SEC. You must retain all such evidence carefully in the school, as it may be required for later quality assurance purposes.
- If your assessment is that the candidate is eligible, you should proceed with the relevant application as set out in Section 8.
- If your assessment is that the candidate is not eligible for RACE, then you should communicate your assessment to the candidate and his or her parents/guardians. Your communication with candidates and parents/guardians in this regard will be made easier if you have previously made available to them the SEC's RACE *Guide for Students*. Your own familiarity with these *Instructions for Schools* and the *Guide for Students* should also help with this communication.
- The SEC can also offer advice and assistance in dealing with complex or difficult cases. See Section 8.3.

## 6.3 Note on Use of Assistive Technology

Schools do not have delegated authority to recommend any accommodations not listed among the range of available accommodations (see Sections 5 and 9). Within the RACE Scheme, the main assistive technology options available are the use of a word processor; use of a recording device; and, the use of exam reading pens.

### Candidates eligible for the use of a word processor.

For the 2023 examinations the SEC will provide candidates approved for the use of a word processor with Digital Coursework Booklets in the following range of subjects:

Leaving Certificate
History
Geography
Home Economics

These four electronic documents outlined above are designed for completion using a word processor and will provide a better examination experience for candidates with writing difficulties. The digital coursework booklets will be provided, on request, to candidates approved for the use of a word processor. Schools should send an e-mail to ***dcb@examinations.ie*** providing the candidate's name, PPSN and date of birth, the subject requested and reason for the request. The digital version will be issued once the SEC is satisfied as to the eligibility of the candidate for accommodations under the RACE scheme.

It should be noted that in many other subjects, all candidates use a digital booklet, so in these subjects no specific provision is needed for candidates approved for the use of a word processor. The subjects which have digital coursework booklets as standard are Leaving Certificate; Agricultural Science, Economics, Political & Society, Classical Studies and Applied Mathematics.

Students taking the Junior Cycle final examinations in 2023 will not be required to complete Assessment Tasks for the relevant subjects in line with the adjusted assessment arrangements.

**Pilot Scheme for Examinations Papers in PDF format for Leaving Certificate candidates visually impaired.**

On a pilot basis the SEC will provide examination papers in read only PDF format to Leaving Certificate candidates who are being provided with other RACE accommodations on the grounds of their visual impairment. Access to these pilot arrangements will be strictly limited to candidates who are visually impaired and under the care of the Visiting Teachers Service. The SEC will evaluate this pilot scheme following the 2023 examinations. No other applications for this accommodation will be considered in the pilot phase. See Section 9.3.8 for further details.

**Other Forms of Assistive Technology**

The SEC will consider applications for use of other forms of assistive technology in the examinations provided the assistive technology:

- is already being used by the candidate (so there is no additional cost in its approval for the examinations);
- does not give rise to any examinations' integrity concerns;
- does not require any development work to be done by the SEC in respect of its examination papers.

The SEC will consider individual applications from schools on behalf of candidates seeking to use other forms of assistive technology. Such applications will be decided upon by the SEC in light of the constraints listed above; the overhead of providing individual examination centres to meet the needs of candidates using assistive technology and the principles and requirements of the RACE scheme.



To qualify for the use of assistive technology in the certificate examinations candidates must, in the first instance, be eligible for the accommodation as evidenced by the qualifying criteria set out in **Section 9** of these instructions. The candidate must also be using the assistive technology for day to day schooling and in-house examinations.

In terms of the use of AT in the RACE scheme, when approving word processors, the SEC does not recommend any particular device; once the candidate is eligible and the device can be restricted in order to preserve integrity then it can be used in the exam. Similarly, with tablets, which can also be approved for use, we do not recommend any particular device; the candidate must be eligible for reasonable accommodations; the device must be capable of being restricted from the internet and other information sources; and the examination content must be capable of being printed from the device and provided on removable media from the device.

#### **6.4 SEC Decision Making Process**

- The SEC will review applications received from the school on an individual basis and will make a decision on eligibility for the scheme.
- In general, the SEC will confirm the school's recommendation of eligibility for supports where it is clear that the candidate is eligible.
- The SEC may select some applications or all of the applications from selected schools as part of the quality assurance programme (**See Section 7**).
- The receipt of incomplete/ineligible forms from a school could trigger a full quality assurance check on the school.
- Where the application form is incorrectly completed, it will be returned to the school for correction. It cannot be accepted for processing until it has been fully and correctly completed.
- If a special centre is required the SEC will determine whether the centre will be a shared or individual special centre in line with the criteria set out in **Section 5.5**.
- Decisions will be provided in writing to the school and you should ensure that all decisions are notified to candidates and their parents/guardians as soon as possible. To assist schools, the SEC provides two copies of all decision letters — one for the school's records and one for the candidate.
- If for some reason the SEC does not agree with the school's recommendation and the decision is to refuse the application, then the reason for the refusal will be provided.
- Access to an Independent Appeals Committee will continue to be a feature of the scheme. The Independent Appeals Committee will provide a reason if their decision is to refuse the RACE application.
- Following the completion of an appeal, any candidate, parent/guardian who considers that their case has not been processed correctly, can make a complaint to the Ombudsman (if they are over 18) or to the Ombudsman for Children (if they are under 18).

Schools should not make recommendations on behalf of candidates who are clearly ineligible for accommodations. In cases where the school and the candidate/parent or guardian are in

dispute with regard to eligibility, then the Advisory Service for Complex Cases should be used. See Section 8.3

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## 7. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF RACE APPLICATIONS.

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In line with established practice, all Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate RACE applications will be subject to quality assurance. The quality assurance programme is the cornerstone of the SEC's governance of the RACE Scheme. The focus of the quality assurance programme is on ensuring that applications for RACE have been made on behalf of candidates whose needs for reasonable accommodations have been appropriately identified.

The quality assurance programme will operate on an ongoing basis commencing with the first set of applications and will continue throughout, and following the completion of, the RACE application cycle.

The focus of the quality assurance will continue to be assisting schools to comply with the demands of the RACE scheme. In the event that problems are identified, the SEC assisted by NEPS will provide schools with guidance and advice as to how they should improve their RACE application process.

However, the SEC or NEPS may intervene more directly with a school at any stage during the application cycle if the actions of the school in relation to RACE are inappropriate and/or threaten the integrity of the examinations. In such cases, the quality assurance process may lead to the removal of accommodations for Leaving Certificate, or the refusal of RACE applications at both Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle, if the evidence of need has not been correctly established.

**In the event that recommendations made by a school are altered as part of the quality assurance process, the application forms will be returned to the school for updating and further engagement with the candidates and their parents/guardians.**

Personnel completing RACE applications should review the common problems that the SEC encountered with the 2022 application process set out in Section 4.3.

Schools will be selected for quality assurance this year using a number of factors including:

- the SEC's observations during monitoring visits over the course of the written examinations.
- recommending reasonable accommodations for which candidates are clearly ineligible.
- history of recommending accommodations that are not availed of.
- recommending accommodations that are not supported by the candidate's level of need e.g.

recommending an individual reader when reading assistance or the use of an exam reading pen is more appropriate or recommending access to a scribe when the use of a word processor or recording device is warranted.

- submitting incomplete applications.
- prevalence of RACE applications including by comparison with previous years, school size and category.
- prevalence of Leaving Certificate applications for new accommodations.
- non-compliance with closing dates.
- prevalence of late applications.
- inappropriate use of emergency applications.
- prevalence of complex/difficult cases referred to SEC.
- prevalence of individual special centres being recommended.
- prevalence of rest breaks.
- random selection.

The revised arrangements for dealing with RACE applications now involve a largely devolved model of decision making, in that the SEC will for the most part be approving the accommodations recommended by the school at both Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate. This means that schools now have a more critical role than heretofore in ensuring that the scheme operates fairly and with integrity. Both SEC and NEPS personnel are involved in the quality assurance process and may visit the school to meet personnel as part of this process.

Quality Assurance checks in 2022 led to additional work for the schools involved and ultimately contributed to delays for the school in the processing of their applications and the issuing of decisions. Some of these quality assurance checks could have been avoided had the schools engaged in the application process as set out in the instructions.

### **Retention of Evidence for Quality Assurance Purposes**

Schools must maintain records of the evidence used to assess eligibility for RACE and have it available for inspection by SEC or NEPS as part of the quality assurance programme. The evidence of eligibility should be retained until the student has completed their Leaving Certificate.

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## 8. APPLICATION PROCESS

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There are separate sets of application forms for the Leaving Certificate and the Junior Cycle and different timelines apply. Within each form you will be asked to indicate the ground(s) on which the application is being made.

The SEC will strictly adhere to deadlines and will not accept applications on the regular applications forms which are received after the closing date. There is a separate process for dealing with late applications and again the closing date for receipt of the late application forms will be strictly adhered to. Adherence to closing dates will assist schools and the SEC in managing the scheme and in providing timely access, if necessary, to the Independent Appeals Committee and to the Offices of the Ombudsman or Ombudsman for Children.

**All forms should be submitted in full by post.** Applications will **not** be accepted by e-mail or fax.

Schools should take care to ensure that they complete the entire application form in full (i.e. not just use the pages of the form they consider relevant).

Incomplete or improperly completed application forms will be returned to the school. These forms must then be completed and returned to the SEC within 2 weeks for processing. If at this stage the application is still incomplete it will be returned to the school to make a new application. If the application deadline has passed then no application can be accepted.

All forms must be signed as required. The forms require the original signatures of all parties, including that of the principal. Forms bearing signature stamps will be returned as these are not valid signatures.

Applications/recommendations should not be made for candidates who are clearly ineligible for accommodations – in the event that you are unsure about a candidate's eligibility for any accommodation follow the process described in Section 8.3.

## 2023 Reasonable Accommodations Key Dates

	<b>AVAILABLE FROM</b>	<b>CLOSING DATE</b>	<b>DECISION TIMEFRAME</b>
Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied 2023 – Reactivation Form and New Accommodations Form	Early October 2022	11 November 2022	Mid-February 2023
Leaving Certificate/ Leaving Certificate Applied 2023 Late Application Form	February 2023	7 April 2023	May 2023
Junior Cycle 2023 – Standard Application Form	Mid October 2022	13 January 2023	April 2023
Junior Cycle 2023 – Late Application Form	February 2023	7 April 2023	May 2023
Emergency Application Form - LC and JC	May 2023	June 2023	June 2023

### 8.1 Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied

There are four Leaving Certificate RACE forms:

1. RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate Reactivation Form (Form RA1) – Use this form to apply to have accommodations carried over from Junior Cycle.
2. RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate New Accommodations Form (Form RA2) – Use this form to apply on behalf of candidates who:
  - a. Did not have any accommodations at Junior Cycle or
  - b. Had different accommodations at Junior Cycle or
  - c. Are seeking additional accommodations to those approved at Junior Cycle.
3. RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate Late Application Form (Form RA3) – Use this form to make a late application for a Leaving Certificate candidate.
4. RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate Emergency Application Form (Form RA4) – Use this form for emergencies such as broken limbs; hospitalisation, etc.

#### 8.1.1 Leaving Certificate Application for Accommodations to be Reactivated

The standard **RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate Reactivation Form (Form RA1)** should be used when recommending to the SEC that the accommodations provided to the candidate at Junior Cycle be provided again on the basis that they continue to be required at Leaving Certificate.

Schools applying to reactivate accommodations granted at Junior Cycle for Leaving Certificate should note the following:

1. It is expected that a candidate granted access to a scribe at Junior Cycle should, following interventions at school during senior cycle, have become sufficiently proficient in the use of a word processor or recording device to enable them to make use of one of these accommodations at the Leaving Certificate examinations. In such circumstances it is acceptable to use this form to apply for a candidate, who had a scribe at Junior Cycle, to have a word processor or recording device at Leaving Certificate.
2. In the event that a candidate's difficulty with reading has improved due to learning support interventions, the reactivation of the reading accommodation should be reading assistance rather than an individual reader.
3. A candidate who had an individual special centre at Junior Cycle and who continues to require a special centre will be approved for a shared special centre at Leaving Certificate.
4. Under no circumstances should an accommodation approved at Junior Cycle under the Emergency Application process be reactivated for Leaving Certificate.

Before making any application, you should assess eligibility in line with the general principles set out in Section 6. It is not necessary to undertake any further testing if recommending that supports be reactivated. In the case of reactivation applications, the SEC consider the school authority's judgement as the appropriate evidence of need. You are required to confirm on the form that the need that led to the granting of supports still persists.

Subject to quality assurance, the SEC will, in general, approve all of the accommodations that were in place for Junior Cycle **with the exception of 1 to 4 listed above**. Special centres will be dealt with as described in Section 5.5. You should inform candidates that the approval of special examination centres rests with the SEC.

Under no circumstances will the SEC accept any Leaving Certificate Reactivation Forms after the published closing date. You may submit these applications again using the late application process. However, you should **take care to ensure that the late application process does not become the default application process** in your school.

### **8.1.2 Leaving Certificate Application for New/Different Accommodations**

The SEC will accept new applications from schools on behalf of candidates who did not have accommodations at Junior Cycle or where additional or different accommodations from those approved at Junior Cycle are being sought.

Use the **RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate New Accommodations Form (Form RA2)** for this type of application. This application form is similar to the standard application form, but additional information is requested explaining why the need for accommodations was not manifest when the candidate sat their Junior Cycle. You should assess eligibility in line with the general principles set out in Section 6 and the specific criteria in Section 9.

You are required to retain all of the evidence used to assess eligibility (test results; samples used to calculate error rates; medical and other reports; details of engagement with professionals e.g. NEPS; the VTS; etc.). The evidence used in the assessment process may be requested for inspection by the SEC at any stage during or following the application process as part of quality assuring the RACE scheme.

Given the nature of learning support in schools, the SEC would expect to receive, if any, only a very small number of this type of application from any school in any year. These applications will be monitored as part of overall quality assurance and in the event that the number of new applications received from a particular school is higher than anticipated or that the SEC is not satisfied with the rationale provided by the school for the new application, then the SEC will pause the processing of applications from that school pending further engagement with the school authority.

Under no circumstances will the SEC accept Leaving Certificate New Accommodation Forms after the published closing date. You may submit these applications again using the late application process. However, the late application process must not become the default application process in your school.

### **8.1.3 Leaving Certificate Late Application – available from February 2023**

You will need to complete a **RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate Late Application Form (Form RA3)**, which will be available on our website from February 2023, in respect of any candidate for whom an application is being made after the relevant closing date. There is also a closing date for the late application process which will be strictly applied. The late application process requires the school to explain why the application is being made late.

As stated above, schools must ensure that the late application process does not become the default application process in the school. As part of overall quality assurance, the SEC will monitor receipt of applications in line with the published closing dates and will follow up with any schools with higher than expected numbers of late applications. Quality assurance interventions with schools during the application process may lead to delays in the approval timelines for that school and may lead to refusal of the accommodations sought.

**Leaving Certificate Late Application Forms will not be processed until all fully completed Leaving Certificate Reactivation forms and Leaving Certificate New Accommodation Forms have been processed.**

**The closing date for late applications is also the latest date by which forms returned to schools for proper completion will be accepted by the SEC.**

After the late application closing date, the only applications that will be accepted are those relating to true emergencies, i.e. injuries or similar emergencies that have occurred after the late application closing date (e.g. broken bone, hospitalisation or other medical emergency).

### **8.1.4 Leaving Certificate Emergencies – available from May 2023**

The **RACE Scheme Leaving Certificate Emergency Application Form (Form RA4)** should be used to apply for RACE in the case of true emergencies which occur in the lead-up to the examinations after the closing date for receipt of late applications. This form will seek details of the circumstances leading to the application. The SEC will refuse any applications that it deems not to be genuine emergencies. Accommodations approved under this process cannot be reactivated in the case of repeat Leaving Certificate candidates.

**Leaving Certificate Emergency Application Forms will not be processed until all fully completed Leaving Certificate Reactivation forms, Leaving Certificate New Accommodation Forms and Leaving Certificate Late application forms have been processed.**

The application forms will be available on our website in May 2023. Because of the timescale involved Emergency Applications will not have access to the Independent Appeals Committee.

Recognising that emergency situations occur leading up to and over the course of the written examinations in June, schools are advised to contact the Reasonable Accommodations section of the SEC by phone as soon as possible.

## **8.2 Junior Cycle**

In line with the changes to the scheme from 2017, applications approved for Junior Cycle will be capable of being reactivated at Leaving Certificate in the future, subject to confirmation by the school authority of an identified and continuing need. Therefore, the recommendations made by schools at Junior Cycle are extremely important. **You must be absolutely sure that each candidate is eligible for RACE and that the accommodations being recommended are required in order for that candidate to access the examinations.** You must assess eligibility in line with the general principles set out in Section 6 and the specific criteria in Section 9 of these Instructions. You are required to gather and retain appropriate evidence of need, including results of testing, as required, to ensure that the candidate is eligible for RACE. Such evidence must be available to the SEC when required under the quality assurance programme.

There are three Junior Cycle RACE forms:

1. RACE Scheme Junior Cycle Application Form (Form RA5) – Use this form for standard applications for Junior Cycle examination accommodations
2. RACE Scheme Junior Cycle Late Application Form (Form RA6) – Use this form for any late applications
3. RACE Scheme Junior Cycle Emergency Application Form (Form RA7) – Use this form for emergencies such as broken limbs; hospitalisation, etc.

### **8.2.1 Junior Cycle Application Form**

You should use the standard **RACE Scheme Junior Cycle Application (Form RA5)** to recommend to the SEC the accommodations to be provided at Junior Cycle. All of the evidence used to assess eligibility (test results; samples used to calculate error rates; medical and other reports; details of engagement with professionals e.g. NEPS, VTS, etc.) must be retained. The evidence used in the assessment process may be requested for inspection by



the SEC at any stage during or following the application process as part of quality assuring the RACE scheme. In Section 2 of the application form, you should include details of the learning supports interventions that have been used to address the student's learning difficulties (e.g. SNIP, paired reading etc.).

Special centres will be dealt with as described in Section 5.5 of the instructions. The default arrangement for a candidate who needs to be accommodated in a special centre will be to assign them to a shared special centre. Individual special centres will only be approved in specific circumstances, as outlined in Section 5.5. You should inform candidates that the approval of special examination centres rests with the SEC.

Under no circumstances will the SEC accept Junior Cycle application forms after the published closing date. You may submit these applications again using the late application process. However, you should take care to ensure that the late application process does not become the default application process in your school.

### **8.2.2 Junior Cycle Late Application – available from February 2023.**

You will need to complete a **RACE Scheme Junior Cycle Late Application Form (Form RA6)**, which will be available on our website from February 2023, in respect of any candidate for whom an application is being made after the relevant closing date. There is also a closing date for the late application process which will be strictly applied. The late application process requires the school to explain why the application is being made late.

As stated above, schools must ensure that the late application process does not become the default application process in the school. As part of overall quality assurance, the SEC will monitor receipt of applications in line with the published closing date and will follow up with any schools with higher than expected numbers of late applications. Quality assurance interventions with schools during the application process may lead to delays in the approval timelines for that school and may lead to refusal of the accommodations sought.

Junior Cycle Late Application Forms will not be processed until all fully completed Junior Cycle Application Forms have been processed.

The closing date for late applications is also the latest date by which incomplete forms returned to schools for proper completion will be accepted by the SEC.

After the late application closing date, the only applications that will be accepted are for those relating to true emergencies i.e. injuries or similar emergencies that have occurred after the late application closing date (e.g. broken bone, hospitalisation or other medical emergency).

### **8.2.3 Junior Cycle Emergencies – available May 2023**

The **RACE Scheme Junior Cycle Emergency Application Form** should be used to apply for RACE in the case of true emergencies which occur in the lead-up to the examinations after the closing date for receipt of late applications. The form will seek details of the circumstances leading to the application. The SEC will refuse any applications that it deems not to be genuine

emergencies. Accommodations approved under this process cannot be reactivated for the Leaving Certificate examination.

Junior Cycle Emergency Application Forms will not be processed until all fully completed Junior Cycle Application Forms and all Junior Cycle Late application forms have been processed.

The application forms will be available on our website in May 2023. Because of the timescale involved Emergency applications will not have access to the Independent Appeals Committee.

Recognising that emergency situations occur leading up to and over the course of the written examinations in June, schools are advised to contact the Reasonable Accommodations section of the SEC by phone as soon as an incident occurs.

### **8.3 Complex Cases and difficult decisions - advise and support**

Schools will be provided with advice and support in dealing with difficult decisions in complex cases. This will be a multi-stage process as follows:

- a) If there is any uncertainty about the eligibility of any candidate, the school, in the first instance, should seek advice from, depending on the nature of the candidate's special needs, the NEPS psychologist and/or the VTS staff assigned to your school.
- b) If, following this consultation, there is still uncertainty about the eligibility of a candidate, the school can contact the SEC for advice. For example, if you consider that the candidate is ineligible but a parent or candidate is adamant that you make the application anyway, you can contact the SEC to discuss the application.
- c) Cases referred to the SEC through this process may be reviewed by NEPS, in the case of applications on the grounds of a learning difficulty, or the VTS, in the case of applications on the grounds of a visual or hearing difficulty, for decision.
- d) Following consultation, you should either proceed with an application or inform the parent or candidate concerned that the SEC has advised that the candidate is not eligible and that an application is not advised.
- e) If the school or parent/guardian/candidate remain in disagreement as to eligibility following the advice received from the SEC, the school should contact the SEC for a **Complex Case Referral Form**. They will then, with parental/candidate consent, complete this form and return it, along with all original testing carried out to determine eligibility and any other relevant documentation, to the SEC who will examine the file and make a decision.
- f) Decisions made through this process will be open to appeal to an Independent Appeals Committee (IAC). In order to facilitate access to the IAC, all fully completed complex case referral forms along with the original testing **must be** received **by 07 April 2023** which is the closing date for receipt of late applications.
- g) Following the completion of an appeal, any candidate, parent/guardian who considers that their case has not been processed correctly, can make a complaint to the Ombudsman (if they are over 18) or to the Ombudsman for Children (if they are under 18).

- h) It is expected that the referral of cases by schools to the SEC for decision in this manner will be exceptional matters. As part of overall quality assurance, the SEC will monitor receipt of Complex Case referrals and will follow up with any schools with higher than expected numbers referred for decision. Quality assurance interventions with schools during the process may lead to delays in the approval timelines for that school and may lead to refusal of the accommodations sought.

#### **8.4 Incomplete/Incorrect Applications.**

Incomplete or incorrectly completed application forms submitted will be returned to schools for completion or correction as appropriate. In such cases, the SEC will consider that no application has been made on behalf of the candidate until such time as the corrected/completed application form is returned. The very latest date that the SEC will accept such forms is TBC

If the incomplete or incorrect application form appears to be an application on behalf of a candidate who is clearly ineligible (e.g. includes test scores outside of the range for eligibility), then the SEC will formally advise the school that they should not be making the application.

**N.B. Schools must not make recommendations on behalf of ineligible candidates.**

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## 9. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR SPECIFIC ACCOMMODATIONS

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### **Explanatory Notes on Statements and Certificates**

Certain accommodations provided under the RACE Scheme involve a waiver or exemption from the assessment of a core element and will give rise to an explanatory note (annotation), indicating the nature of the adjustment, on the provisional statements of results and on the final examination certificates. The accommodations that give rise to an explanatory note, and the wording of the explanatory note, are identified throughout the following section. The practice of annotating certificates and statements allows a balance to be struck between the need to enable students with disabilities to access the examinations by being exempted from assessment in core elements of a subject, while at the same time maintaining the integrity of the overall system, ensuring transparency for end users and fairness to other candidates.

Before making any application, you should assess eligibility in line with the general principles set out in Section 6.

### **Evidence of Need.**

Evidence of need is an integral component of the RACE scheme. It is expected that students on whose behalf an application for a reasonable accommodation is being made have **ongoing issues over time** and have had this evidence of need both identified by the school **and** the appropriate interventions put in place throughout their schooling. **A history of such information should be recorded on the student's record of learning support/Student Support File.** RACE accommodations should be part of an ongoing need that the candidate has, something that impacts on their daily learning in school as well as in the examinations. Some schools have failed to adequately address the requirement to provide evidence of need in the application forms. They are not providing sufficient, or indeed any, information about

the continuum of learning support being provided to the candidate to support their learning in school.

Evidence of their eligibility, including details of their history of support and intervention throughout their schooling must be retained in the school. It may be sought by the SEC as part of the quality assurance of the school's RACE applications.

### **9.1 Learning Difficulty Grounds**

For candidates with learning difficulties in reading, spelling and/or writing (e.g. dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, general learning difficulty, etc.)

There is no longer any need to undertake tests of general cognitive ability for the purposes of the RACE scheme as you are no longer required to distinguish between specific and general learning difficulties.

The candidate's eligibility for a particular accommodation continues to be dependent upon meeting specified criteria as detailed below.

Schools should ensure that candidates and parents/guardians are aware that a psychological report is **not** required for the RACE application process.

Schools should note particularly that when a professional report recommends that a particular accommodation is to be provided they are to treat it as a recommendation to the school on behalf of the candidate. Such recommendations do not automatically confer eligibility for supports and candidates must meet all eligibility criteria as set out in these instructions before any accommodation can be approved. Before submitting any recommendation to the SEC that such an accommodation be granted, the school authority must be satisfied that the candidate meets all of the eligibility criteria as set out in this section.

All of the required testing can be carried out in the school and the expectation is that any testing required to support an application for RACE will be carried out in the school.

The results from any attainment tests required (i.e. standardised tests in reading; spelling; writing speed) must be obtained **within the 12 months** prior to the date of application.

In the absence of school-conducted attainment tests, you may use results from psychological reports, obtained within 12 months of the date of application, which are already available to you.

The required counts of error rates in reading and spelling can only be obtained from assessments carried out by the school. The error rate counts cannot be accepted from other sources (i.e. psychological or other professional reports) under any circumstances.

In all cases, you should bear in mind that it is rarely in a candidate's best interest to recommend an accommodation to which they are not accustomed because it does not reflect the candidate's normal way of working in school. However, candidates cannot choose not to read or write – they must meet all criteria for accommodations to be granted.

You must maintain records of all of the evidence used to assess eligibility for RACE accommodations until the candidates have completed their Leaving Certificate. This evidence must be available to the SEC and NEPS, during and following the RACE application process, for quality assurance purposes.

Great care should be taken to ensure that all tests are carried out correctly, with a particular emphasis placed on the following:

- Use of publisher's record sheets
- Correct calculation of chronological age
- Adherence to test administration instructions (including basal and ceiling points)
- Meticulous attention to the calculation of raw scores, and subsequent conversion to standard scores

Candidates for an Accommodation should only be tested once, following the establishment of need and a history of intervention. **Results from retests will not be accepted unless there is clear evidence that an error was made by the test administrator in conducting the tests or calculating their results.** In such cases a new application must be made.

### **Tests of Literacy Related Skills**

The tests that are accepted by the SEC for the purpose of RACE are taken from the list of assessment instruments, including ability and achievement tests and web-based resources that are approved for use in Guidance and/or SEN contexts in post primary schools, which is issued annually by the Department of Education and governed by Circular Letter 0067/2020. The selection of these particular tests has been determined in conjunction with NEPS and, as outlined in the circular, schools should ensure that the versions in use are the most up-to-date and appropriate for administering to the specific student cohort.

There is no longer any need to undertake tests of general cognitive ability for the purposes of the RACE scheme as there is no requirement to distinguish between specific and general learning difficulties.

These tests below may be used by teachers to establish a candidate's standard score on reading or spelling and writing speed and **must be administered on an individual basis.** It should be noted that whilst some of these tests can be administered at a group or individual level, **for the purpose of RACE they will only be accepted following administration on an individual basis.**

**1.** The following tests should be used by teachers to establish a candidate's standard score in **reading** and must be administered individually. **Any subtest selected from the following tests must relate to single word reading and not reading fluency/accuracy/comprehension.**

- Wide Range Achievement Test 5 (WRAT-5) **or**
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test III (WIAT-III) **or**
- Woodcock Reading Mastery Test 3rd Edition **or**

- Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement 2014 **or**
- Diagnostic Reading Analysis (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (DRA 3) **or**
- Adult Reading Test 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (ART 2)

**2.** The following tests should be used by teachers to establish a candidate's standard score in **spelling** and must be administered individually:

- Wide Range Achievement Test 5 (WRAT-5) **or**
- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test III (WIAT-III) **or**
- Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement **or**
- SPaRCS Test

**3.** The following standardised tests should be used, where applicable, by schools to explore a candidate's **Writing Speed**. They must be administered individually to establish the writing speed in words per minute. **(Please note, for the purpose of RACE, only administration of the Free Writing component is required in order to achieve a word per minute score)**

- Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting 2007 for Age Range 9 to 16:11 (www.pearsonclinical.co.uk)
- Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting 2011 for Age Range 17 to 25 (www.pearsonclinical.co.uk)

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Further information and support on testing can be accessed through the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) or The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) support services.

This is not an exhaustive list. Please refer to Circular Letter **0067/2020** for additional suitable tests.

### **9.1.1 Access to Reading Assistant/Exam Reading Pen/Individual Reader**

Three accommodations are available to candidates with reading difficulties:

- 1.** A reading assistant, who, on request, read occasional words or phrases from the examination paper to the candidate without elaboration or explanation. The vast majority of candidate's needs will be met through the provision of reading assistance, delivered by a reader shared in a small examination centre between 2-4 candidates.
- 2.** An exam reading pen which can be used by the candidate to scan the examination paper. It converts the text to speech which candidates can listen to using ear-phones. Candidates may have reading assistance for any subject that is not compatible with an exam reading pen.
- 3.** An individual reader, who, on request, will read the entire or any part of the examination paper to the candidates without elaboration or explanation. On the basis that a shared reader will be appropriate to the needs of most candidate's individual readers should be recommended on an exceptional basis only based on the educational needs of candidates

Decisions in relation to the type of reading assistance which will be provided to candidates should be guided by the candidate's level of difficulty with reading and their normal way of working in the school, including in examinations house tests. Best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their schooling to work independently. The SEC will engage with schools in this regard.

Readers can only read the questions as presented and are precluded from changing the meaning, interpreting, adding any additional information, providing an explanation as to what the questions require of the candidate or otherwise providing assistance to the candidate. In the subjects Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, a reader is **not** allowed to read the parts of the paper that are in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

Candidates approved for an examination reading pen may use the pen to scan text which is then converted to speech which can be listened to using ear-phones. The reading pen may not have functionality enabled which allows words to be explained or translated. In the subjects Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, the reading pen may not be used to read the parts of the paper that are in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

Applications will be considered where it can be established that a candidate has a need for a reading assistant/exam reading pen/individual reader in order to access the examination papers, because:

- a) The candidate has been identified as having difficulties with reading accuracy over time;
- b) The level of word-reading attainment displayed by the candidate, their rate of reading and/or their ability to read examination papers accurately is such that they would be significantly *impaired in reading the questions*;
- c) These difficulties are persistent despite the candidate having had access to a continuum of support and to learning opportunities that are effective and appropriate for most other candidates.

In practice, these general conditions are implemented by means of the following specific eligibility criteria:

<b>READING ASSISTANCE/EXAM READING PEN /INDIVIDUAL READER</b>	
<i>Appropriate evidence of the candidate's level of need as detailed in section 2 of the application form</i>	
<b>AND</b>	
<i>A standard score of 85 or less on a recommended test of word reading (i.e. reading accuracy <u>not</u> comprehension)</i>	
<b>AND EITHER</b>	
<i>A reading accuracy error rate of 7% or more on examination papers at the appropriate level (See below for guidance)</i>	<i>A reading speed of 89 words or less per minute on examination papers at the appropriate level (See below for guidance)</i>

When you are listening to a candidate read for the purpose of testing them against the above criteria, the following procedure should be used:

- The candidate should read aloud passages from two previous examination papers (a minimum of 450 words and a maximum of 550 words in total between both samples).
- Under no circumstances should a candidate read more than 550 words.
- If speed of reading is the issue for a candidate, the duration of test of the reading speed should not exceed 10 minutes.
- In all tests, candidates should read at their normal speed.
- The papers to be read should be from recent examinations and should be from a variety of subjects.
- In English medium schools\*, one of the samples must be in the subject English and the other sample should be in a subject other than a language subject.
- Such passage(s) should be unfamiliar to the candidate.
- Such passages should be at the appropriate level (i.e. if the candidate is entering for ordinary level English then the paper should be ordinary level; if entering for higher level Biology then read from a higher level paper, etc.).
- Reading accuracy error rates and reading speed can only be calculated by the school and not extracted from professional reports.

\*See note 9.1.5 below re Irish medium schools

When making an application for any reading accommodation , i.e. (reading assistant/exam reading pen/individual reader) please ensure that you include **results obtained in all three areas on the application form that relates to the specific eligibility criteria**, i.e. standard score, error rates and rate of reading.”.

You must retain all of the details of the reading test conducted with the candidate, including the text with the count of errors, for future quality assurance purposes. When making a recommendation for a reading accommodation, it should be based on evidence of need i.e. does the candidate require reading assistance or an individual reader or, is a reading pen a more appropriate support.

Access to a reading accommodation precludes the assessment of reading in any language subject. Accordingly, the grades obtained in any language subject taken by the candidate will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the reading element”*

When making an application for an individual reader schools should consider whether the candidate requires an individual reader for all subjects e.g. an individual reader may be



required in subjects such as English with a large volume of text while reading assistance may suffice for subjects such as Maths with a lower volume of text.

### **Special Centres for Reading Accommodations.**

- A candidate who is given access to a reading assistant will be placed in a shared examination centre that can have between 2 and 4 candidates sharing that reading assistant.
- A candidate granted the use of an exam reading pen will be placed in a shared examination centre that can have between 2 and 4 candidates. In the event of a pen malfunction, or if required, the superintendent may act as a reading assistant.
- A candidate who is given access to an individual reader will be placed in an individual examination centre.

### **9.1.2 Waiver from the assessment of Spelling, Punctuation and certain elements of Grammar in Language Subjects**

Applications will be considered where it can be established that a candidate has a need for a **waiver from the assessment of spelling, punctuation and certain elements of grammar in language subjects** because:

- a) The level of spelling attainment displayed by the candidate and their ability to write accurately under examination conditions is such that it would significantly affect the readability of their written work;
- b) The candidate has been identified as having difficulties with spelling, grammar and punctuation over time;
- c) These difficulties are persistent despite the candidate having had access to a continuum of support and to learning opportunities that are effective and appropriate for most other candidates.

The waiver applies specifically to language subjects only. It is not necessary in subjects such as History, Geography, and Biology, etc. although a candidate's written work in such subjects may well provide useful evidence of the level of difficulty experienced. In the case of the language subjects in the Leaving Certificate Applied (English & Communication, Gaeilge Chumarsáideach, French, German, Spanish and Italian) spelling, grammar and punctuation is not under assessment. **This means that schools must not make an application for this accommodation for Leaving Certificate Applied candidates.**

In practice, these general conditions are implemented by means of the following specific eligibility criteria:

**WAIVER FROM THE ASSESSMENT OF SPELLING, PUNCTUATION AND CERTAIN  
ELEMENTS of GRAMMAR IN LANGUAGE SUBJECTS**

Appropriate evidence of the candidate's level of need as detailed in section 2 of the  
application form

**AND**

*A standard score of **85 or less** on an approved test of spelling*

**AND**

*Spelling/grammar/punctuation error rate of **8% or more** in scripts written in the  
language of the school under examination conditions*

*(See below ad Appendix C for  
additional guidance)*

When you are assessing error rates in written scripts, the following practice should be adhered to:

- A minimum of two pieces of sample work must be used to assess eligibility.
- There must be a minimum of 500 words between the samples.
- The sample work must be from **original** scripts completed under examination conditions i.e. summer, Christmas or class tests but not work completed at home. **Photocopies will not be accepted.**
- The samples must be essays, letters or other pieces of continuous script from a text rich examination.
- In English medium schools both of the samples should be in English language subjects.

You must retain all of the evidence used when determining eligibility, including the work produced by the candidate and the counts of errors in that work.

Where a waiver from the assessment of spelling, punctuation and certain elements of grammar in language subjects is granted, the grades obtained by the candidate in any language subject taken will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements” (This will apply in the case of English)*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements” (This will apply in the case of all other language subjects)*

### **9.1.3 Use of a Word Processor or Recording Device – Learning Difficulty**

Applications will be considered where it can be established that a candidate has a need for the use of a word processor or a recording device because:

- a) The candidate has been identified as having difficulties with spelling, grammar and punctuation over time;
- b) The level of spelling attainment displayed by the candidate and his or her ability to write accurately and/or at a reasonable speed under examination conditions is such that the candidate would be significantly impaired in writing the answers or such that his or her written work would be effectively illegible and that an examiner would have difficulty in deciphering;
- c) These difficulties are persistent despite the candidate having had access to a continuum of support and to learning opportunities that are effective and appropriate for most other candidates.

Candidates who have been granted the use of assistive technology by the Department of Education must meet all the relevant criteria in the same way as all other candidates. They do not have an automatic right to use same in examinations.

Two separate eligibility categories exist for this accommodation:

- 1) Quality of Written Work
- 2) Speed of Writing

To be eligible, candidates need only fall into one category or the other.

### 1) Quality of Written Work

In the case of a candidate whose written work is **effectively indecipherable** due to **the frequency of spelling, grammar and punctuation errors**, the following criteria must be met:

**WORD PROCESSOR/RECORDING DEVICE – QUALITY OF WRITTEN WORK**

Appropriate evidence of the candidate’s level of need as detailed in section 2 of the application form

**AND**

*A standard score of **85 or less** on an approved test of spelling*

**AND**

*Spelling/grammar/punctuation error rate of **20% or more** in scripts written in the language of the school under examination conditions*

*(See below and Appendix C for additional guidance)*

### 2) Speed of Writing

In the case of a candidate whose ability to answer examination questions in writing is significantly impaired due to the **speed of his or her writing**, coupled with spelling, grammar and punctuation difficulties, the following criteria must be met:

**WORD PROCESSOR/RECORDING DEVICE – SPEED OF WRITING**

Appropriate evidence of the candidate’s level of need as detailed in section 2 of the application form

**AND**

*A standard score of **85 or less** on an approved test of spelling*

**AND**

*Spelling/grammar/punctuation error rate of **8% or more** in scripts written in the language of the school under examination conditions*

*(See below and Appendix C for additional guidance)*

**AND**

*Speed of writing of less than 12 words per minute*

When you are assessing error rates in written scripts, the following practice should be adhered to:

- A minimum of two pieces of sample work must be used to assess eligibility.
- There must be a minimum of 500 words between the samples.
- The sample work must be from **original** scripts completed under examination conditions i.e. Summer, Christmas or class tests but not work completed at home. **Photocopies will not be accepted.**
- The samples must be essays, letters or other pieces of continuous script from a text rich examination.
- In English medium schools both of the samples should be in English language subjects.
- In Irish medium schools one of the samples, at a minimum, should be in an Irish language subject.

You must retain all of the evidence used when determining eligibility, including the work produced by the candidate and the counts of errors in that work.

The use of a word processor or a recording device, on grounds of learning difficulty, will preclude the assessment of spelling, written punctuation and grammatical elements in any language subjects. Accordingly, the grades obtained by the candidate in any language subject will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements” (This will apply in the case of English)*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements” (This will apply in the case of all other language subjects)*

Candidates that have been granted the use of a word processor to complete their examinations and are submitting a word-processed script, must follow the instructions for the setting up, saving and getting a script ready for return at the end of the examinations-copies of these instructions are at Appendix D. It is also essential that schools refer to the booklet '*Implementing Access Arrangements during the Written Examinations*', which issues in May each year, for more details in relation to the procedures involved in the use of a word processor in the certificate examinations.

In the subjects Leaving Certificate Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, a word processor or recording device can be used only for questions to be answered in English or Irish and **NOT** for questions to be answered in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

Schools should note that the SEC does not meet the costs associated with purchase of assistive technology or removable USBs, SD cards, CD-Rs, hard drives, etc. for candidates.

#### **9.1.4 Access to a Scribe**

There are three writing accommodations available under the RACE scheme:

1. Word processor
2. Recording device
3. Scribe

Candidates **may not choose to have a scribe**, they must be eligible. The SEC expects that candidates approved for a writing accommodation will use either a word processor or a recording device. There is a higher threshold of eligibility for access to a scribe.

To be eligible for a scribe a candidate must firstly qualify for a writing accommodation by reference to the criteria. There must also be an impediment to the candidate making use of either the word processor or the recording device. The SEC must be satisfied that this impediment is valid. The default alternative for any candidate that is unable to make use of a word processor in examination conditions is to use a recording device.

The reason for this distinction is because examination accommodations should reflect, as far as is possible, those used by the candidate in day to day schooling to overcome a difficulty, and best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their schooling to work independently. Candidates using word processors are working independently, while those relying on a scribe are not. Since relying on a scribe throughout one's learning process is rare and would be considered a support of last resort when supports to work independently are not feasible, the same applies in an examination setting. Schools will also need to show that they have tried to migrate students from scribes to assistive technology

In recommending access to a scribe, in addition to confirming that the candidate meets the eligibility criteria for either a word processor or a recording device, you will need to confirm that he or she also has a physical difficulty, such as motor difficulties and/or a speech impediment, which renders the other writing accommodations unsuitable. It may also be the case that, in exceptional circumstances, the use of a word processor has not proved feasible for the candidate in a specific subject, in which case it may be appropriate for the candidate

to write themselves or the school can recommend the use of a scribe for this subject and the use of a word processor in the remaining subjects. In all cases, you should bear in mind that it is rarely in a candidate's best interests to recommend an accommodation that the candidate is not used to — because it does not reflect his or her normal way of working in school. Applications will be considered where it can be established that a candidate has a need for the use of a scribe because:

**SCRIBE – WORD PROCESSOR/RECORDING DEVICE NOT SUITABLE DUE TO PHYSICAL OR SPEECH DIFFICULTIES**

*The candidate already meets the eligibility criteria for access to the use of a word processor or recording device as set out at Section 9.1.3 Category 1 or 2*

**AND**

*The candidate's physical and speech difficulties render the use of a recording device or word processor unsuitable*

OR

**SCRIBE – WORD PROCESSOR/RECORDING DEVICE NOT SUITABLE IN CERTAIN SUBJECTS**

*The candidate already meets the eligibility criteria for access to the use of a word processor or recording device as set out at Section 9.1.3 Category 1 or 2*

**AND**

*The use of the device in question is not possible or is particularly difficult in the case of the specific examination (e.g. Mathematics)*

Candidates approved for this accommodation should be aware that the scribe can only write the answers dictated by the candidate and are precluded from changing the meaning, interpreting, adding any additional information or otherwise providing assistance to the candidate. Scribes must not give any advice, information or assistance to candidates in relation to the content of the examination papers, or the subject of the examination.

Access to a scribe will preclude the assessment of spelling, written punctuation and grammatical elements in any language subjects. Accordingly, the grades obtained by the candidate in any language subject taken will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements” (This will apply in the case of English)*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements” (This will apply in the case of all other language subjects)*

### **Limitations on Using a Scribe in Certain Subjects**

In the Leaving Certificate subjects Technology, Engineering, Construction Studies, Art - History and Appreciation; in the Leaving Certificate Applied subjects Graphics and Construction Studies, Technology, Engineering, Craft and Design and in the Junior Cycle subjects Wood Technology, Applied Technology and Engineering, candidates are only allowed to use the scribe for questions or parts of questions which require a written response.

The scribe cannot under any circumstances produce sketches and/or drawings in any question in these examinations. Labelling and annotations are considered to be inherent parts of these diagrams and must also be the candidate’s own unaided work.

A scribe is not permitted in the subjects Leaving Certificate Design and Communications Graphics (DCG) or Junior Cycle Graphics.

In the subjects Leaving Certificate Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, a scribe can be used only for questions to be answered in English or Irish and **not** for questions to be answered in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

There may be other subject specific limitations to the use of a scribe and these will be detailed in the letter of approval.

### **9.1.5 Note for Gaelcholáistí and Gaelscoileanna**

#### **Candidates sitting their examinations through the medium of Irish**

The SEC is aware that, currently, there are no age appropriate, suitably standardised tests available in Irish.

In making applications for reasonable accommodations for candidates who will be taking their examinations through the medium of Irish please note that there are alternative criteria and this can be obtained on request from the SEC

Reasonable accommodations granted using these alternative criteria will be closely monitored to ensure it is only applied where the examinations are taken through the medium of Irish.

If the school is in any doubt about a candidate taking their examinations through the medium of Irish they should make their application for RACE with reference to the criteria set out for candidates answering through English

## **9.2 Hearing Difficulty Grounds**

Without making an application to the SEC, schools have discretion to arrange for hearing impaired candidates to sit near the superintendent and/or the CD player in the main examination centre. See Section 5.4 for details.

You should seek the views of the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS) before making an application for a candidate whose needs arise as a result of a hearing difficulty. Details of your engagement with the VTS should be recorded for future review along with any professional/medical reports, etc. necessary to support the application. The following accommodations may be provided to candidates with hearing difficulties, based on their level of need:

### **9.2.1 Personal Stereo in Main Centre for the Aural Examination**

During the aural examination, the candidate may be allowed to use a personal stereo player with personal induction loop in the main centre. Please note that the school must have an induction loop system in place to avail of this option.

### **9.2.2 Special Centre for the Aural Examination**

During the aural examination, the candidate is allowed to sit in a room on his/her own and have the use of headphones linked to the compact disc player.

### **9.2.3 Modified Aural Examination**

A candidate granted a modified aural examination **must not** take the listening comprehension section of the examination in June.

This examination will take the form of a face-to-face session with an examiner appointed by the SEC. The examiner reads from a script, allowing the candidate to lipread as required. The candidates answer written questions in a booklet (and are not required to speak in the target language). The marks allocated to this special examination will be equivalent to the total marks for the standard aural examination (that is, the Listening Comprehension section of the examination). This modified aural will take place in the weeks leading up to the start of the June examinations

### **9.2.4 Exemption from the Aural Examination**

#### **a) Language subjects**

If a modified aural is not appropriate due to the candidate's level of need then an exemption from the aural may be granted. The results will be calculated on the remaining components, regarding them as 100% for the purpose of calculating the grade. This exemption is only approved where it can be demonstrated that the candidate's disabilities preclude engagement with a modified aural examination (such as a disability that significantly impairs the candidate's ability to lip-read in the language of schooling). The grades obtained by the candidate, in any language subject taken, will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*"all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the aural element"*



### **a) Leaving Certificate Music**

In 2018, a policy decision was taken to include an exemption from the Listening component of the Music examination as an accommodation available to candidates with a hearing difficulty. If this exemption is granted, the results will be calculated on the remaining components regarding them as 100% for the purpose of calculating the grade. Qualifying conditions apply in the same manner as currently exists when assessing a candidate's eligibility to apply for an exemption from the aural component of language subjects. Decisions to grant such an exemption will be taken on the basis of the candidate's level of need and schools making applications for this support will be asked to engage with the Visiting Teacher Service (VTS). The grade obtained by the candidate in Leaving Certificate Music will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*"all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the aural element"*

At Junior Cycle, all elements of the specification are integrated throughout the paper so there is no defined Music aural section and therefore an exemption is not feasible.

### **9.2.5 Sign Language Interpreter**

Access to a sign language interpreter can be arranged for a hearing-impaired candidate during the written examinations. The sign language interpreter will, on request, sign to the candidate the entire, or any part, of the examination paper. The role of the sign language interpreter is to present the questions (in sign language) without changing the meaning, adding any additional information or providing an explanation as to what the questions require of the candidate. The grades obtained by the candidate, in any language subject taken, will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*"all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the reading element"*

### **9.2.6 Support Arrangement in the Oral Tests**

The candidate will be examined in the oral tests in language subjects by an examiner who has been briefed in dealing with candidates who have hearing impairments. The oral tests will take place during the period in which all other candidates will be examined.

### **9.2.7 Exemption from the Oral Tests**

If support arrangement in the oral tests are not appropriate due to the candidate's needs then an exemption from the oral may be granted in any language subjects that the candidate is taking. This exemption is only approved where it can be demonstrated that the candidate's disabilities preclude engagement with an oral examination (such as a disability that significantly impairs the candidate's ability to speak). The results in these subjects will be calculated on the components taken regarding them as 100% for assessment purposes. Accordingly, the grades obtained by the candidate in the relevant subjects will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the oral element”*

### **9.3 Visual Difficulty Grounds**

There are a range of accommodations available to candidates who are visually impaired and under the care of the Visiting Teacher Service.

For 2023 these have been extended to include:

- (a) the extension of additional time to practical examinations
- (b) access to read only PDF Leaving Certificate examination papers on a pilot basis.

Without making an application to the SEC, schools have discretion to arrange for visually impaired candidates to use low vision aids, magnifiers and reading lamps that are used normally by the candidate in the classroom. See Section 5.4 for details.

You should seek the views of the VTS before making an application for a candidate whose needs arise as a result of a visual difficulty. Details of your engagement with the VTS should be recorded for future review along with any professional/medical reports, etc., necessary to support the application. Regardless of the recommendation of the VTS, candidates must be eligible in line with all applicable criteria before an application for reasonable accommodations is submitted.

The following accommodations may be provided to candidates with visual difficulties, based on their level of need:

#### **9.3.1 Enlarged Examination Papers**

The candidate will be supplied with the enlarged versions (A4 to A3) of the standard examination papers. If requested, the candidate may be given a standard size version of the paper in addition to the enlarged version.

#### **9.3.2 Modified Version of Examination Papers**

The candidate will be supplied with a modified version of the examination papers in text (non-braille) format. On this modified version, diagrams or other images may be simplified or removed. Tasks that involve drawing diagrams are replaced with other tasks of a similar demand. The modified version is supplied in enlarged A3 size. It must be understood that the candidate **will not have access** to both the standard (unmodified) examination paper and the modified version. The grades obtained by the candidate in the relevant subjects will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except for the testing of graphical skills in the written papers”*

### **9.3.3 Braille Version of Examination Papers**

The candidate will be supplied with the modified or standard paper presented in braille format. Tactile diagrams with braille labelling will also be supplied as necessary. The candidate may have access to both the braille and text version of the modified examination papers if required. It must be understood that the candidate **will not have access** to both the standard (unmodified) examination paper and the modified version. The grades obtained by the candidate in the relevant subjects will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except for the testing of graphical skills in the written papers”*

### **9.3.4 Reading Assistant or Individual Reader — Visual Difficulty**

Applications will be considered where it can be established that a candidate, because of their visual impairment, has a need for a reading assistance in order to access the examination papers.

The reading assistant will, on request, read occasional words or phrases from the examination paper to the candidate without elaboration or explanation. The vast majority of candidate’s needs will be met through the provision of reading assistance, delivered by a reader shared in a small examination centre between 2-4 candidates.

The individual reader will, on request, will read the entire or any part of the examination paper to the candidates without elaboration or explanation. On the basis that a shared reader will be appropriate to the needs of most candidate’s individual readers should be recommended on an exceptional basis only based on the educational needs of candidates

The reading accommodations should reflect, as far as is possible, the candidate’s normal way of working and level of need, and best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their schooling to work independently.

The reading assistant/individual reader can only read the questions as presented and is precluded from changing the meaning, interpreting, adding any additional information, providing an explanation as to what the questions requires of the candidate or otherwise providing assistance to the candidate. As access to a reading assistant/individual reader precludes the assessment of reading in any language subjects, accordingly the grades obtained in any language subject taken by the candidate will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the reading element”*

### **9.3.5 Writing Accommodations — Visual Difficulty**

There are three writing accommodations available under the RACE scheme:

#### **1) Word Processor (standard, with vision aids and/or voice activated) – Visual Difficulty**

A candidate approved for the use of a word processor on visual difficulty grounds must have the spell-check and auto-correct turned off. Such candidates can still demonstrate proficiency in spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and accordingly no explanatory note will apply. In the subjects Leaving Certificate Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, a word processor can be used only for questions to be answered in English or Irish and **NOT** for questions to be answered in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

## **2) Recording Device — Visual Difficulty**

The use of a recording device precludes the assessment of spelling, written punctuation and grammatical elements in any language subject. Accordingly, the grades obtained by a candidate in language subjects taken by him/her will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements” (This will apply in the case of English)*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements” (This will apply in the case of all other language subjects)*

Schools should note that the SEC does not meet the costs associated with purchase of assistive technology or removable USBs, SD cards, CD-Rs, hard drives, etc. for candidates.

In the subjects Leaving Certificate Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, a recording device can be used only for questions to be answered in English or Irish and **NOT** for questions to be answered in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese. The reading pen may not be used to read the parts of the paper that are in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

## **9) Scribe — Visual Difficulty**

A candidate who is unable to write or effectively unable to write may be granted the assistance of a scribe where a visual difficulty combined with a speech difficulty makes the use of a word processor or recording device unsuitable. The use of a scribe may also be appropriate where a word processor or recording device would be impossible or very difficult in the case of a specific examination (e.g. Mathematics).

Access to a scribe will preclude the assessment of spelling, written punctuation and grammatical elements in language subjects. Accordingly, the grades obtained by the candidate in any language subject will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements” (This will apply in the case of English)*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements” (This will apply in the case of all other language subjects)*

## **Limitations on Using a Scribe in Certain Subjects**

In the Leaving Certificate subjects Technology, Engineering, Construction Studies, Art in the Leaving Certificate Applied subjects Graphics and Construction Studies, Technology, Engineering, Craft and Design and in the Junior Cycle subjects Wood Technology, Applied Technology and Engineering, candidates are only allowed to use the scribe for questions or parts of questions which require a written response.

The scribe cannot under any circumstances produce sketches and/or drawings in any question in these examinations. Labelling and annotations are considered to be inherent parts of these diagrams and must also be the candidate's own unaided work.

A scribe is not permitted in the subjects Leaving Certificate Design and Communications Graphics (DCG) or Junior Cycle Graphics.

In the subjects Leaving Certificate Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, a scribe can be used only for questions to be answered in English or Irish and **not** for questions to be answered in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

There may be other subject specific limitations to the use of a scribe and these will be detailed in the letter of approval.

### **9.3.6 Drawing Aids**

Use of parallel motion drawing boards and smaller drawing sheets can be recommended in the following Leaving Certificate subjects; Design and Communication Graphics, Construction Studies, and Technology and the following Junior cycle subjects; Wood Technology and Graphics.

### **9.3.7 Colour Identifier**

Candidates who are colour blind may need a colour identifier. This is most likely to be needed in the subjects Leaving Certificate Geography and Junior Cycle Geography and Science but could arise in other subjects. In questions that require candidates to be able to distinguish between colours (for example, where elements of a diagram are being identified by their colour) the candidate may ask the colour identifier such questions as "can you tell me what colour this is?", or "can you tell me which of these lines is the red one?". As this need will not arise often in the examination, the colour identifier should be the superintendent of the main centre or special centre.

### **9.3.8 Pilot Scheme for Examinations Papers in PDF format for visually impaired candidates**

On a pilot basis the SEC will provide examination papers in read only PDF format to Leaving Certificate candidates who are being provided with other RACE accommodations on the grounds of their visual impairment. Access to these pilot arrangements will be strictly limited to candidates who are visually impaired and under the care of the Visiting Teachers Service. The SEC will evaluate this pilot scheme following the 2023 examinations. When candidates apply for the RACE scheme under the visually impairment category we will provide them with the opportunity to engage with this pilot scheme.

## **9.4 Physical Difficulty Grounds**

For the purposes of the RACE Scheme, the physical category is taken to include medical, sensory and mental health difficulties, behavioural conditions as well as physical difficulties.

You should assess eligibility in line with the general principles set out in Section 6 of these Instructions. You should apply for the accommodations that best remove the impact of the difficulty on the candidate's capacity to demonstrate his or her level of achievement, while leaving the integrity of the assessment intact. It may be necessary, particularly in cases of candidates presenting with needs which were not known to the school previously, to seek medical or other professional evidence in support of the RACE application. However, this evidence should only be used to support the school's view of the required examination supports. Schools should also consider the type of learning supports and intervention that will then also be made to support the candidates' ongoing needs in the classroom. The evidence used to assess eligibility must be retained by the school for future quality assurance purposes.

Schools should note particularly that when a professional report recommends that a particular accommodation is to be provided they are to treat it as a recommendation to the school on behalf of the candidate. Such recommendations do not confer eligibility for supports and all candidates must be eligible for the recommended supports. Before submitting any recommendation to the SEC that such an accommodation be granted, the school authority must be satisfied that the candidate is eligible with reference to the guidelines laid out in this section.

The following accommodations may be provided to candidates with physical difficulties based on their level of need.

### **9.4.1 Writing Accommodations — Physical Difficulty**

Writing accommodations are available to candidates who have a need for such supports on grounds of permanent or temporary physical conditions. Generally assessing students in need of writing accommodations to access the examinations due to a physical disability is straightforward. However, this is not always the case and we have been asked to provide some further guidance to schools specifically in respect of conditions such as dyspraxia, developmental co-ordination (DCD) and dysgraphia. An added complication is that both dyspraxia and dysgraphia are also classified as learning difficulties.

In general, candidates whose needs are as a result of these conditions must meet the eligibility criteria as set out in Section 9.1.

Some students have co-attendant issues with spelling as well as issues with writing, letter formation, etc. and may qualify for reasonable accommodations in line with the learning difficulty criteria. However, it is recognised that, in the case of dyspraxia, DCD and motor dysgraphia, there may be no co-attendant issue with spelling and such students would not qualify for writing accommodations in line with the criteria.

If this is the case, applications for writing accommodations for students whose needs are as a result of dyspraxia, DCD or motor dysgraphia can be assessed on physical grounds.

### **General Guidelines on Applications for Writing Accommodations on Physical Grounds**

It is expected that students with any physical difficulty and on whose behalf an application for a writing accommodation is being made have ongoing issues with handwriting over time, have had this evidence of need identified by the school and the appropriate interventions put in place throughout their schooling. It is also expected that their ability to write accurately and/or at a reasonable speed under examinations conditions is significantly impaired (i.e. the written work would be effectively illegible and that an examiner would have significant difficulty in deciphering – see note on Poor Handwriting below). Legibility of handwritten samples completed under examination conditions and writing speeds of less than 12 word per minute (measured using the tests recommended in Section 9.1) may be used in assessing eligibility for writing accommodations on physical grounds.

Evidence of their eligibility, including details of their history of support and intervention throughout their schooling must be retained in the school and may be sought by the SEC as part of the quality assurance of the school's RACE applications.

#### **Note on Poor Handwriting**

Poor handwriting, in and of itself is not a disability or difficulty that requires accommodation, under the RACE scheme. Schools should not apply for accommodations to be made in individual cases where the concern relates to difficulties that may arise in accessing the work of a candidate solely as a result of poor handwriting. Examiners engaged by the SEC are very skilled, from both their teaching and examining experience, at interpreting the handwriting of candidates and will make every effort to ensure that all work presented in the examinations is understood and marked fairly. In any case where they find themselves unable to read the script they are instructed to refer it to a senior, more experienced examiner who will, if necessary, engage with other experts in accessing the work.

#### **Range of Writing Accommodations**

There are three writing accommodations available under the RACE scheme:

- 1) Word processor
- 2) Recording device
- 3) Scribe

If applying for a writing accommodation on grounds of physical difficulty you should review and retain samples of written work representative of performance under typical examination conditions which demonstrates that the candidate is unable to write or effectively unable to write as a result of their difficulty. This is in addition to any professional/ medical reports, etc. that is necessary to support the application. The SEC expects that candidates approved for a writing accommodation will use either a word processor or a recording device. There is a higher threshold of eligibility for access to a scribe. To be eligible for a scribe, a candidate must firstly qualify for a writing accommodation by reference to the guidelines. There must

then also be an impediment to the candidate making use of either the word processor or the recording device. The SEC must be satisfied that this impediment is valid. The default alternative for any candidate that is unable to make use of a word processor in examination conditions is to use a recording device. Access to a scribe is not a matter of personal preference. The candidate must be eligible.

### **Word Processor or Recording Device — Physical Difficulty**

Applications will be considered where it can be established that a candidate has a need for the use of a word processor or a recording device because:

- a) The ability of a candidate to write at a reasonable speed under examination conditions is such that the candidate would be significantly impaired in writing the answers or such that his or her written work would be effectively illegible and that an examiner would have difficulty in deciphering;
- b) These difficulties are persistent despite the candidate having had access to a continuum of support and to learning opportunities that are effective and appropriate for most other candidates.

Candidates who have been granted the use of assistive technology by the Department of Education must meet all the relevant guidelines in the same way as all other candidates. They do not have an automatic right to use same in examinations.

Candidates that have been granted the use of a word processor to complete their examinations and are submitting a word-processed script, must follow the instructions for the setting up, saving and getting a script ready for return at the end of the examinations—copies of these instructions are at Appendix D. It is also essential that schools refer to the booklet *Implementing Access Arrangements during the Written Examinations*, which issues in May each year, for more details in relation to the procedures involved in the use of a word processor in the certificate examinations.

A candidate approved for the use of a word processor or a voice activated word processor on physical difficulty grounds must have the spell-check and auto-correct turned off. Such candidates can still demonstrate proficiency in spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and accordingly no explanatory note will apply.

A candidate approved for the use of a recording device precludes the assessment of spelling, written punctuation and grammatical elements in language subjects. Accordingly, the grades obtained by a candidate in any language subject taken by him/her will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements” (This will apply in the case of English)*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements” (This will apply in the case of all other language subjects)*



Schools should note that the SEC does not meet the costs associated with purchase of assistive technology or removable USBs, SD cards, CD-Rs, hard drives , etc. for candidates.

In the subjects Japanese and Mandarin Chinese, the word processor or recording device cannot be used for the parts of the paper where answers are required in Japanese or Mandarin Chinese.

### **Scribe — Physical Difficulty**

The SEC expects that candidates approved for a writing accommodation will use either a word processor or a recording device. **There is a higher threshold of eligibility for access to a scribe.** To be eligible for a scribe, a candidate must firstly qualify for a writing accommodation by reference to the guidelines. There must then also be an impediment to the candidate making use of either the word processor or the recording device. The SEC must be satisfied that this impediment is valid. The default alternative for any candidate that is unable to make use of a word processor in examination conditions is to use a recording device. Access to a scribe is not a matter of personal preference. The candidate must be eligible.

The reason for this distinction is because examination accommodations should reflect, as far as is possible, the candidate's normal way of working, and best practice is that candidates with such difficulties should be supported throughout their schooling to work independently. Candidates using word processors are working independently, while those relying on a scribe are not. Since relying on a scribe throughout one's learning process is rare and would be considered a support of last resort when supports to work independently are not feasible, the same applies in an examination setting. Schools will also need to show that they have tried to migrate students from scribes to assistive technology.

In recommending access to a scribe, in addition to confirming that the candidate meets the eligibility guidelines for either a word processor or a recording device, you will need to confirm, that he or she also has a physical difficulty, such as motor difficulties and/or a speech impediment, which renders the other writing accommodations unsuitable. It may also be the case that, for example, the use of a word processor has not proved feasible for the candidate in one or more specific subjects (e.g. Mathematics), in which case it may be appropriate to recommend the use of a scribe for those subjects and the use of a word processor in the remaining subjects. In all cases, you should bear in mind that it is rarely in a candidate's best interests to recommend an accommodation that the candidate is not used to. This is because it does not reflect the accommodations used in day-to-day school to overcome a difficulty.

A candidate who is unable to write or effectively unable to write may be granted the assistance of a scribe **where a candidate's particular difficulties** makes the use of a word processor or recording device unsuitable. Using a scribe in the examination is not a matter of choice for either the student or the school authority but must be based on the candidate's needs.

Access to a scribe will preclude the assessment of spelling, written punctuation and grammatical elements in language subjects. Accordingly, the grades obtained by the

candidate in any language subject will be accompanied by an explanatory note, which will read as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements” (This will apply in the case of English)*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements” (This will apply in the case of all other language subjects)*

Candidates approved for this accommodation should be aware that the scribe can only write the answers dictated by the candidate and are precluded from changing the meaning, interpreting, adding any additional information or otherwise providing assistance to the candidate. Scribes must not give any advice, information or assistance to candidates in relation to the content of the examination papers, or the subject of the examination.

**N.B. See “Limitations on using a Scribe in Certain Subjects” section 9.1.4**

#### **9.4.2 Exemption from Practical Test and/or Project in Junior Cycle Home Economics**

In the Junior Cycle subject Home Economics, a candidate may be granted an exemption from the project; from the practical test; or from both. Depending on the exemption(s) granted, the grade obtained by a candidate in this subject will be accompanied by an explanatory note, or notes, as follows:

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the project element”*

*AND/OR*

*“all parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except the practical element”*

**Please note that exemptions are not available from the practical components or projects in any other subject.**

#### **Assistance of a Helper in the Practical and Written Tests (Please note this may be granted without recourse to the SEC). See section 5.4**

A helper in the practical tests, is a person who may carry out general ‘housekeeping’ type duties, e.g. lifting and carrying utensils and equipment. The helper must not give factual help to the candidate or offer any suggestion regarding what has to be undertaken and must carry out instructions exactly as they are given unless to do so will cause a health and safety hazard. The helper is furthermore not permitted to carry out any task that is part of what is being assessed. For example, the helper may assist a candidate in clamping a piece of work, but may not assist them in applying any tool to the piece. The subjects in which a helper in the practical tests can be approved are –; Junior Cycle Home Economics ; Leaving Certificate Engineering, Home Economic, Scientific and Social, Art and Construction Studies.

A helper in the written tests may assist a candidate with physical needs in any written examination which requires drawing sheets to clamp the drawing sheets to a board. The

subjects in which a helper for the written examinations may be approved are Leaving Certificate Construction Studies and DCG, and Junior Cycle Graphics, and Wood Technology.

The SEC is not responsible for any costs associated with the provision of a helper for the written or practical tests.

#### **9.4.3 Drawing Aids**

Use of parallel motion drawing boards and smaller drawing sheets can be recommended in the following Leaving Certificate subjects: Design and Communication Graphic, Construction Studies, and Technology and the following Junior cycle subjects: Wood Technology and Graphics.

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## 10. SPECIAL CENTRE SUPERINTENDENTS, READERS AND SCRIBES

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In order to protect the integrity of the certificate examinations and to be fair to all candidates, the SEC will investigate all allegations or suspicions of malpractice in relation to the examinations, including inappropriate assistance in a special examination centre.

Superintendents of special examination centres, including those acting as readers, reading assistants and/or scribes must not give any advice, information or assistance to candidates in relation to the content of the examination papers, or the subject of the examination.

In general, a person acting as a special centre superintendent, reader, reading assistant or scribe should **not** be someone who has been involved in the candidate's recent schooling or be personally known to them (such as a special needs assistant who recently worked with them). However, it is recognised that, in very exceptional circumstances, the special educational needs of certain candidates are such that they would have a great difficulty making themselves understood by someone who is not used to communicating with them, or would for some other reason have a severe difficulty working with a person not previously known to them. If you are satisfied that such circumstances apply, then it is acceptable to appoint a person known to the candidate to act as reader, reading assistant, scribe or special centre superintendent.

To ensure the integrity of the examination is upheld, relatives and friends of the candidate are not permitted to act as the superintendent, reader, reading assistant or scribe, nor are persons under the age of 18 years permitted to so act.

The SEC recognises that decisions with regard to the appointment of superintendents to examination centres and other situations which require a locally appointed superintendent are matters for the school authority, acting in the best interests of the candidates and having regard to the fairness and integrity of the examinations.

It is up to each school to appoint superintendents, readers, reading assistants and scribes to the special examination centres in their schools. The SEC will not be involved in the appointment of personnel to special examination centres.

The SEC has a duty to safeguard the integrity of the examinations. In line with established practice, the SEC will arrange audio-recording in Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle individual special examination centres in a randomly selected sample of schools for 2023. Further information on the arrangements for audio-recording will be provided, in advance of the written examinations, to the selected schools.

As has been the case in the past, a more detailed document *Implementing Access Arrangements during the Written Examinations* will issue in May 2023 and will include guidance for superintendents, readers, reading assistants and scribes in individual/shared special examination centres.

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## 11. APPEAL PROCEDURE

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In cases where a parent or candidate is dissatisfied with any aspect of the SEC's decision, they have access to a RACE Independent Appeals Committee (IAC). All members of the IAC are drawn from outside the SEC. The remit of the IAC covers appeals against all elements of decisions on the RACE process taken by the SEC. All appeals are considered in light of the published principles. An appeal can only deal with the information originally used to assess eligibility. The appeal deadline of 3 weeks from the receipt of the decision letter will be strictly applied.

All appeals **must be made through the school** using the appeals application form (**FORM RAAP1**) which is available, on request, from the Reasonable Accommodations section. This form must be completed in full and signed by the candidate, parent/guardian and school authority.

In making an appeal, schools are invited to submit all of the evidence that they used to assess a candidate's eligibility for RACE at the time that they completed the original application.

### **Main Applications**

An appeal against a decision arising from a standard application must be based solely on the information originally used to assess eligibility. **Where new information is to be relied on, a fresh application must be made.** If the closing date for receipt of applications has passed then any fresh application must be through the late application process.

### **Late Applications**

An appeal against a decision arising from a late application must be based solely on the information originally used to assess eligibility. No new information will be considered in processing such an appeal. Given the timelines, it will not be possible to consider a fresh application, based on new information, if the late application closing date has passed.

### **Emergency Applications**

Applications made through the emergency application process will not have access to the Independent Appeals process due to the time constraints involved with these applications.

Appeal decisions will be notified to the candidate's school. If an appeal is being denied then the reasons for the decision of the IAC will be provided. Schools in turn are required to communicate the outcome of the appeal to the candidate and their parents/guardians. To assist schools, the SEC will provide two copies of all decision letters, one copy for the school and one to be given to the candidate/parent/guardian.

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## 12. FURTHER RECOURSE

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Following the completion of an appeal, any candidate, parent/guardian who considers that their case has not been processed correctly, can make a complaint to the Ombudsman (if they are over 18) or to the Ombudsman for Children (if they are under 18).

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## 13. GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS (GDPR)

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The State Examinations Commission, as a Data Controller, carries out its duties and obligations to Data Protection in compliance with legislation. Included in this process are the schools, our main processing agents, who are the primary contact point between the SEC and candidates for whom applications for reasonable accommodations are made. The schools are a Data Processor for the SEC (Data Controller) under the GDPR. The Data Protection Act 2018, sections Processing of Personal Data 71(9) (b) and Processors Section 80 provides details.

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## APPENDIX A. UPDATED FRAMEWORK OF PRINCIPLES

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<b>1</b>	Reasonable Accommodations will be made for candidates who have special educational <i>and /or</i> assessment needs to enable them to access the test instrument and to demonstrate their attainment in the examination.
<b>2</b>	The assessment of eligibility for Reasonable Accommodations will be based on appropriate evidence of need.
<b>3</b>	Reasonable Accommodations will be underpinned by, and uphold the integrity of the assessment principles, as published by the State Examinations Commission.
<b>4</b>	Reasonable Accommodations will be appropriate to the needs of the candidate, while at the same time, meeting the assessment objectives and requirements of the relevant syllabus.
<b>5</b>	The particular needs of a candidate in each individual subject area will be considered. The Reasonable Accommodations made for an individual candidate may differ from subject to subject.
<b>6</b>	There should be continuity between learning and assessment; accordingly Reasonable Accommodations should reflect a candidate's normal way of working, as far as possible*.
<b>7</b>	Applications for, and decisions on Reasonable Accommodations will be made in a timely manner.
<b>8</b>	If, as a result of a special need, a candidate cannot attain, or demonstrate attainment, in a particular element or elements of an examination, an alternative assessment may be specified. The alternative must assess the same construct as the original test item, and must not compromise the purpose of the examination.
<b>9</b>	If, as a result of a special need, a candidate cannot attain, or demonstrate attainment, in a particular element(s) of an examination, or in a particular component(s), and an alternative assessment is not possible, a waiver or exemption may be permitted, subject to Principle 10 below. Waivers or exemptions will not be permitted in the case of an element or component that is deemed core** to the syllabus.
<b>10</b>	Prior to undertaking a course of study in a particular syllabus, information should be available to the candidate regarding the assessment conditions pertaining to that syllabus, including those elements of the syllabus that are core and in which no exemption is possible.
<b>11</b>	The certification process should accurately record the attainment of the candidate in the examination. Accordingly, when an element(s) or component(s) has been exempted, or where a particular accommodation changes the assessment construct, this should be recorded on the certificate of results.
<b>12</b>	Exceptional circumstances that may affect a candidate's performance (e.g., illness, trauma, accidents, bereavement) should, insofar as is possible, be addressed.

\*A candidate requesting the use of, for example, assistive technology in the State Examinations should normally be accustomed to its use in his/her day to day learning and assessment environment

\*\*Core in this context has two dimensions, as follows:

**(a)** an element of a syllabus could be core in that it constitutes such a significant proportion of the syllabus content that, in its absence, there is insufficient content remaining to validly assess the syllabus objectives

**(b)** an element of a syllabus could be core in that the element is so fundamental or integral to the study of the subject or domain and its assessment, that to exempt it from the assessment would fundamentally undermine the credibility and integrity of the assessment and certification processes.



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**APPENDIX B – ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATE WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS IN CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS**

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Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations

**ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATES WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS IN CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS**

Report to the Minister for Education and Science

January 2000

Any consideration of arrangements for the examination of candidates with special needs has to recognise that the Leaving Certificate Examination is a key point in the lives of candidates. On the one hand, performance on the examination is taken to represent candidates' achievements after 13 or 14 years of education. On the other, it is used to make important decisions about candidates' future education which, in turn, seriously affects their life chances. The examination enjoys a high status and is regarded by most people as a fair means of making decisions about candidates' educational achievements. It is essential that fairness to all candidates, and the perception of that fairness, be maintained in the administration of the examination.

The Junior Cycle Examination is obviously of less importance than the Leaving Certificate Examination for most candidates, though it is often regarded as a useful experience in preparation for the Leaving Certificate. Our discussion of special arrangements is framed for the most part by a consideration of the Leaving Certificate, and it should not be assumed that regulations should be applied with the same rigour to both certificate examinations. We do not consider how regulations might be applied differently at the two levels, taking the view that modification of the Junior Cycle for all candidates would be a more appropriate strategy than attempting to develop a subset of the regulations designed with Leaving Certificate candidates in mind. If the Junior Cycle Examination is developed so that there is less emphasis on terminal papers and greater consideration is given to school-based assessment, the potential to deal with special cases should be greatly enhanced.

It is recognised that in certain circumstances an examination may not adequately represent the achievements that it purports to measure. This is a particular problem when the scope of an examination is fairly limited, as is the case in the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations. Although there is provision for other kinds of assessment (e.g., oral and practical competencies), these examinations rely heavily on performance on written papers which are administered under controlled conditions in a limited time frame at the end of a long period of study. Some candidates experience difficulty, or may even find it impossible, to communicate what they know in this situation. This is, perhaps, most obvious in the case of a physical disability, such as a visual or hearing impairment, but specific learning disabilities are also recognised as giving rise to difficulties.

The normal routine of examination administration, dedicated to the maintenance of universalistic standards (i.e. a system based on generally applicable rules and principles), when faced with particularistic considerations (i.e. concern with elements, which have a particular rather than a universal application, or to which no general standard is applicable), inevitably gives rise to conflict. The former involves the application of bureaucratic principles so that all candidates are treated in the same way; the latter attempts to take account of the circumstances of individual candidates. Resolution of the conflict is likely to be complex and difficult since a concession to the universalistic could be seen to be at the expense of the particularistic, while a concession to the particularistic could be interpreted as compromising the universalistic.

In late 1998, the Minister for Education and Science requested the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations (a body he had set up in December 1997 to provide independent advice and evaluation on the operation of examinations) to prepare a discussion paper on special

arrangements at the examinations for candidates with special needs. The paper, which was prepared in April 1999, set out current arrangements for candidates with special needs in certificate examinations in this country and also provided descriptions of regulations followed by examining bodies in Great Britain. A number of principles were proposed, which it was suggested should underlie the provision of special arrangements, and a series of issues requiring discussion was outlined.

Responses to the paper were invited from interested parties in advertisements in national newspapers on May 17, 1999. The paper was also made available on the Internet. Submissions were requested by June 30, 1999. Altogether, 210 submissions were received. These were considered by the Advisory Group, following which the present document was prepared.

The document outlines the present situation regarding special arrangements made before an examination and the situation regarding special consideration after an examination. This is followed by a summary of the main issues addressed in submissions. Principles governing the provision of special arrangements, based on the earlier document and on submissions, are then proposed. Finally, recommendations relating to modification of existing regulations are proposed.

In preparing the document, cognisance was taken of the Education Act, 1998, in which the need to provide for the education of every person in the state, including any person with a physical or learning disability or with other educational needs, is stated. It follows from this statement that the administration of examinations, which form part of that provision, should be sensitive to the needs of candidates with disabilities.

The need for flexibility in making decisions about individual candidates was also borne in mind in arriving at the principles and recommendations set out in the paper. Flexibility is needed in light of the complexity and individual nature of candidate needs for a number of fairly obvious reasons. First, the number of disability categories is considerable, and, within each, there is substantial variability. Second, the impact of accommodations in examination administration on the validity of an examination is usually unknown for different disability categories. And third, it is important that allowance be made for future developments, both in examinations and in the availability of technology that may serve to improve the situation for candidates with special needs.

In light of these considerations, and in recognition of the fact that decisions about individual candidates have to be made in the light of the particular needs of candidates, the present paper sets out principles and a structure under which specific arrangements can be made, rather than rules and regulations that would describe how particular individuals should be treated. The principles were framed with the intention of facilitating the operation of a responsive and flexible system, which would enable all candidates to demonstrate their achievements, while preserving the integrity and fairness of an examination, in which special arrangements are operated in a transparent manner.

## **THE PRESENT SITUATION FOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS IN IRELAND**

Under present regulations governing the administration of state examinations, special arrangements may be made for a candidate when it is indicated in advance of the examination

that the candidate has difficulties which preclude him or her from displaying the achievements which are assessed in the examination. Special consideration is sometimes sought during or after an examination on the grounds that unforeseen circumstances arose during the course of, or around the time of, the examination which interfered with a candidate's performance.

### **Special Arrangements Requested Before an Examination**

Application for special examination arrangements on the grounds of a specific learning disability or of a physical disability is made by schools to the Department of Education and Science on prescribed forms to be completed by school authorities<sup>2</sup>. The form requests information on the following:

- i. name of examinations for which special arrangements are being sought;
- ii. whether the candidate avails in school of any special facilities for studying or communicating;
- iii. reasons for applying for special arrangements;
- iv. the nature of the special arrangements that are being requested;
- v. particulars of previous Certificate examinations taken by the candidate;
- vi. details of assessment by a guidance or remedial teacher;
- vii. if the candidate had received remedial or special help at school;
- viii. the candidate's attendance record;
- ix. the candidate's general ability;
- x. the candidate's application to studies;
- xi. a psychologist's report if available over the past 12 months;
- xii. three samples of a candidate's written work under examination conditions;
- xiii. a report of a psychologist or medical doctor supporting the case for special arrangements.

Special arrangements on the grounds of a specific learning disability will be approved only if the Department is satisfied on the basis of evidence put forward or adduced that the candidate's ability is not below 'the average range' and that the candidate has a specific difficulty in reading or in writing that is of such a degree that he or she would be impaired in reading the questions or in writing the answers, or is such that a regular examiner would have difficulty in deciphering the candidate's handwriting. Special arrangements are not approved for candidates who are 'slow learners' or for candidates with a 'mental handicap'.

A parent/guardian is required to complete a form consenting to an interview/assessment by a psychologist from the Department of Education and Science (should the Department consider this necessary) and to the results of the interview/assessment being made available to the Department.

A closing date is specified for the submission of applications. However, it is not always possible to keep to this, and applications are received and processed up to and during the examination period.

A number of observations may be made about the operation of the scheme. First, there were about 3,200 applications in 1998. Second, the number of applications is growing (e.g., from about 2,300 in 1994). Third, there is considerable variation between schools in the operation of the scheme. Some schools produce multiple applications, others do not make any. In some cases, the reasons for this are obvious. A school which caters for candidates with disabilities would be expected to have an above-average application rate. However, this type of situation does not fully explain differential application rates. Finally, special arrangements for the vast majority of candidates involve no more than ensuring that every possible effort is made to decipher their answers and mark them reliably in accordance with the marking scheme, however difficult it may be to read their work because of misspellings, bad handwriting, poor grammar, etc. When the degree of impairment is severe, further arrangements (including the provision of a person who will read the questions or write the answers, or the use of a tape recorder, typewriter, or word processor) may be made.

There is provision for a range of special arrangements.

- i. Time (allowance of 10 minutes extra time per hour where a scribe or mechanical aid is used or a candidate is visually impaired).
  
- ii. Means of Access to Questions
  - a) reading an examination paper, without elaboration or explanation, to the candidate;
  - b) provision of modified questions, substituting alternative questions for those which refer to visual material, such as diagrams, photographs, and maps;
  - c) provision of braille translations;
  - d) provision of enlarged print in the examination papers;
  - e) provision of low vision aids for reading questions.
  
- iii. Means of Presenting Responses
  - a) recording of answers on tape or word processor;
  - b) dictation of answers to a scribe;
  - c) sending a script to a supervising examiner when the examiner encounters difficulty in reading it.
  
- iv. Alternative Accommodation/Time Arrangements
  - a) taking the examination in a special room in a school or in a hospital;
  - b) alteration in the time at which the examination is taken (e.g., to allow attendance at the funeral of a close relative).

There is no indication on a candidate's certificate of results that special arrangements were in place for the examination.

### **Special Consideration During and After an Examination**

Unforeseen circumstances (e.g., illness, death of a relative, accident, trauma) can arise during an examination. Examination superintendents are advised that the Department is prepared to accord candidates who become ill during the course of an examination every consideration to help them sit the examination. In exceptional circumstances, candidates may take an examination

at a later time (but not on a later date) than the scheduled time. A further situation arises when examination authorities are notified after the examination has been completed that illness or trauma seriously interfered with a candidate's performance. Several hundred items of correspondence are generated each year arising out of such situations.

There are two possible responses to situations in which unforeseen circumstances are claimed to have affected a candidate's performance. One is to espouse the universalistic position and state that examiners can only work on the basis of what a candidate has presented. This is the situation at present. The other is to attempt to address the circumstances of the particular case and re-examine the candidate's work, though this could involve departing from the marking scheme which should be applied to the work of all candidates. The latter approach is more feasible in examinations in other jurisdictions which rely less on terminal written performance. Flexibility to respond to unforeseen school or personal circumstances would improve in this country if examination procedures were less rigid.<sup>3</sup>

## REVIEW OF SUBMISSIONS

Submissions to the Discussion Paper of the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations (April 1999) were received up to 30 June 1999. Several of the 210 submissions highlighted inadequacies in the operation of the present system. Some raised very broad issues; some referred to perceived difficulties in schools; others to the operation of the system by the Department of Education and Science. Practically all addressed issues relating to special arrangements that are decided before an examination; very few dealt with the question of special consideration during or after an examination. Submissions dealt with special arrangements for candidates with physical disabilities and for candidates with learning disabilities. A number expressed a preference for practices in Britain (especially in Scotland), a description of which had been provided in the Discussion Paper. While these practices were considered by the Expert Group in arriving at the recommendations in this document, the fact that they operated in the context of assessment systems which differed from the Irish system in their nature and traditions had to be kept in mind.

A summary of the main points of the submissions, categorised under four headings, follows. The points are not set out in any particular order, and no indication of the frequency with which points were made is provided. This course of action was adopted, partly because the rationale and appropriateness of points seem more important than their frequency of mention, and partly because a head-count based on multiple identical submissions would have resulted in a distorted picture.

### Issues with Implications for Examination Systems in General

A number of submissions considered issues in the context of increasing participation rates in education and in examinations, pointing to the need to give greater prominence to the certification (as opposed to the selection) function of examinations. The point is particularly relevant in the case of the Junior Cycle Examination.

Submissions with implications for the examination system in general related to a role for a continuous assessment component in the examination process; the need for greater use of oral examining; a modular system of examinations; repeat examinations; a modified schedule for examinations; limiting the number of subjects which some candidates would be required to study;

and the introduction of alternative curricular and assessment procedures for some candidates. While all these recommendations merit serious consideration, they raise issues that go well beyond the terms of reference of the Expert Group in its review of the operation of special arrangements at examinations for candidates with special needs.

### General Issues Relating to Special Arrangements

Several of the recommendations in submissions were of a general nature: that special arrangements be available to all candidates with special needs (not just those of 'average ability'); that the view of 'disability' as a pathological condition be abandoned; that the word 'special' be excluded from the description of arrangements; that the problematic nature of the use of terms such as dyslexia and Asperger Syndrome be recognised; that separate consideration be maintained for physical and learning disabilities; and that regulations and provision for the Junior Cycle Examination should differ from those for the Leaving Certificate Examination.

Recognising the difficulties in adapting general examination regulations to meet the needs of all candidates, it was pointed out that there was a danger that the scheme of special arrangements might be used as a means of making inappropriate methods of assessment seem appropriate for all candidates.

### Specific Comments/Proposals Regarding the Present Scheme (Before the examination)

Present arrangements in many schools for dealing with candidates with special needs were considered inadequate (especially by parents/guardians). It was stated that the identification of candidates was often late; that schools were not adequately resourced to deal with candidates with specific learning difficulties; and that schools did not always have the equipment to prepare candidates for examinations. More general problems identified in schools related to lack of awareness of candidate needs and lack of appropriate teaching and learning supports.

A series of recommendations relating to examinations were made: the need to provide clear guidelines for candidates, schools, and parents/guardians; the need for a standard psychological assessment form (possibly in multiple-choice format); greater school involvement in the identification and preparation of candidates; assigning responsibility for administering and overseeing arrangements to an individual in the school; assigning a major role in assessment and in preparing applications for special arrangements to a guidance counsellor/remedial teacher; a mechanism for earlier candidate identification, certainly no later than second year in secondary school; decisions regarding arrangements and their nature to be provided earlier by the Department of Education and Science; the need to try out various options in schools to determine the most appropriate conditions for a candidate; the provision of opportunities for candidates in school to practice for special arrangements; the incorporation into school examinations of special arrangements (from first year in secondary school, if possible); the provision of opportunities for a candidate to work with a reader/assistant/scribe under examination conditions before an examination; and access by parents/guardians to relevant correspondence and reports.

### Specific Comments/Proposals Regarding the Present Scheme (During and After the Examination)

Many submissions saw the provision of extra time as an important factor in alleviating problems that candidates might face in an examination. It was felt that additional time would help candidates who tire quickly, who are restricted in physical movement, who take longer than most candidates to process material, or who have difficulty in concentrating on a limited range of topics for a long period. The proposals about extra time varied from 10/15 minutes for an examination to 10/15 minutes per hour. Some suggested that the extra time be provided before an examination, others that it be used to provide rest periods during an examination. The suggestion was also made that the provision of extra time should be at the discretion of the examination centre.

Some submissions addressed the issue of expanding the range of formats for accessing questions (e.g., the distribution of examinations on tape as well as on hard copy). Several submissions focused on the role of examiners/markers. Suggestions included the employment of special markers (with relevant experience/training); informing markers of the status of candidates and the nature of candidate difficulties; the provision of general guidelines and training for supervisors and examiners; and the provision of training/experience for markers of the scripts of candidates with special needs. It was recommended that the provision for seating candidates in a quiet area or separate room, where distraction would be minimised, should be extended.

Most, but not all, submissions were opposed to indicating on certificates that candidates had taken an examination under special arrangements.

#### **PRINCIPLES ON WHICH THE PROVISION OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CANDIDATES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS MIGHT BE BASED**

In this section, a number of principles on which the provision of arrangements for candidates with special needs might be based is presented. These are drawn from present practice in this country, practice elsewhere<sup>4</sup>, and a consideration of submissions made in response to the Discussion Paper of April 1999.

In considering the principles, it is necessary to bear in mind the distinction between a candidate's achievements and his/her ability to display those achievements under examination conditions. There are cases where the nature of a subject, and consequently of an examination, preclude a candidate, because of a disability, from acquiring the competencies which the subject is designed to develop. For example, a candidate may not be physically able to produce an end product in subjects such as Construction Studies and Engineering. Since the achievement of the candidate, rather than the assessment of the achievement, is at issue, the case for special arrangements does not arise.

There are other cases in which many elements of the achievements in a subject are accessible to a candidate but some, because of a particular disability, are not. For example, the aural component in a language may not be accessible to a hearing-impaired candidate. In this case, the issue is again one of achievement, rather than the nature of the examination. However, it is reasonable that the candidate sit for an examination in the components of the subject in which achievement was possible, and that he/she be exempted from the specific and identifiable component (e.g. the aural component) in which it was not.



There are other cases again in which all aspects of a subject are accessible to a candidate, but the nature of the examination adversely affects the candidate's ability to display what he/she had achieved in the subject. In these cases, modification of the examination procedure (e.g., the provision of enlarged print on the examination paper) is permissible so long as it does not affect the integrity of the examination.

With these conditions in mind, the following principles on which the provision of arrangements for candidates with special needs might be based are proposed.

1. Special arrangements should be made for candidates who, because of a temporary, permanent or long-term disability, have special assessment needs in examinations.
2. Provision should be made for both physical and learning disabilities.
3. Special arrangements should not put the integrity, status, or reputation of the examination at risk.
4. Special arrangements should be designed to remove as far as possible the impact of a disability on a candidate's performance, so that he or she can demonstrate in the examination his or her level of achievement.
5. Special arrangements are designed to assist a candidate in demonstrating his or her achievements in an examination setting. They are not designed to compensate for a possible lack of achievement arising from a disability.
6. Since a core principle of the Certificate examinations is to ensure equitable treatment for all candidates, arrangements should not give the candidate for whom they are made an advantage over other candidates.
7. Independent evidence of a disability and support needs should be required before allowing special arrangements.
8. The precise arrangements to be made should be determined on the basis of the disability or impairment established in each individual case and of the particular needs of the candidate in each individual subject area. Different subjects and different methods of assessment may make different demands on candidates.
9. A candidate's disability may be such that it is not possible for him or her to participate in a particular mode of assessment (an aural examination for a candidate with severe hearing impairment), in which case it should be open to the candidate to apply for exemption from part of the assessment procedure.
10. Where it is not possible for a candidate to participate in a particular mode of assessment, an alternative assessment procedure may be specified.
11. An alternative procedure is not acceptable where the purpose of an examination would be compromised by its use (e.g., reading a test of reading comprehension to a candidate with a specific reading difficulty).
12. When an element or elements of an examination have been waived, so that the purpose of the examination regarding that element or elements has not been met, or the method of examining has been significantly altered, this should be indicated by the presence of an Explanatory note on the candidate's certificate of results.
13. Circumstances that may affect a candidate's performance (e.g., illness, trauma, bereavement) should, insofar as is possible, be addressed during the examination period.

## APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

While these principles may seem straightforward enough, they carry within them possible sources of conflict. Furthermore, it is not always obvious how the principles might be applied in practice. In this section, we consider issues that arise from the principles in terms of candidate identification, effective and equitable provision, and the treatment and reporting of candidate performance. Recommendations in relation to each are made. It is recognised that some of the recommendations have implications for resources, which obviously would have to be considered before implementation.

### Candidate Identification

The identification of candidates in need of special arrangements at examinations involves a judgment about the difficulties a candidate would experience in an examination setting, having given due consideration to the candidate's achievements and the extent to which the examination setting would prevent the candidate from demonstrating those achievements. Barriers to full participation in the examination may be physical or psychological. The former (e.g., motor, visual, auditory) are more obvious than the latter (e.g., specific reading disability, attention deficit disorder) and are probably more easily assessed.

Key components of the present regulations relating to special arrangements on the grounds of a specific learning disability are that arrangements will be granted only if the candidate's general ability is not below 'the average range' and if there is a discrepancy between that ability and achievement in at least one specified domain of achievement (e.g., reading comprehension). These conditions give rise to a number of problems. First, given the increase in participation rates in state examinations in recent years, many candidates are likely to fall below 'the average range' of ability. There is no reason why these should be excluded from consideration for special arrangements if they also have a more specific learning disability. Second, the available evidence indicates that poor readers who do not exhibit discrepancies between measures of their general ability and achievement appear to have the same kind of cognitive difficulties and achievement needs as poor readers who exhibit discrepancies. Third, there are technical problems in the use of a discrepancy score between ability and achievement. These arise from, among other things, regression to the mean and errors of measurement (which tend to be large when the correlation between measures is high). Fourth, even if a reliable discrepancy procedure were available, evidence of a discrepancy would not in itself mean that it was due to a particular disability. It could be that other factors (e.g., lack of motivation, failure to study) caused the discrepancy.

### Recommendations on Candidate Identification

Present regulations covering the identification of candidates requiring special arrangements are in general acceptable to the Expert Advisory Group, though some modifications are suggested. In general, regulations and their implementation should be designed to ensure that all eligible candidates are facilitated; at the same time, it is important that the system should not be abused. The following recommendations, which are designed to improve the identification process and to increase the involvement of schools in the process, are made.

- i. The condition that a candidate's general ability be not below 'the average range' for consideration for special arrangements should be discontinued.

- ii. Procedures should be established to increase awareness in schools of candidate needs.
- iii. Procedures should be established in schools to ensure identification at the earliest possible point. iv. Schools should have greater involvement in the identification and preparation of candidates.
- iv. The Department of Education and Science should provide guidelines regarding identification for candidates, schools, and parents/guardians.
- v. A guidance counsellor/remedial teacher, in collaboration with classroom teachers, resource teachers and occupational therapists, should have a role in assessment and in applying for special arrangements.
- vi. A standard diagnostic and assessment process should be developed by the Department.
- vii. The time period between applications and approval should be as short as possible.
- viii. Parents/guardians should have access to all relevant correspondence and reports.
- ix. Provision for appeals regarding the operation of the scheme should be continued

### Effective and Equitable Provision

There are three aspects to effective and equitable provision: preparation of candidates, candidates' access to questions/tasks, and candidates' responses.

There would appear to be a lack of awareness in some schools about the needs of candidates requiring special arrangements, as well as inadequate facilities to prepare candidates for examinations. Schools need to be more proactive, not only in the identification of special needs, but also in providing for them. Improvement in this area will not be without its difficulties and will have resource implications<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of access to questions/tasks in the actual examination, demand for extra time to address a variety of candidate difficulties appeared in many submissions, although provision of additional time does not always work to a candidate's advantage<sup>8</sup>.

The issue of extending time for some candidates raises a broader question: Is timing primarily an administrative device and are examinations designed so that the great majority of candidates can complete an examination in the allotted time, or is speed of response one of the competencies being assessed? We may assume that the former is the case. It would, however, be worthwhile obtaining data on the proportion of candidates who finish examinations under standard conditions. A similar criterion could then be applied to candidates with disabilities. However, even this position would have to take cognisance of the fact that the amount of time required to complete an examination may vary substantially by disability category. For example, individuals with visual impairments, using Braille or recorded versions of tests, seem particularly disadvantaged as far as time is concerned<sup>9</sup>.

The provision of extra time has the clear potential to allow a candidate to provide additional information in response to questions or to attempt additional questions. On the face of it, then, additional time could confer an unfair advantage on individual candidates. On the other hand, it can be argued that for some candidates, additional time would do no more than enable them to access the test instrument in a way available to all candidates. To ensure that extra time is restricted only to those who would achieve no advantage is well-nigh impossible. It would require intensive screening of each individual applicant by professionals and, even then, given the

variation in the nature and severity of special needs, it would be extremely difficult to decide how much time was required by a candidate and whether or not the additional time conferred an advantage in the examination.

A possible way forward that might meet the special needs of many candidates, while, at the same time, preserving the integrity of the examination system, would be to make the time element of examinations less critical. As adumbrated above, evidence on the role of time in examinations under present conditions is required. While awaiting this evidence, all candidates might be given the option of availing of a limited increase in time (15 to 20 minutes). Obviously, this option would not be available in all examinations. Constraints are imposed by timetables, which are complex, and, anyhow, extra time would not be required in all subjects.

Our proposal is that, on a pilot basis, in the Leaving Certificate Examinations in 2000, all candidates be offered the option of availing of an additional 15 to 20 minutes in a small number of subjects. The examinations to which this proposal would apply should be determined in consultation with Chief Examiners. It is recommended that the selected subjects should be ones taken by large numbers of candidates, in which time seems to be a critical issue, and for which there is a capacity in the timetable to grant additional time. A number of subjects in the humanities which involve extensive essay writing would seem to meet these criteria. If the proposal is adopted, its implementation should be monitored, and the situation should be reviewed in light of the experience gained in the pilot.

Other factors to be considered in deciding on special provision in the case of both access and response relate to whether special provision for a particular candidate is required for all examinations or only for some; the amount of time that the Department requires to provide special conditions (e.g., alternative versions of a printed paper); whether papers currently in use are at an appropriate level of readability, bearing in mind the competencies being assessed; and whether some assessment tasks which are unsuitable for some candidates could be changed while at the same time meeting the objectives of the assessment.

### Recommendations on Effective and Equitable Provision

In general, the arrangements provided by the Department of Education and Science to facilitate candidates' access to questions/tasks and their responses in the actual examination were found by the Expert Advisory Group to be satisfactory and generally similar to arrangements elsewhere. The following recommendations, several of which relate to the preparation of candidates in schools, are made.

- i. Examination instruments should be reviewed with the purpose of making them as accessible as possible to all candidates. Readability levels and the time required for completion should be ascertained.
- ii. Special arrangements should, insofar as it is possible, reflect the nature and complexity of the learning difficulties of each individual candidate.
- iii. Decisions on arrangements should be provided at an earlier date than at present by the Department.

- iv. Schools should, by trying out various options, ensure that the most appropriate conditions are recommended for a candidate.
- v. School examinations should incorporate the special arrangements (from first year in secondary school if possible).
- vi. Candidates should have the opportunity to practice in school for the special arrangements (e.g., in use of a typewriter, word processor).
- vii. Schools should be encouraged to give candidates the opportunity to work with a reader/assistant/scribe under examination conditions before the examination. viii. An additional 15 to 20 minutes time could be offered to all candidates in subject areas in the examination in which time constraints may be considered a problem. A pilot scheme in a small number of subjects is proposed for the 2000 Leaving Certificate Examination.
- viii. Further decisions regarding the granting of additional time or rest periods should be made by the Department having considered the needs of an individual candidate.
- ix. Consideration should be given towards extending further the range of formats for accessing questions (e.g., tape as well as hard copy).

### Treatment and Reporting of Candidate Performance

Among the questions that arise in considering the treatment and reporting of candidate performance are: Should the work of candidates conducted with special provision be processed in the same way as the products of other candidates? Or should the work be identified and scored under special arrangements? Is it appropriate for an examiner to take into consideration life circumstances of an individual, or should he/she confine him/herself to the assessment of material that is actually presented, and apply the specified marking scheme without modification? The present regulations specify that examiners are required to apply agreed marking schemes to the work that candidates (including ones with learning difficulties and/or special needs) produce in the examination.

Many submissions expressed the view that certificates should not carry an indication that special arrangements had been in place for a candidate while taking an examination. This position seems to be based on the view that annotation on a certificate always works to the disadvantage of a candidate. This, however, is not the case. A scheme in which annotation is applied to certificates can serve to expand the capacity for special arrangements. Furthermore, users of the certificate (e.g., universities) are often prepared to make special provision for candidates when they know that such provision is required.

A question regarding the appropriateness of examiners taking into consideration the life circumstances of an individual also arises when candidates, though not the subject of a particular physical or learning disability, and not availing of special arrangements, are unable, because of circumstances around the time of the examination, to take all or part of an examination, or are seriously upset while doing the examination. A number of considerations are relevant to the situation. First, it does not seem possible to produce guidelines that would anticipate all conditions or establish criteria that would successfully identify all cases that merit consideration. Second, any attempt, however well-meaning, to take account of difficulties would involve departing from agreed marking schemes. Third, criteria that would allow an examiner to estimate the extent to which circumstances affected an individual candidate or their impact on his/her examination performance would be very difficult to establish. In this context, it may be noted

that the alternatives to sitting the examination for estimating a candidate's achievements that exist in other jurisdictions are not available in our external, time-bound, terminal examination system. Thus, even if candidates could be identified, there are difficulties in determining what compensation should be made. Finally, there is always the danger of abuse when special consideration is given to candidates that had experienced illness or trauma during the course of an examination.

### Recommendations on Treatment and Reporting of Candidate Performance

The following recommendations are made regarding the treatment and reporting of candidates' performance.

- i. Assistant examiners should continue to be advised to refer to their Advising Examiner material from candidates which they have difficulty in accessing.
- ii. It should be noted on certificates of results if an element or elements of an examination have been omitted or the method of examining has been altered in a substantial way.
- iii. The range of supports which at present are provided to candidates and schools in trauma situations should be reviewed and developed to enable the Department to consider the appropriate response in individual cases, in consultation with school authorities and with full professional input.

### FOOTNOTES

1

See Department of Education and Science (n.d.). The Junior Cycle: Issues for discussion. Dublin: Author.

2

Department of Education and Science. Examinations Branch. Special Arrangements in State Examinations. Application on the Grounds of a Specific Learning Disability. Athlone: Author, 1999; Department of Education and Science. Examinations Branch. Special Arrangements in State Examinations. Application on the Grounds of a Physical Disability. Athlone: Author, 1999.

3

See Department of Education and Science (n.d.). The Junior Cycle: Issues for discussions. Dublin: Author.

4

See Cullen, H. (1988). Special provision for pupils with learning difficulties in GCSE examinations. Support for Learning, 3, 182-183; Joint Forum for GCSE & GCE. (1998). Candidates with special assessment needs. Special arrangements and special consideration. Regulations and guidance. Cambridge: Author; Scottish Examination Board. (1996). Scottish Certificate of Education and Certificate of Sixth Year Studies Examinations. Arrangements for candidates with special educational needs. Guidance for Centres for Examinations in and after 1996. Dalkeith Midlothian: Author.

5

See Fletcher, J.M., Francis, D.J., Shaywitz, S.E., Lyon, G.R., Foorman, B.R., Stuebing, K.K., & Shaywitz, B.A. (1998). Intelligence and the discrepancy model for children with learning disabilities. Learning Disability Research and Practice, 13, 186-203; Siegal, L.S. (1988). Evidence that IQ scores are irrelevant to the definition and analysis of reading disability. Canadian Journal of Psychology, 42, 210-215.

6

See Burns, E. (1998). Test accommodations for candidates with disabilities. Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas; Thorndike, R.L. (1963). The concepts of over- and underachievement. New York: Teachers College Press.

7

See Woods, K. (1998). Special examination arrangements for GCSE. A study of school processes for selection within one LEA. Educational Psychology in Practice, 14, 194-201.

8

See Burns, E. (1998). Test accommodation for candidates with disabilities. Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas; Hedderly, R. (1996). Assessing pupils with specific learning difficulties for examination special arrangements at GCSE 'A' level and degree level. Educational Psychology in Practice, 12, 36-44; Pumfrey, P.D. & Reason, R. (1991). Specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Challenges and responses. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.

9

See Burns, E. (1998). Test accommodation for candidates with disabilities. Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas.

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## APPENDIX C: GUIDANCE FOR THE CALCULATION OF ERRORS IN SPELLING & GRAMMAR

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### **Spelling Errors:**

- When there are various misspellings of a particular word, count each misspelling as an error. If the same word is misspelled the same way, count the error only once, even if it occurs multiple times.
- In relation to proper names do not count incorrect spellings.
- Incorrect use of a homonym is an error (e.g. *their going to the cinema*).

### **Punctuation Errors:**

Count each punctuation error:

- Missing capitalisation for a proper noun or the first word of a sentence or the personal pronoun 'I'.
- Missing or incorrect punctuation at the end of a sentence, e.g. full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.
- Missing apostrophe in the possessive e.g. *Mikes chair*.
- Using the apostrophe in the plural form e.g. *lots of thing's, new chair's*.
- Improper use of commas (see below)

### **Grammar:**

- Every sentence is a complete sentence. Count every incomplete sentence as one error.
- Capitalisation:
  - Missing capitalisation, including title, rank, honour or respect (e.g. *Professor Murphy* or *Dear Editor*)
    - Formal government agencies/bodies etc.
    - Or for School or University, when used as part of a proper noun (e.g. *Trinity College*)
    - Missing capitalisation for titles of books, magazines or other published works
- Missing commas:
  - Missing commas in dates or addresses, or after a greeting or closing in a letter
  - Missing commas before conjunctions, including and, but, or, not, yet when they join independent clauses.
  - Missing commas that should separate expressions that introduce (e.g. *Finally, I would like ...*) or interrupt (e.g., *We would be better without uniforms, unless you enjoy looking alike, because ...*) the sentence.

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## APPENDIX D – HOW TO SET UP A WORD-PROCESSED SCRIPT

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These instructions should be followed by candidates who have been granted the use of a word processor in their certificate examinations. Following these instructions for setting up, saving and getting your script ready for return to the SEC for marking will help to ensure that you get full credit for your work.

**IMPORTANT NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN:** You must only set up your document in an offline environment as, under examination conditions, it is prohibited to have your laptop connected to the internet. Therefore, if you normally use online word-processing software you will need to set up the software on your laptop hard drive in advance of the examinations.

1. At the start of each examination session, you should set up a word-processed document (e.g. MS Word) and save the document using the following naming convention:

**Examination Number followed by Exam Type, followed by Subject and Paper Number**

For example, in the case of a Leaving Certificate candidate 189453 who completes the English Paper 2 examination on a word processor, the document should be named as: **189453 LC English 2**

This document is your examination script. You should ensure that the auto-save feature has been turned on to save your work regularly (e.g. every minute) during the examination. You should also get in the habit of manually saving your script regularly to avoid losing any content.

2. You should set up your word-processed script to record the following:

Examination Number	Each page of the word-processed script should have your examination number appearing in the header at the top right-hand corner.
Page Number	Each page of the word-processed script should be numbered with the page number appearing in the middle of the footer.

If using Microsoft WORD, you should click on the INSERT tab in the toolbar to access the Header and Footer functions

To insert your examination number and page number, you should:

- a) Click on the Header button in the toolbar, select Edit Header and input your examination number.
- b) Click on the Page Number button in toolbar\* select Bottom of Page and input the page number in middle of the footer.
- c) When you have inputted your examination number and page number, click on the Close Header and Footer on the toolbar. The header and page number will insert automatically on each word-processed page.

3. Printing your word-processed script

- a) Use white A4 paper
- b) Set to print on one side only.
- c) Make sure all pages have been printed.



