

**Advisory Group on Reasonable  
Accommodations**

**Accommodating Students with Special  
Educational Needs in the State  
Examinations**

**Final Report and Recommendations**



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Chairperson,  
Advisory Group on Reasonable Accommodations  
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# **Executive Summary and Recommendations**

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This Executive Summary provides an overview of the main issues arising from the review of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations (RACE), as well as setting out the recommendations of the Advisory Group. The chapter begins with a short explanation of the current scheme, as well as an account of the establishment and work of the Advisory Group. Thereafter, the chapter identifies and gives an overview of the key issues arising from the Advisory Group's deliberations. The subsequent section sets out the recommendations of the Advisory Group to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) on changes to enhance the RACE scheme. The final section of this chapter contains concluding remarks.

### **The Current RACE scheme**

The current RACE scheme administered by the SEC has its origins in Circular S40/94 entitled *Special Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities* which was issued by the Department of Education in 1994. This circular stated that the special arrangements were intended for candidates “who would have difficulty in communicating what they know to an Examiner because of a physical disability, including visual and hearing impairments, or a specific learning difficulty”. It also stated that the arrangements were intended:

- a) To remove, as far as possible, the impact of the disability on the candidate's performance and thus enable the candidate to demonstrate his/her level of attainment, and
- b) To ensure that, while giving candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment, the special arrangements will not give the candidate an unfair advantage over other candidates in the same examination.

These two key principles are core to any discussion or application of RACE. They encapsulate the fundamental challenge of, on the one hand, attempting to provide access for candidates with particular needs to demonstrate their level of attainment, while on the other, attempting to ensure that the principle of inter-candidate equity is not compromised in the measures taken to provide access.

In the year 2000, an Expert Advisory Group, chaired by Dr. Tom Kelleghan, reviewed the special arrangements scheme and, while the group confirmed the two key principles set out above, it also set out a more detailed Framework of Principles that underpins the current scheme. Arising out of the Kelleghan report, a number of changes were made to the scheme, and the recommendations of that report continue to inform the RACE scheme to the present day.

### **Advisory Group set up in 2007**

In January 2007, the State Examinations Commission appointed the present Advisory Group, chaired by Professor Áine Hyland, to review policy and practice in the RACE scheme. The terms of reference of the Advisory Group are as follows:

1. Having regard to both the importance of providing a state examinations system that promotes high standards of quality and integrity and the need to ensure access, participation and benefit for all students, to re-examine/review policy and practice in the area of reasonable accommodations.
2. In undertaking the re-examination/review, to consider all relevant issues and to take account of best practice internationally.
3. Arising from the re-examination/review of current policy and practice, to make appropriate recommendations to the SEC and to propose an implementation strategy for such recommendations, including details of the cost, timing and other practical considerations.
4. The Advisory Group will consult widely in its re-examination/review.

The Advisory Group met on 17 occasions between March 2007 and July 2008, and published a Consultative Document in October 2007, as well as a final report *Accommodating Students with Special Educational Needs* in November 2008.

The Advisory Group engaged in a wide-ranging consultative process, inviting written submissions from various groups and individuals and from the public at large; holding meetings with relevant individuals and groups; organising focus group meetings with a variety of stakeholders; and engaging in a Consultative Session in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, in October 2007 which was attended by about 150 people. In all, over 300 people participated in the consultative process, details of which are provided in Chapter 1 of this report.

The report takes account of the views articulated by various constituencies during the course of the consultation. These comprised past, current and future examination candidates, their parents, teachers and school principals as well as a variety of organisations and groups, and state and semi-state agencies, including those involved in providing services for people with disabilities. A wide range of perspectives was presented to the Advisory Group – some of which endorsed and supported current practices in relation to reasonable accommodations, others which argued for changes in the current RACE scheme.

Wide-ranging research was carried out on practices in other countries in relation to providing reasonable accommodations for examination candidates. Chapter 3 provides some international comparisons, focusing particularly on eligibility issues, exemptions and special conditions, and on the annotation of certificates.

The Advisory Group fully subscribes to the principle of an examination system which is accessible for all students, and the Advisory Group is committed to a scheme of reasonable accommodations which removes barriers that might prevent students with disabilities and/or those with special educational needs from demonstrating their attainment in the State examinations system.

## **Increase in numbers of candidates seeking Reasonable Accommodations**

Chapters 2 and 8 of the report document the growth in the numbers of candidates seeking reasonable accommodations in the State examinations system since 2001. The numbers of candidates seeking reading assistance at Junior Certificate level grew more than fourfold, from less than 750 in 2001 to 3,230 in 2008. The increase in the numbers seeking a spelling and grammar waiver in the language papers increased even more dramatically – at Junior Certificate, the numbers increased from 976 to 4,552 and at Leaving Certificate level the increase was from 264 in 2001 to 2,136 in 2008 – an eightfold increase. As the provision of reasonable accommodation often requires a candidate to be accommodated in a separate centre to his/her peers, the growth in the number of individual accommodations has been paralleled by a substantial growth in the number of separate examination centres. The number has more than

quadrupled since 2001 – increasing from 1,776 in 2001 to over 7,000 in 2008. The total of 7,000 separate centres compares with a total of 4,500 regular centres in the same year.

The numbers seeking Reasonable Accommodation on grounds of physical/sensory disability has fallen in the same period. At Leaving Certificate level, only 30 candidates sought and were granted enlarged papers in 2008 and only one candidate sought and obtained a Braille version of an examination paper. Similarly the numbers using a tape recorder because of a physical/sensory disability fell from over 70 in 2004 to 25 in 2008. These and other issues relating to specific accommodations are discussed in Chapter 8 of the report.

## **Key Issues**

The Advisory Group, having engaged in extensive consultation, research and debate, has distilled under twelve headings, the issues that emerged during its deliberations.

### **1. Complexity of the RACE scheme**

The Advisory Group was struck by the complexity of the RACE scheme and was impressed by the commitment of the staff of the SEC and of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to implementing the scheme meticulously and humanely. Each individual applicant for reasonable accommodation is considered individually on his/her own merits, and considerable time and effort is expended by the staff of the SEC on each application, especially at Leaving Certificate level. Many of the requests for Reasonable Accommodations occur during, or close to the time of the examinations and there can be considerable pressure on the SEC and on the staff of NEPS to respond. Some of these late applications are unexpected and could not have been foreseen, e.g. applications in respect of candidates who, because of an accident or illness, require reasonable accommodations. However, other late applications are more difficult to justify, particularly applications on grounds of long-standing learning disabilities which are not brought to the attention of the SEC until shortly before the examinations are to be held. However, the Advisory Group noted that the staff of the SEC responds comprehensively and sympathetically to every application, within the context of the limitations of the current RACE scheme.

### **2. Implications of Curriculum Flexibility and Choice for the RACE scheme**

The Advisory Group is aware that the increasing flexibility and the wider choice provided by the various forms of the Leaving Certificate (the established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and the Leaving Certificate Applied) add to the complexity of the situation. The range and levels of subjects have increased in recent years and are likely to increase further in the coming years, especially if the recommendations of the recent Senior Cycle documents issued by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) are accepted. A series of consultative documents on curriculum provision at Senior Cycle issued between 2002 and 2004 culminated in the document “Proposals for the Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland” which was submitted to the Minister for Education and Science in 2005. These and other curricular developments are likely to have implications for the RACE scheme.

The implications of universal access to curriculum and examinations, as set down in the 1998 Education Act, the EPSEN Act (2004) and other legislation, were also taken into account by the Advisory Group, and the Group was impressed by the growing number of candidates with various disabilities, including specific learning disabilities, who are accommodated annually by the RACE scheme at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. The provision of an inclusive curriculum and an inclusive learning environment from the early years, up to and including further education, and third and fourth level education, has provided educational opportunities

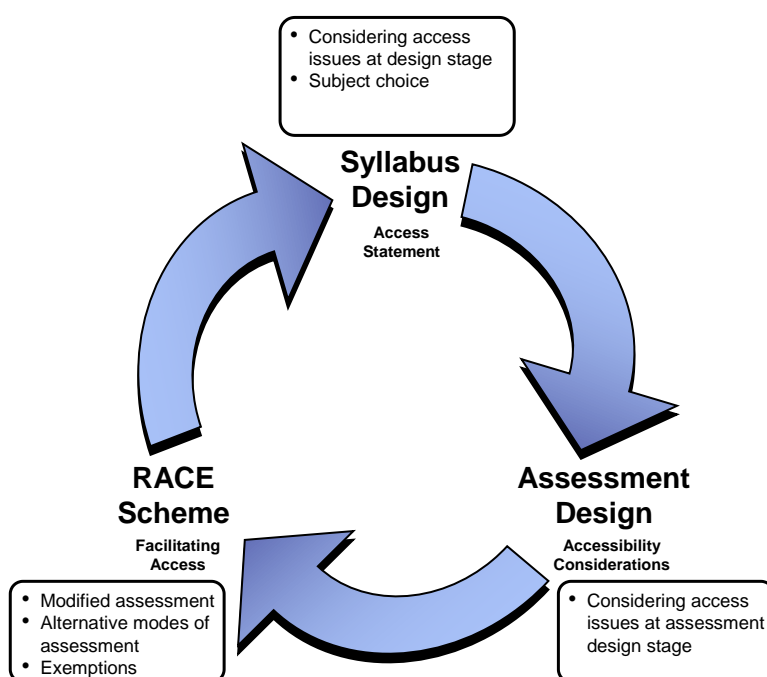
for students of all abilities, some of whom would have been excluded in the past from such opportunities, and this has created new expectations of and demands for Reasonable Accommodations. In a lifelong learning context, the issue of continuity of educational provision and of coherence in curricula, assessment and reasonable accommodations, needs to be borne in mind by all education and training providers and by the various certification and qualifications bodies. Relevant and timely information and guidance for pupils, their parents and teachers and others involved in the education and training process are particularly important in this context. This issue is discussed in Chapter 7.

### 3. Link between Curriculum Design, Assessment and Reasonable Accommodations

Throughout its deliberations, the Advisory Group was cognisant of the inextricable link between curriculum design and the design and process of assessment and examinations, and their implications for Reasonable Accommodations. A key issue which arose in this regard, related to skills or competences that might be regarded as fundamental or “core” to certain subjects. For example, the question was raised as to whether a candidate who was aurally impaired could be exempt from the aural component of Music and yet be deemed to pass that subject. The issue to be considered was whether aural skills should be deemed a “core” element of the subject Music. Similarly, the question of a candidate who because of a physical disability or visual impairment could not attempt the Life Sketching element of an Art paper was raised. Could such a candidate be exempt from the Life Sketching element and still be deemed to pass the subject Art? In language subjects, the issue of whether elements such as spelling and grammar might be regarded as core elements was also raised.

Some submissions argued that a candidate who did not demonstrate competence in core elements could not be deemed to pass the subject; others argued that such candidates should be exempt from that element of the subject and be allowed to compensate by their performance in other elements of the subject. It was noted that in some other countries, the core elements of a syllabus or curriculum are explicitly identified at curriculum design stage and students who might have difficulty accessing those elements, might be advised not to present the subject for examination purposes.

The Advisory Group considers that access issues should be fully considered at each stage:



#### **4. The Application of RACE to candidates undertaking the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme**

Unlike the established Leaving Certificate, which consists of a combination of individual subjects, the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme is a single award made on the basis of credits accumulated over two years and in the final examination. (Details of the curriculum and assessment of the Leaving Certificate Applied are given in Chapter 6 of this report). In recent years, a growing number of candidates has sought and been granted exemptions from some elements of the Programme, including full subjects, especially Irish and other language components. Such exemptions have the potential to undermine the integrated nature of the Leaving Certificate Applied.

#### **5. Implications of Developments in Assistive Technology**

The Advisory Group was aware that the increasing sophistication of computer technology and the development of new forms of assistive technology will continue to provide the means for students to access elements of a subject(s) which formerly might not have been accessible. Some submissions outlined examples of such technology and their potential for inclusion in the RACE Scheme. For example, speech-recognition computer software has made it possible for students with a physical disability or visual or other impairment to access examinations in a way that would not have been possible until recently.

Increasingly sophisticated technology also has implications for the application and administration of the RACE scheme. The Advisory Group was impressed by developments in Scotland where schools may now apply online for Reasonable Accommodations. This has helped to streamline the process of considering and approving Reasonable Accommodations, as well as providing a tool for efficient and timely statistical analysis of the overall situation.

#### **6. Assessing Eligibility for Reasonable Accommodations**

The Advisory Group noted the differences in assessing eligibility for Reasonable Accommodations at Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. At Junior Certificate level, a significant degree of autonomy is devolved to schools to identify candidates who require Reasonable Accommodations. While the SEC formally approves each candidate for whom Reasonable Accommodation is sought at both Junior and Leaving Certificates, it does not normally investigate each individual applicant at Junior Certificate, or formally examine in detail the supporting evidence provided by the candidate's school.

In recognition of the higher-stakes nature of the Leaving Certificate, a more rigorous approach is taken to the assessment of eligibility for the RACE scheme at that level. There is greater involvement of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), and all applications for reasonable accommodations, apart from those on sensory or physical grounds which are verified by medical evidence, are referred by the SEC to a NEPS psychologist for assessment. All documentation in relation to each application, including psychological assessments, samples of a candidate's hand writing, and other appropriate material, is made available for evaluation as part of the decision-making process. The Advisory Group noted that in a growing number of cases, applications for reasonable accommodations at Leaving Certificate are accompanied by a report from a private psychologist commissioned by the applicant. Though such a report is not a requirement of the RACE Scheme, when supplied, it forms part of the evidence considered by the NEPS psychologist.

A number of submissions to the Advisory Group drew attention to the importance of candidates having adequate advance notice of what Reasonable Accommodations, if any, they would be entitled to. Complaints were made that some candidates were not informed until very shortly before the examination as to whether or not their application for Reasonable Accommodations had been successful. The Advisory Group noted that in some of these cases,

applications had been made very late and as the initial evidence in some cases was not convincing or was incomplete, further information had to be sought before a decision could be made by the SEC.

The Advisory Group also noted that the proportion of candidates who are granted Reasonable Accommodations varies considerably from school to school and that there is no discernible pattern to explain this variation. Whereas the national average of candidates granted Reasonable Accommodations is around 6.4%, the Group notes that the proportion varies between schools where no candidate is granted Reasonable Accommodation, and schools where up to 35% of candidates are granted such accommodations. The Group also noted that it is not clear whether or not there is a correlation between the proportion of students in a school who are in receipt of special needs support and the proportion being granted Reasonable Accommodation.

## **7. Early Identification of Pupils with Special Educational Needs – Relationship between Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and the RACE scheme**

With the setting up of the National Council for Special Education, the earlier identification of pupils with special educational needs, and the requirement that Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) be prepared as early as possible for pupils with special educational needs, the Advisory Group expects that in the future, those pupils who require special educational support and may need reasonable accommodation in examinations, would be identified relatively early on in their years of schooling. It is expected that IEPs will play a valuable role in informing teaching, learning and assessment. In its deliberations, the Advisory Group concluded that the existence of an IEP, whilst not automatically guaranteeing a reasonable accommodation, would serve to sign post where an accommodation might be needed. As indicated in Chapter 5, there could be many reasons why a student with an IEP would not require or be eligible for a Reasonable Accommodation in an examinations situation. In this regard, the Advisory Group noted that training and information sessions have been made available in the past for Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) to help ensure that IEPs are drawn up in the context of an accurate understanding of the purpose and scope of the RACE scheme.

## **7. Exemptions**

The concept of exemptions from elements of assessment was initially proposed by the Expert Advisory Group in 2000, which recommended that where a candidate's disability might be such that it is not possible for him or her to participate in a particular mode of assessment (e.g. an aural examination for a candidate with severe aural impairment) it should be open to the candidate to apply for exemption from part of the assessment process.

During the consultative process, it was suggested to the Advisory Group that the current approach to exemptions under the RACE scheme appears to vary across subjects. For example, in the case of a modern language such as French, a student with an aural impairment may be exempted from the aural component of the examination, whereas in the case of Art, a candidate who is not able to attempt the Life Sketching element will not be granted an exemption. This refusal is justified on the basis that the Life Sketching element constitutes such a fundamental element of the study of Art that to exempt it from assessment would fundamentally impinge on the integrity of the assessment.

When an exemption is granted from an element of a subject, the candidate's overall marks are adjusted proportionately, so that he/she is not penalised for failing to take this element of the examination. For example, where an exemption is granted in the aural component of a language examination, the candidate's result is calculated on the balance of work undertaken by the candidate. In those circumstances, and in order to protect the integrity of the examinations, the assessment implications of the exemption is then explained in an annotation to the candidate's

certificate which states that “all parts of the examination were assessed except the aural component”.

## **8. Spelling and Grammar Waiver**

A reasonable accommodation, known as the spelling and grammar waiver, is available in some language subjects. It was first introduced in 2000 when Circular S70/2000 stated that “under the principles identified by the Expert Advisory Group, candidates with spell check enabled computers or the assistance of a scribe, effectively are granted a waiver in relation to the assessment of the spelling and grammatical elements in language subjects”. The circular went on to state that “From 2001, a candidate whose specific learning difficulty is not severe enough to warrant the grant of such facilities may nonetheless opt for a waiver in relation to assessment of spelling/grammar etc. in language subjects”. The circular also noted that where this arrangement is granted “the candidate will have his/her grade determined on the balance of the work in the subject and the results will be accompanied by an explanatory note to the effect that all elements of the language subject in question were assessed except the spelling and grammatical elements”. As has been noted earlier, the number of candidates seeking a grammar and spelling waiver in the Leaving Certificate has grown exponentially in recent years, increasing eightfold from 264 in 2001 to 2,136 in 2008.

It should be noted that this waiver only applies in language subjects. Since spelling and grammar are not assessed in subjects other than language, a spelling/grammar waiver would be irrelevant in those subjects. The process of applying for a waiver is similar to that of the exemption. The waiver is applied in a similar way to the exemption. Candidates who are granted a spelling and grammar waiver are not marked for spelling and grammar and their grade is determined on the balance of the work done in the subject. Their certificates are annotated to explain this accommodation, in the same way as the certificates of those granted an exemption, are annotated.

During the consultative process, it was brought to the attention of the Advisory Group that the spelling and grammar waiver does not appear to be consistently applied in all languages. For example, in non-curricular languages such as Polish or Portuguese, there is no provision for a spelling and grammar waiver. It was also represented to the Advisory Group that some examiners and assistant examiners find it very difficult to apply the waiver when marking language papers, as they regard spelling and grammar as an intrinsic or “core” element of language. Some submissions suggested that the special educational needs of some candidates who had been granted a spelling and grammar waiver in the Certificate Examinations were not always apparent. The point was also made that a waiver from spelling and grammar is inconsistent with the national emphasis on literacy, since spelling and grammar are core elements of language and literacy. It was also argued that a spelling and grammar waiver in a language subject is educationally unsound.

The Advisory Group carried out wide-ranging research into the situation in other countries and could not find any other national or State examination system with a spelling and grammar waiver analogous to that applied in the Irish State examinations system.

## **9. Additional Time**

Under existing arrangements, there are two main provisions in the RACE scheme relating to additional time. These are

- The pilot project in additional time that was introduced in 2000 in a selected number of subjects. Under this pilot project, an additional 20 minutes of examination time was made available on a pilot basis to all candidates in Irish, English, History and Geography. In recent years, instead of being regarded as a bonus, the extra time is often

regarded as a burden for students, and has been adversely commented on by the media, by parents and by politicians.

- In the case of candidates with visual impairments and candidates using mechanical aids, an additional 10 minutes per hour of examination time is available, up to a maximum of 30 minutes. This accommodation and the pilot project in additional time run concurrently i.e. the total allocation of additional time cannot exceed 30 minutes.

A number of submissions were critical of the pilot project in additional time, and argued that it was not serving the purpose for which it was intended. One contributor went as far as stating that “this measure confers an advantage on students who do not have special educational needs and who tend to be in the higher achievement group”. This view was shared by another who believed that the extra time “confers benefits primarily on the most able academically and does not achieve its intended aim of facilitating completion of these examinations by students availing of reasonable accommodations .... Its general effect is to exacerbate rather than mitigate inequity”.

## **10. Candidates who encounter Trauma and Adversity**

Another issue which was raised consistently during the consultative process, was the issue of candidates who encounter trauma and adversity close to and during the period of the examinations. These include accidents, illness, bereavement and other trauma. The SEC estimates that about 1,000 such cases present annually and in most cases, especially cases of bereavement, there is limited provision in the RACE scheme to accommodate such candidates.

Special mention was made of the situation of candidates who suffered bereavement during the examination period. Under the current system, such a candidate must sit each paper on the day on which that examination paper is timetabled. This can result in a candidate attending the funeral of a parent or close relative on the morning of an examination (accompanied by the school principal or other authority figure who must ensure that the candidate does not access any information relating to the examination paper) and sitting the relevant examination later that afternoon. Other cases cited included situations where a candidate had to undergo an emergency operation in the morning and sit an examination in his/her hospital bed that afternoon or evening.

## **11. The Candidate's Normal Way of Working**

During the consultative process, the Advisory Group became aware that some candidates seek and are given Reasonable Accommodations in an examinations context, which are not consistent with their normal way of working. For example, situations were highlighted where candidates who do not normally have access to a Reader, or to a Scribe, either in their learning environment or in house or “mock” examinations, encountered a Reader or a Scribe for the first time in the context of a State examination. Such a situation raises questions about the advisability or necessity of such a Reasonable Accommodation, except in rare cases where an unexpected injury or accident during the course of the examination resulted in a candidate being unable to access the examination in the normal way.



## **Key Recommendations**

The Advisory Group endorses and supports many of the policies and practices of the current RACE scheme, and commends the SEC for its humane and positive approach to requests for Reasonable Accommodations. However, following very careful consideration of the issues and concerns that arose during its research, consultation and deliberations, the Advisory Group makes a number of recommendations to the SEC, which are intended to further enhance and improve the RACE scheme. These are summarised below:

### **Framework of Principles**

The revised Framework of Principles, presented in Chapter 4, which takes account of legislative, educational and social environment changes, should replace the current Framework of Principles set out in the 2000 report.

### **Normal way of working**

Reasonable Accommodations should, as far as possible, reflect a candidate's normal way of working.

### **Timeliness**

Applications for, and decisions in relation to Reasonable Accommodations should be made during the academic year prior to the year in which the students are due to sit the examination and should be communicated to candidates by the end of that year.

### **Assessing eligibility**

NEPS should continue to be involved in assessing eligibility for accommodations at Leaving Certificate level. Reports from private psychologists, where provided, should be required to conform to a pre-determined template. Appropriate guidelines should also be made available for private psychologists, including guidelines on identifying and applying appropriate tests; interpretation of the results of tests and implications of results of tests for RACE. Advisory and training courses/sessions might be provided to ensure that private psychologists are accurately informed of the purpose and scope of Reasonable Accommodations.

The SEC should examine, in consultation with other education agencies, the feasibility of establishing an approved list of private psychologists whose reports conform to, and are aligned with, the requirements of the different agencies.

In its consideration of the inclusion of students with general learning disability (GLD) in the RACE scheme, the Advisory Group acknowledged the progress that has been made in recent years in the inclusion of students with GLDs in mainstream education. The Advisory Group considers that the provision of a range of appropriate awards for which curricula and assessment can be elaborated, is the most appropriate means of addressing the needs of all students, and, in particular, those with General Learning Disabilities. It therefore recommends that the RACE scheme should not be extended to candidates with GLDs, unless the co-existence of a Specific Learning Difficulty is established.

The Advisory Group is of the view that the issue of linguistic barriers to accessing the examination papers is not one which should be addressed under the RACE scheme.

## **Audit**

Regular monitoring and audit of the implementation of the RACE scheme should be undertaken, with priority being given to monitoring schools which are significantly above or significantly below the national average. Such data be collected, collated and published on a regular basis.

## **Syllabus and curricular issues**

The Advisory Group recommends that where there are core elements of a subject, from which no candidate should be exempt, such core elements should be identified at syllabus design stage. Students with special educational needs should be made aware from an early stage of the implications of this for examination and certification purposes.

The Advisory Group recommends that the SEC consults with the NCCA as a matter of urgency to review the issue of accommodations in the LCA programme, so that policy in this area is clarified and agreed. The outcome of this review should then be circulated to those concerned.

The Advisory Group recommends that the SEC together with the NCCA, considers setting up a Disability Advisory Panel, consisting of people with special educational needs and their representatives, to advise on disability issues in the design and delivery of syllabus and assessment arrangements.

## **Schools**

Each school's Special Needs Policy document should include a statement of policy and practice on RACE, including assessment of eligibility.

The Advisory Group recognises the key role of the school principal in liaising with the SEC on matters relating to the State examinations. It is also aware that, in view of the increasing responsibilities which devolve to the principal, it may be desirable that a person be designated within each school with specific responsibility for the RACE scheme.

## **Accommodations**

### **Exemptions**

The Advisory Group supports the principle of exemptions from elements of an examination, but recommends that an exemption should be the final option for candidates with special needs.

### **Annotations**

The Advisory Group recommends that where exemptions are granted, or where the nature of an accommodation results in a change to the assessment construct, certificates should continue to be annotated, as is currently the situation.

### **Spelling and Grammar waiver**

The Advisory Group recommends that serious consideration be given by the State Examinations Commission to the withdrawal of the spelling and grammar waiver in those subjects where it is currently permitted. It is recommended that the views of NCCA be sought on this particular issue as a matter of urgency. On receipt of these views the SEC should give immediate attention to reviewing its current practice in this area of the RACE scheme.

### **Enlargements**

Enlarged print examination papers should continue to be made available, as should examination questions on audio-tape/CD where appropriate. The current practice of enlarging the pages of the examinations paper should be replaced by a system where a Larger Typeface can be used.

Consideration might be given to making the Enlarged Typeface versions available to candidates with specific learning disabilities such as Dyslexia, where such an accommodation is appropriate.

### **Readers and scribes**

Readers and scribes should continue to be permitted for those for whom such accommodations are appropriate. The role and function of the reader or scribe may need to be more specifically delineated and monitored to allay concerns that readers and scribes may sometimes go beyond their prescribed role and provide prompting or other inappropriate supports to candidates. The Advisory Group noted that in some countries, candidates who are granted the use of a scribe must spell out each word of the examination script.

### **Audio versions**

The use of an audio version of the examination papers could be made available, thereby reducing the need for special centres, as well as helping to increase efficiency and ensure the integrity of the examination.

### **Technology**

The use of other forms of technology, such as computers instead of scribes and increased use of silent assistive technology, might be an appropriate form of reasonable accommodation for some candidates, and might also help to reduce the number of special centres.

### **Additional time**

The Advisory Group recommends that the pilot project of 20 additional minutes in Irish, English, History and Geography at Leaving Certificate be discontinued at the earliest possible date.

Accommodations of additional time - normally to a maximum of 10 minutes per hour - should continue to be made available for candidates with special educational needs or a specific learning disability. In exceptional situations, the amount of additional time might be as much as 25% extra.

### **Trauma and adversity**

The Advisory Group recommends that the SEC consider the pros and cons of each of the four options set out in Chapter 9 of this report and that it engage in a process of consultation with the education partners to discuss all relevant issues and to consider the feasibility of devising, agreeing and implementing an appropriate scheme to cater for cases of trauma and adversity.

## **Communication/collaboration between agencies**

The Advisory Group commends and recommends that communication between the SEC and the range of agencies in relation to developments and changes in the RACE scheme, continues and develops further, thus ensuring that these groups are aware of the purpose and application of the scheme.

## **Information and Training**

Information and Training sessions on the RACE scheme and its implications for individual students, should continue to be made available for Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs), in the context of the preparation of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs).

Advisory and training sessions should be provided by the SEC, and where appropriate by NEPS, for school staff, especially staff members directly involved in assessing applications for Reasonable Accommodations.

## **Conclusion**

While this report addresses the issues which came to the Advisory Group's attention during the course of its deliberations, it does not purport to be all-encompassing or conclusive. Neither does it attempt to predict the future. The Advisory Group has noted the considerable advances and changes which have occurred in Irish education, especially in the area of providing for students with special educational needs, since the Kelleghan report was issued less than a decade ago. It is likely that the pace of change will continue for the next decade and that the RACE scheme will have to be adjusted regularly in response to change. The Advisory Group therefore recommends that the SEC carries out regular and ongoing review of the RACE scheme, bearing in mind the growth of assistive technology, increasing, growing awareness of emotional and behavioural disorders as well as mental health issues and more sophisticated modes of assessment which will bring to the fore new and unanticipated challenges which may require Reasonable Accommodation in the State Examinations system.

## **1. Introduction**

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### **1.1 The Advisory Group on Reasonable Accommodations**

In January 2007, the State Examinations Commission established an Advisory Group to review policy and practice in Reasonable Accommodations in the State Examinations. The members of the Advisory Group on Reasonable Accommodations were:

Professor Áine Hyland, former Vice-President, University College Cork (Chairperson)

Mr Liam Arundel, former CEO of City of Dublin VEC

Ms Sarah Craig, Head of Disability Databases Unit, Health Research Board

Ms Eilis Humphreys, Principal, St. Louis High School, Rathmines, Dublin 6, (Currently seconded to the Leadership Development for Schools programme as an Assistant National Coordinator)

Ms Anna Kelly, Director of Curriculum and Quality Assurance, FÁS

Ms Isabel Nisbet, Acting Chief Executive, Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, England

The Advisory Group was assisted in its work by staff members of the State Examinations Commission. These were:

Ms Andrea Feeney, Principal Officer, who was Secretary to the Group\*

Mr Michael Kiely, Principal Officer, Operations Division, who provided advice on operational matters

Mr Jerome Leonard, Assistant Head, Examinations and Assessment Division who provided advice and research assistance on examinations and assessment issues.

\*Ms Kathleen Kiveney, Principal Officer (Acting), and Ms Patricia Anderson, Assistant Principal Officer (Acting) also undertook the task on occasion.

The Advisory Group met on seventeen occasions between March 2007 and July 2008.

### **1.2 Terms of Reference**

The Terms of Reference of the Advisory Group were:

1. Having regard to both the importance of providing a state examinations system that promotes high standards of quality and integrity and the need to ensure access, participation and benefit for all students, to re-examine/review policy and practice in the area of reasonable accommodations.

2. In undertaking the re-examination/review to consider all relevant issues and to take account of best practice internationally.
3. Arising from the re-examination/review of current policy and practice, to make appropriate recommendations to the SEC and to propose an implementation strategy for such recommendations, including details of the cost, timing and other practical considerations.
4. The Advisory Group will consult widely in its re-examination/review.

## **1.3 Methodology**

In accordance with its terms of reference, the Advisory Group undertook a comprehensive programme of work. This included:

- an extensive consultation process
- meetings with statutory and other bodies
- a literature and documentary review
- research on international practice in relation to assessment arrangements for candidates who have special needs
- a statistical analysis of issues pertaining to the current scheme.

As part of its deliberations, the Advisory Group also visited the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in Dalkeith near Edinburgh in September 2007.

The Advisory Group noted that there is no universally recognised set of terms within the field of reasonable accommodations. The terminology includes, for example, ‘access arrangements’, ‘special arrangements’, ‘accommodations’, ‘reasonable accommodations’, ‘reasonable adjustments’, ‘standard accommodations’, ‘non-standard accommodations’, ‘alternate assessment’ ‘special considerations’ and ‘modifications’.

The term ‘Reasonable Accommodations’ is the term used in Ireland and is used throughout this report. The term ‘accommodation’ has a legal interpretation in the Equal Status Act, 2000. Section 4 (1) of The Act states

For the purposes of this Act discrimination includes a refusal or failure by the provider of a service to do all that is reasonable to accommodate the needs of a person with a disability by providing special treatment or facilities, if without such special treatment or facilities it would be impossible or unduly difficult for the person to avail himself or herself of the service.

### **Consultation process**

#### **(a) Consultation**

Invitations for submissions to the Advisory Group were published in the national media in April 2007. At this time, contact was also made with the National Disability Authority and representative organisations were written to individually and invited to make submissions. All submissions received were acknowledged and a sample of the submissions received was made available in the Reasonable Accommodations section of the State Examinations Commission website ([www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie)).

The submissions received were analysed thematically and the analysis was subsequently published as part of a *Consultative Document on Reasonable Accommodations* in October 2007. In addition to presenting the analysis of the submissions received, the *Consultative Document* outlined the educational, legislative and assessment context, summarised the main provisions of the current Scheme, and presented a number of key questions and issues for discussion. These were based on the analysis of the submissions received, preliminary research conducted by the Advisory Group and on studies undertaken both of current practice in the State Examinations Commission and of international practice.

Some submissions to the Advisory Group referred to issues that were outside the scope of the terms of reference. These included, for example, issues related to the nature of the state examinations and requests to consider a greater reliance on school-based assessments.

A Consultation Session on Reasonable Accommodations was held in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, Dublin on 17 October 2007. In addition to all individuals and groups who had made submissions to the Advisory Group, invitations were also extended to other organisations. Chaired by Dr John Bowman, the Consultation Session provided a further opportunity for individuals and groups to express their views on the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations and on related issues to the Advisory Group. Over 300 people participated in the Consultation Session.

#### (b) Focus Groups

The Advisory Group commissioned an independent company specialising in social research, Ralaheen Ltd., to organise, facilitate and report to the Advisory Group on the outcomes of a series of Focus Group meetings. The Focus Groups included current and former candidates, parents, Principals and Deputy-Principals, teachers, Special Needs Co-ordinators and Resource Teachers, Visiting Teachers and Disability Officers in third-level institutions. The rationale for the Focus Groups was to further develop the consultative process and to ensure that the views of the users of the system were taken account of and to allow the Advisory Group to explore in further depth the views of users and other relevant personnel.

The report on the outcomes of the Focus Group discussions contained a significant amount of qualitative research and constituted a significant resource of material for the Advisory Group in its deliberations. The Report on the Focus Groups is produced in Appendix XXX.

#### (c) Meetings with statutory and other bodies

The Advisory Group held meetings with a number of bodies and groups including the following:

- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)
- National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS)
- The Chief Executive of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE)
- The Commissioners of the State Examinations Commission (SEC)
- The Executive and Management of the State Examinations Commission
- A number of Chief Examiners from the State Examinations Commission
- AHEAD - The Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
- The Independent Appeals Committee on Reasonable Accommodations
- Ralaheen Ltd. – the social research company that was commissioned to organise and report on the Focus Groups
- The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

#### (d) Research

Research was conducted on international policy and practice in Reasonable Accommodations and focussed in particular on practice in Australia, New Zealand, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland and the United States. The theme of the research was based on comparative studies of practice in relation to Reasonable Accommodations and examined issues such as the published principles that underpinned the accommodations, legislative provision, the actual accommodations provided, and any special conditions pertaining to particular accommodations.

The State Examinations Commission provided a significant amount of material to the Advisory Group and was particularly helpful in the provision of information on procedures and administration, current practice and statistics on the current scheme. The statistics provided an interesting lens through which aspects of the current scheme could be viewed.

In addition to research conducted by the Advisory Group itself and by its support staff, a significant amount of research material was sourced externally.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England, for example, provided the Group with valuable research that it had undertaken in the field. The International Unit of the QCA made available its briefing document *Assessment for Students with disabilities: an international comparison* (QCA, 2007). This paper provided a briefing on assessment arrangements for students with disabilities in various countries. The paper was based on research conducted using international networks and literature. An enquiry was sent to two international networks: Eurydice – the European Commission’s information network on education in Europe ([www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)), and INCA which is QCA’s international curriculum and assessment network ([www.inca.org.uk](http://www.inca.org.uk)).

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) in Drumcondra facilitated a request for information through the OECD network of country representatives. The responses, which were mainly by email, yielded some interesting material, findings, and observations from individual country representatives.

The research informed the work of the Advisory Group in its consideration of a wide range of issues. Chapter 3 *Reasonable Accommodations – some international comparisons* presents some key findings with regard to current practice internationally. In addition, examples and illustrations of practice in other jurisdictions are referred to throughout the report, where appropriate.

#### (e) Visit to Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

In September 2007, the Advisory Group visited the Scottish Qualifications Authority in Dalkeith, near Edinburgh. While a particular focus of the visit was on the arrangements in place in Scotland with regard to candidates who are absent from examinations through illness or who have experienced particular trauma at examination time, the visit also included presentations and discussions with SQA officials on other aspects of policy and practice in the Scottish educational context. These included the administration of the scheme in Scotland and in particular, the online application system developed by the SQA. Issues relating to Reasonable Accommodations generally were also discussed.

## **1.4 Rationale**

In undertaking its work, the Advisory Group adopted the approach that the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations should

- provide for the needs of candidates who require accommodations in examinations



- contain appropriate measures to ensure that accommodations are given only to candidates who genuinely require them
- uphold the published assessment principles of the State Examinations Commission and, in so doing, maintain the integrity of the assessment process

The Advisory Group was aware of legal proceedings that were taken in relation to the particular issue of the annotation of certificates in particular circumstances and a claim of discrimination under the Equal Status Act by virtue of the annotation. The Circuit Court found that the annotation of certificates in particular circumstances was not discriminatory. The outcome has been appealed to the High Court and while this appeal has not been heard at the time of writing, subsequent legal developments may impact on future developments in this area. The issue of the annotation of certificates is considered in Chapter 3 and Chapter 9.

One core issue that the Advisory Group considered was the manner in which one defines the parameters of the scheme in terms of eligibility. For example, is it possible to devise a single scheme that is capable of catering for the broad range of candidates who require accommodations in state examinations? Another issue that the Advisory Group considered was whether a legal definition of special educational needs, such as that provided in the EPSEN Act, 2004 should be the means of defining eligibility? These issues are considered further in Chapter 5.

As the work of the Advisory Group progressed, three main categories of candidates were identified for whom accommodations may be required. These included:

- candidates with physical, sensory and specific learning disabilities (SLDs)
- newcomer students whose first language is not English or Irish and candidates with general learning disabilities (GLDs)
- candidates who are absent through illness at examination time or suffer trauma or bereavement at examination time.

The Circulars dealing with Reasonable Accommodations are S40/94, S11/2000 and S70/2000. Circular S40/94 states that the special arrangements were intended for candidates ‘who would have difficulty in communicating what they know to an Examiner because of a physical disability, including visual and hearing impairments, or a specific learning difficulty’. It also states that the arrangements were intended

- (a) to remove, as far as possible, the impact of the disability on the candidate’s performance and thus enable the candidate to demonstrate his/her level of attainment and
- (b) to ensure that, while giving candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment, the special arrangements will not give the candidate an unfair advantage over other candidates in the same examination.

Issues regarding eligibility for the scheme are considered in Chapter 5.

## **1.5 Outline of the Report**

The *Executive Summary and Recommendations* summarises the main issues, findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Advisory Group.

Chapter 1 *Introduction* outlines the membership of the Advisory Group, its Terms of Reference, the methodology employed by the Group in conducting its work, and the overall structure of the report.

Chapter 2 *Context* describes a number of contextual issues including, for example, the educational, legislative and examinations backgrounds. It also refers to the development of the current Scheme and summarises its main provisions. The application process, and in particular, the differences between the processes at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate are also described.

Chapter 3 *Reasonable Accommodations – some international comparisons* provides an overview of practice in other jurisdictions. It describes common characteristics of a number of systems including available accommodations, application procedures, eligibility requirements and conditions attaching to particular accommodations. It also refers to the issue of the annotation of certificates in particular circumstances, and to measures that other jurisdictions have established to ensure that the integrity of the assessment process is maintained and is not compromised by the granting of particular accommodations.

Chapter 4 *Review of Principles underpinning the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations* considers the principles in the context of developments in research, in assessment, and in understanding of the nature and concept of disability. A set of principles was drafted and implemented in 2000. These were revisited by the Advisory Group in the context of legislative, societal and educational change. It is hoped that the principles recommended by the Advisory Group in this chapter will form a sound basis for decision making into the future in what is generally acknowledged to be a complex and evolving area.

Chapter 5 *Eligibility issues* consider the fundamental purpose of the RA Scheme before addressing the different models currently in place at Junior and Leaving Certificate. Eligibility for the Scheme is discussed and issues such as the role of private psychological assessments are considered. This chapter also considers the eligibility of students with general learning disabilities in the scheme, and newcomer students whose first language is not English or Irish. Issues relating to the delivery of the scheme at school and centre level and the involvement of various personnel are also considered. Finally, some measures are proposed with regard to the development of the scheme in the medium to longer term.

In Chapter 6, *Curricular and syllabus issues*, the Advisory Group considers the role of curriculum and syllabus design in the context of Reasonable Accommodations. The chapter considers current syllabi and the design of syllabi in the future from the particular standpoint of considering issues of access throughout the design stage. The Advisory Group also considers access issues within the continuum from syllabus design through to completion of the assessment process.

Chapter 7 *Provision of Information on the Scheme* examines the information on the scheme that is currently available and considers some measures to enhance awareness of the scheme generally, its specific provisions and eligibility requirements. It was apparent from the consultative process that there was a need for greater awareness of, and information on, the scheme to be available to the public generally and to candidates and parents on the purpose, rationale, provisions and procedures of the scheme generally.

Chapter 8 *Specific Accommodations* examines the accommodations currently available and makes a number of recommendations with regard to the ongoing development of the scheme.

Chapter 9 *Trauma and adversity / absentee candidates* considers the issues associated with candidates who are absent from examinations due to illness or who suffer particular trauma or bereavement at examinations time. The Advisory Group examines current arrangements and provision for such candidates and considers some of the challenges involved in attempting to design an appropriate scheme. In the course of its deliberations, the Advisory Group formed the view that it is an imperative that appropriate measures are established to cater for these candidates and proposes a way forward in developing such measures.

There are three Appendices, as follows:

Appendix I includes a Bibliography.

Appendix II lists the submissions received during the consultative process. The submissions were summarised thematically and published in a Consultative Document in October 2007. The Consultative Document and a selection of submissions are available on the State Examinations Commission website - [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie)

Appendix III contains a Glossary of Terms and common acronyms.



## **2. Context**

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### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the context in which the state examinations - Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate (established), Leaving Certificate Vocational programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme - operate in Ireland.

The chapter begins by summarising the primary roles and responsibilities of the key players involved in examination policy and operation, as well as describing the characteristics and status of the state examinations. Two separate sets of principles are described - the assessment principles published by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) that underpin the preparation of test items and certification processes, and the Framework of Principles that underpin the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. The Scheme is commonly referred to as the RACE Scheme – Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations. Subsequent sections of the chapter outline the legislative background, elaborate on key elements of the current scheme including the range of accommodations provided, as well as detailing the application processes. The final section in the chapter records the level of increase in applications and accommodations granted in recent years.

### **2.2 The State Examinations - roles and responsibilities**

The state examinations in Ireland comprise the Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate (established), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA). The policy, development and operation of these examinations involve Government through the Minister for Education and Science, as well as two key agencies: the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) also plays a key role in relation to the assessment of applications under the RACE Scheme. The role and responsibilities of each is described below.

The Minister for Education and Science determines all policy matters in relation to the state examinations, including the syllabus content, the assessment structure, and the duration of these examinations.

Responsibility for the elaboration of national curricula, the development of syllabi, as well as assessment specifications, rests with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. Established in November 1987, the NCCA was reconstituted as a statutory body in July 2001. Its brief, as outlined in the Education Act (1998), is “to advise the Minister for Education and Science on matters relating to...the curriculum for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools and the assessment procedures employed in schools and examinations on subjects which are part of the curriculum” (41.1 a, b).

The NCCA undertakes its work in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including representatives of school managerial bodies, teacher unions, parent organisations, subject associations and higher education interests including universities and colleges, employer bodies,

as well as the DES and the SEC. As indicated previously, all curricula and assessment specifications are presented by the NCCA to the Minister for approval.

The SEC was established in March 2003 under Section 54 of the Education Act, 1998. The role of the State Examinations Commission (SEC) is ‘to provide a high quality State Examination and Assessment System incorporating the highest standards of openness, fairness and accountability’ (SEC Mission Statement).

The SEC is structured into two divisions – the Operations Division and the Examinations and Assessment Division. The Operations Division is responsible for the administrative and logistical functions entailed in running the national examinations for the three Leaving Certificate programmes, as well as the Junior Certificate. Responsibility for ensuring the quality and standards of these examinations rests with the Examinations and Assessment Division, including taking the necessary actions to maintain the highest standards in the preparation of each examination annually and requiring compliance with the specified protocols and procedures.

Using the curriculum and assessment framework, developed by the NCCA, and approved by the Minister, the SEC operates diverse modes of assessment to address the full range of candidate achievement, need and background and to evaluate a broad range of knowledge, skills and competencies. The range of assessment modes includes, for example, written examinations, oral, aural, practical tests, and coursework.

The Junior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate programmes culminate in the state examinations held in June each year. This is a significant logistical exercise, typically involving:

- 116,000 candidates in four examination programmes: Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate (established), Leaving Certificate Vocational programme and Leaving Certificate Applied programme
- 4,500 main examination centres, and almost 7000 separate examination centres
- 89 examination subjects
- 985,000 grades
- 1.8 million individual test items
- 3 million examination papers made up of 34 million A4 pages
- 250 different test components - oral, aural, practical, project and portfolio items and the written examination papers.

Established by the Department of Education and Science in September 1999, the National Educational Psychological Service plays a key role in relation to the assessment of applications for accommodations in the RACE Scheme on the grounds of specific learning difficulties. NEPS psychologists work with both primary and post-primary schools, and are concerned with learning, behaviour, social and emotional development. NEPS mission is “to support the personal, social and educational development of all children through the application of psychological theory and practice in education, having particular regard for children with special educational needs” (NEPS *Statement of Strategy 2001 – 2004*).

Applications for accommodations are made through the school to the SEC on behalf of candidates. In the case of Leaving Certificate, all applications for reasonable accommodations on grounds of a specific learning disability are referred to NEPS for determination. The application process is described in Section 2.3.5 below.

## 2.2.1 Characteristics and status of the State Examinations

In 1998, the Minister for Education and Science requested the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations to prepare a discussion paper on special arrangements at the examinations for students with special needs. The Discussion Paper was published in May 1999. Responses to the Discussion Paper were invited, following which a Report to the Minister for Education and Science entitled *Arrangements for the Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations* was produced in January 2000.

This report, including the framework of principles on which the provision of arrangements for candidates with special needs might be based, was accepted by the Minister and forms the basis of the current scheme.

With regard to the standing and status of the Leaving Certificate, the Expert Group on the Certificate Examinations (2000) stated:

The Leaving Certificate examination itself is a key point in students' lives in that it represents students' achievement after many years of education and it is used to make important decisions about future education.

It enjoys a high status both nationally and internationally.

It is essential that fairness to all candidates and the perception of that fairness be maintained in the administration of the examination (p. 2).

In contrast with the examination systems in many other jurisdictions, the Advisory Group notes that examinations for the Junior and Leaving Certificate programmes are terminal, centralised and, in the main, externally-assessed. The current testing schedule is operated within a timeframe constrained by the availability of centres, superintendents and examiners during the school vacation period, and the pressing requirement to have results available to feed into the college entry process conducted by the Central Applications Office (CAO).

The characteristics and status of the state examinations, and in particular, the Leaving Certificate, have been referred to in a number of documents and reports, such as the Commission on the Points System, the NCCA *Discussion Paper on Senior Cycle* (2002), and at various national and international conferences such as the Association for Educational Assessment (AEA Europe) and the International Association for Educational Assessment (IAEA). The certificate examinations in general and the Leaving Certificate examination in particular, are generally perceived as fair, equitable and possessing high standards of integrity and public confidence. They are the subject of intense scrutiny, both in the media and in the community generally. Given the importance of the Leaving Certificate as a selection mechanism for further education and employment, and the high standing in which this examination is held internationally, it is clear that no measure or action should be taken that in any way impinges on, or compromises, the standing and integrity of the examination. Indeed, the fact that it is a high stakes examination gives the requirement to protect and uphold the principle of inter-candidate equity added importance. This requires that no measure or action be taken which confers either advantage or disadvantage on any candidate or group of candidates.

The State Examinations Commission (SEC) is committed to maintaining and enhancing the credibility of the examination system. In order to do this, it is necessary to put in place procedures which will help to ensure that trustworthiness, impartiality, consistency and fairness are central to the operation of the state examinations. Any compromise of these principles, either real or perceived, has the potential to damage the integrity of the examination system and thereby undermine the current high level of public confidence in the system. The Advisory Group considers that while every effort must be made to ensure that the state examinations are

as accessible as possible, due cognisance must also be taken of the requirement to protect and maintain the integrity of the examinations.

## **2.2.2 The Assessment Principles underpinning the State Examinations**

As stated previously, the SEC is charged with the provision of a high-quality state examinations and assessment system. Various guidelines and protocols are published, which govern the operation of the examination system. Of relevance is the SEC document entitled *The Preparation of Test Items – Principles and Protocol* (2006), which outlines the principles that underpin the preparation of test items and the measures in place to ensure compliance with these principles. While all of the principles are important, the principles of validity, reliability and accessibility are of particular relevance in the context of Reasonable Accommodations. It is clear that all test items prepared by the SEC, including those prepared for candidates requiring Reasonable Accommodations, must both uphold and be in accordance with these core principles.

The following paragraphs have been summarised from the document *The Preparation of Test Items – Principles and Protocol* (SEC 2006) and issues of particular relevance to Reasonable Accommodations have been highlighted.

**Validity** refers to the accuracy with which an examination measures what it is intended to measure. Validity is achieved through a number of measures in accordance with the *Manual for Drafters, Setters and Assistant Setters* (SEC, 2003; revised 2006). These measures include, for example, the training of contract staff and the preparation of test items so as to ensure that each test item is governed by the aims and objectives of the relevant published syllabus and is representative of the syllabus content, as defined in the syllabus. Proposed modifications to the examination under the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations are evaluated by subject experts to assess the impact, if any, of the proposed modification on the validity of the examination.

**Reliability** refers to the consistency of the results produced by an examination. Reliability is achieved through, for example, clear and unambiguous test items, high standards of security and integrity and by ensuring that optional elements and modified versions of test items are similar in demand to the original versions.

**Freedom from bias** refers to the elimination, as far as possible, of bias from an examination. Bias is the presence of some characteristic of an examination that results in different levels of performance by candidates of the same level of achievement, but from different groups, such as different ethnic or gender groups.

**Inclusiveness and Equity** refer to the extent to which examinations should reflect an inclusive view of society and a respect for diversity.

**Discrimination** refers to the extent to which an individual test item, or an examination as a whole, effectively distinguishes between candidates of different underlying levels of achievement.

The **accessibility** of an examination refers to the extent to which all candidates are facilitated in demonstrating their achievements, in the context of the need to preserve the integrity, fairness and standards of the examination.

The principle of accessibility is of particular relevance in the context of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. Accessibility is achieved through minimising the need for adjustments in test items for candidates who have particular requirements; modifying examinations, where required, in accordance with the principles set out in the *Report on*



*Arrangements for the Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations* (2000), under the direction of the relevant Examination and Assessment Manager (EAM); and commissioning relevant specialists to modify prepared test items and other assessment materials and/or to advise EAMs in relation to the modification of examinations to meet particular needs.

## **2.3 The Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations**

This section introduces the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations; charts its history and evolution, details the principles underpinning it, as well as elaborating on the range of available accommodations and the associated application processes.

### **2.3.1 Evolution and Development**

A scheme of special arrangements (Reasonable Accommodations) has formally operated within the state examinations system in Ireland since 1994. Originally administered by the Examinations Branch of the Department of Education, the scheme has developed significantly both in nature and scope in recent years in response to a number of developments. These developments include a significant legislative framework in relation to issues of equality, equity and access to educational provision and services (see 2.3.2 below), developments in the understanding of the concept of disability and related issues, and increased awareness generally of rights and entitlements as enshrined in law.

General principles for the operation of what was, at that time, termed *Special Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities* were outlined in Circular S40/94. This Circular stated that the special arrangements were intended for candidates ‘who would have difficulty in communicating what they know to an Examiner because of a physical disability, including visual and hearing impairments, or a specific learning difficulty’. It also stated that the arrangements were intended:

- (a) to remove, as far as possible, the impact of the disability on the candidate’s performance and thus enable the candidate to demonstrate his/her level of attainment and
- (b) to ensure that, while giving candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment, the special arrangements will not give the candidate an unfair advantage over other candidates in the same examination.

These two issues are core to any discussion of Reasonable Accommodations in assessment. They encapsulate the fundamental conflict of, on the one hand, attempting to provide access to candidates with particular needs to demonstrate their level of attainment, while on the other, attempting to ensure that the principle of inter-candidate equity is not compromised in the measures taken to provide access. Resolution of this conflict ‘is likely to be complex and difficult’ (Expert Advisory Group, 2000, p.3).

The report of the Expert Group also outlined a Framework of Principles that underpin the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. It stated that ‘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’ (p. 4). The framework of principles was accepted by the Minister for Education and Science in 2000 as ‘a sound basis for dealing with this complex and difficult area’ (S11/2000). The scheme was further extended later in 2000 under the provisions of Circular S70/2000 (see also Chapter 8, section 8.4).

The implementation of the Expert Advisory Group Report (2000) marked a number of significant innovations in the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. Firstly, for example, it introduced the principle of exemption from elements of an examination. In such circumstances, the certificate awarded would be annotated to indicate the elements of the assessment on which the candidate's result was based.

Secondly, improved procedures in relation to examiners accessing candidates' scripts, in the case of legibility issues, for example, were introduced. Thirdly, an additional 20 minutes examination time was provided, on a pilot basis, for all candidates taking Leaving Certificate papers in Irish, English, History and Geography. These and other issues are considered in further detail in Chapter 8 - *Specific Accommodations*.

## **2.3.2 Legislative Framework**

A number of pieces of relevant legislation have been enacted and are operational since the Report of the Expert Group was published in 2000. These include the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000; the Equal Status Act, 2000-2004; the EPSEN Act, 2004 and the Disability Act, 2005. The Education Act, 1998 is also significant, as is the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999.

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) commissioned a legislative review as part of its *Implementation Report: Plan for the Phased implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004* (NCSE, 2006). This report was submitted to the Minister for Education and Science in October 2006.

NCSE (2006) notes that 'the Education Act deals with education generally, but does place a considerable emphasis on the rights of children with disabilities and special educational needs' (p. 79). The Education (Welfare) Act is focussed on ensuring that children receive a certain minimum education as required by the Constitution. The Equal Status Act prohibits discrimination on nine grounds, including the ground of disability. The EPSEN Act, 2004 aims to ensure that a person with special educational needs can be educated where possible in an inclusive environment.

NCSE notes that

...it seems logical to assume that the Education Act is the parent act and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs and the Education (Welfare) Act are giving effect to two specific elements of that constitutional right to education. Neither the Equal Status Act nor the Disability Acts are education acts, but they have some benefits to those seeking to be provided with education in the state (NCSE, 2006, p. 82).

It is interesting to note that four of the five Acts referred to above contain definitions of either disability or special educational needs.

The EPSEN Act, 2004, defines special educational need as

a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or learning disability, or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without that condition....

(Government of Ireland, 2004, section 1)

In the Education Act 1998, "special educational needs" means the educational needs of students who have a disability and the educational needs of exceptionally able students; (Government of Ireland 1998, section 2)

The definition of "disability" in the Education Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act 2000-2004 is as follows:-

- a) the total or partial absence of a person's bodily or mental functions, including the absence of a part of a person's body
- b) the presence in the body of organisms causing, or likely to cause, chronic disease or illness
- c) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of a person's body
- d) a condition or malfunction which results in a person learning differently from a person without the condition or malfunction or
- e) a condition, disease or illness which affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or which results in disturbed behaviour." (Government of Ireland, 1998 and 2000, Section 2)

In the Disability Act 2005, "disability", in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment. (Govt of Ireland 2005, section 2). The Education (Welfare) Act does not define either term (NCSE, 2006, p. 83).

In considering the issues, the Advisory Group concurred with the view expressed by the NCSE that

...the broad progressive definition of "special educational needs" and "disability" as contained in the EPSEN Act, 2004 and the Education Act, 1998 respectively, must be the definition applied when questions of educational provision are being considered. The Council considers that the approach is the intent of the legislature and is consistent with the constitutional guarantees on education. However, it accepts that the wider definition of disability in the Equal Status Act 2000-2004 must be used when considering issues of discrimination both generally and in relation to special education policy (NCSE, 2006, p. 84).

### **2.3.3 Principles underpinning the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations**

The following is the Framework of Principles, proposed by the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations, (2000, p. 3) which underpin the current scheme:

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.

Chapter 4 reviews these principles and proposes a revised Framework of Principles to underpin decision making in relation to Reasonable Accommodations in the future.

### **2.3.4 The range of accommodations provided in the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations**

The Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations operated by the SEC is governed by a defined set of principles, as detailed in the previous section. This scheme provides for a range of accommodations for candidates with particular needs.

The accommodations available may be grouped into four main categories, as follows:

- 1. Alternative versions of the test instrument:** These include, for example, Braille and enlarged formats, modified versions, and the provision of readers.
- 2. Variations in examination setting:** These include, for example, separate centres, additional time, and the provision of a helper in practical subjects.
- 3. Variations in the medium of presentation:** These include, for example, scribes, tape recorders, and the use of technology / assistive technology.
- 4. Exemptions and waivers:** These include, for example, exemptions from elements of the assessment in a particular subject, the waiver in spelling and certain grammatical elements, and whole subject exemptions in the Leaving Certificate Applied.

### **2.3.5 The Application Processes for the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations**

There is a fundamental difference in the application process at Junior Certificate and at Leaving Certificate.

In both cases, applications for accommodations are submitted to the SEC by a candidate's school on the prescribed application forms. However, a key feature of the application process at Junior Certificate is the devolution to schools of a significant degree of autonomy in identifying candidates with a disability or additional support needs in the examination setting. The granting of accommodations is made by the SEC. It is important to note however, that approval of an accommodation at Junior Certificate does not assure approval at Leaving Certificate.

In the case of a Leaving Certificate candidate, as with a Junior Certificate candidate, applications for reasonable accommodations are submitted by the school which the candidate attends on prescribed application forms. Applications for reasonable accommodations on the grounds of a physical / sensory disability are considered by the SEC on the basis of the supporting medical evidence provided. However, all applications for reasonable accommodations on grounds of a specific learning difficulty (SLD) are referred to a psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS). All documentation in relation to each application, including all professional psychological assessments, samples of a candidate's hand writing, and any other appropriate material are made available to the NEP's psychologist for evaluation as part of the decision-making process.

In all cases, there is provision for appeal by the candidate to the Independent Appeals Committee which, as the title suggests, is independent of the State Examinations Commission.

It was apparent from the consultative process that there was little awareness of the differences in the application process between Junior and Leaving Certificate.

### **2.3.6 Participation in the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations**

One of the most striking features of the current scheme is the level of increase in applications and accommodations granted in recent years. The most significant areas of growth within the scheme are the spelling and grammar waiver, separate centres, and to a lesser extent, readers and scribes. The increase in individual accommodations granted under the various headings between 2001 and 2008 is illustrated below.

## Leaving Certificate

Table 2.1 below illustrates the growth in accommodations granted at Leaving Certificate examinations.

**Table 2.1 – Leaving Certificate accommodations 2001 – 2008**

Type of Accommodation	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Tape Recorder (Learning)	90	214	146	148	194	181	194	149
Tape Recorder (Physical)			49	71	52	58	49	25
Reading Assistance	106	280	353	488	656	736	967	1,148
Scribe	24	72	70	105	135	192	204	263
Word Processor	23	37	45	67	79	86	135	170
Enlarged Question Papers	11	48	42	36	43	31	30	30
Braille Question Papers	2	3	2	4	5	4	1	1
Exemption from Aural Tests	1	10	12	15	11	11	12	16
Exemption from Oral Tests	4	6	9	23	12	10	16	7
Modified Papers (Visual)	9	11	5	11	13	6	10	13
Spelling/Grammar Waiver	264	456	684	972	1,396	1,458	1,841	2,136

## Junior Certificate

Table 2.2 illustrates the range of accommodations at Junior Certificate level, where the application process is largely devolved to schools.

**Table 2.2 – Junior Certificate accommodations 2001 - 2008**

Type of Accommodation	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Tape Recorder (Learning)	415	481	567	582	606	555	580	426
Tape Recorder (Physical)			67	109	91	92	72	42
Reading Assistance	746	1,084	1,431	1,808	2,356	2,769	3,101	3,232
Scribe	70	101	153	239	245	345	447	526
Word Processor	50	62	68	75	90	138	177	179
Enlarged Question Papers	43	46	51	48	38	53	45	30
Braille Question Papers	7	2	8	5	2	4	0	1
Exemption from Aural Tests	12	19	19	3	15	13	11	15
Exemption from Practical Tests	5	4	4	8	4	5	12	0
Modified Papers (Visual)	18	13	16	13	14	21	18	18
Spelling/Grammar Waiver	976	1,489	2,077	2,630	3,367	3,992	4,378	4,552

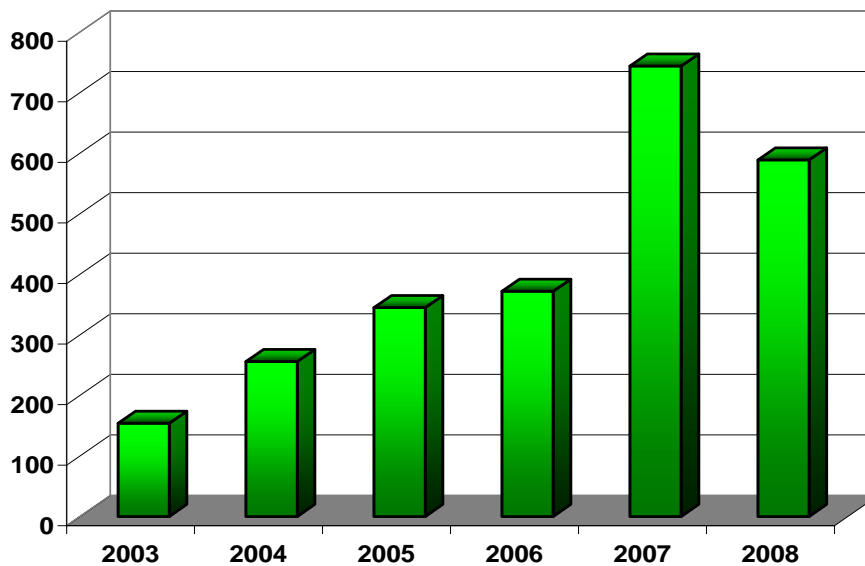
## Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

Table 2.3 illustrates that usage of the range of accommodations at Leaving Certificate Applied examinations. 1,394 candidates received whole subject exemptions in 2007. Whole subject exemptions are particularly noteworthy accommodations in this examination, as the Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained two-year programme of study. It is a single award, and the programme structure and the potential impact of whole subject exemptions in the context of an integrated programme, such as the LCA, is considered in Chapter 6.

**Table 2.3 - Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) accommodations 2003 - 2008 (Year 1 and Year 2)**

Type of Accommodation	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Tape Recorder (Learning)	71	78	93	5	106	29
Tape Recorder (Physical)	7	10	7	7	53	62
Reading Assistance	154	256	345	372	744	589
Scribe	18	39	48	13	82	84
Word Processor	5	5	6	17	18	11
Enlarged Question Papers	3	8	7	14	10	10
Modified Papers (Visual)	0	1	2	0	1	0
Oral Exemption	0	1	5	7	1	0
Aural Exemption	0	0	1	2	2	0
Whole Subject exemption	0	537	640	949	1,394	1,723

**Reading Assistance (Leaving Certificate Applied) 2001 - 2008**



**Figure 2.1 Reading Assistance (Leaving Certificate Applied) 2001-2008**

### **Separate Centres**

Figures 2.2 and 2.3 illustrate the expansion in the number of separate centres since 2001, which has grown at a rate of 23% over the past five years. There were almost 7,000 separate centres in 2008, while there were some 4500 regular centres. In the case of some individual schools where there were one or more regular centres, the number of reasonable accommodations granted required the provision of multiple separate centres. A number of schools had more than 10 separate centres and the Advisory Group notes that in one school in 2007, more than 25 separate centres had to be provided. The growth is discernible at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels (figure 2.3).

Figure 2.2 - Separate Centres 2001 - 2008

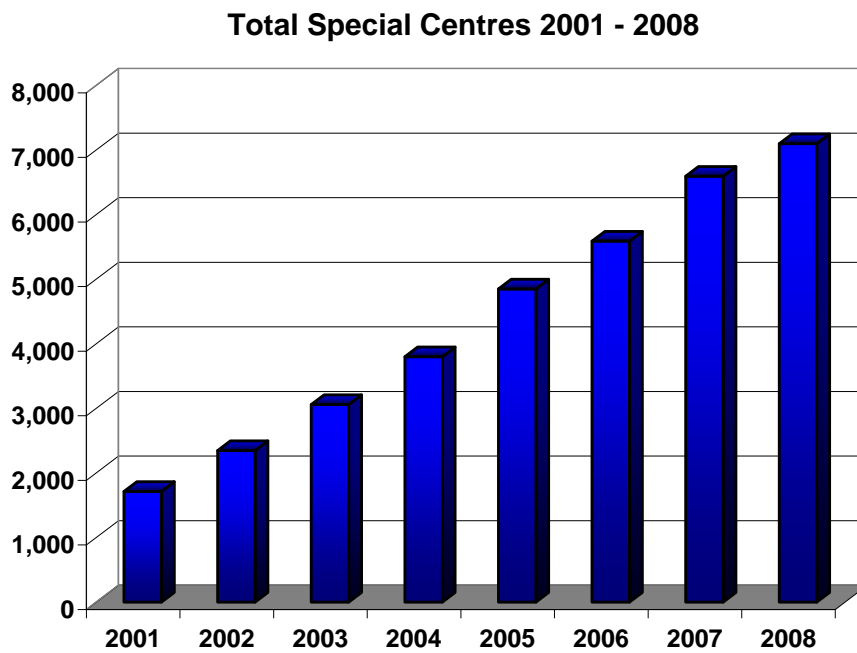
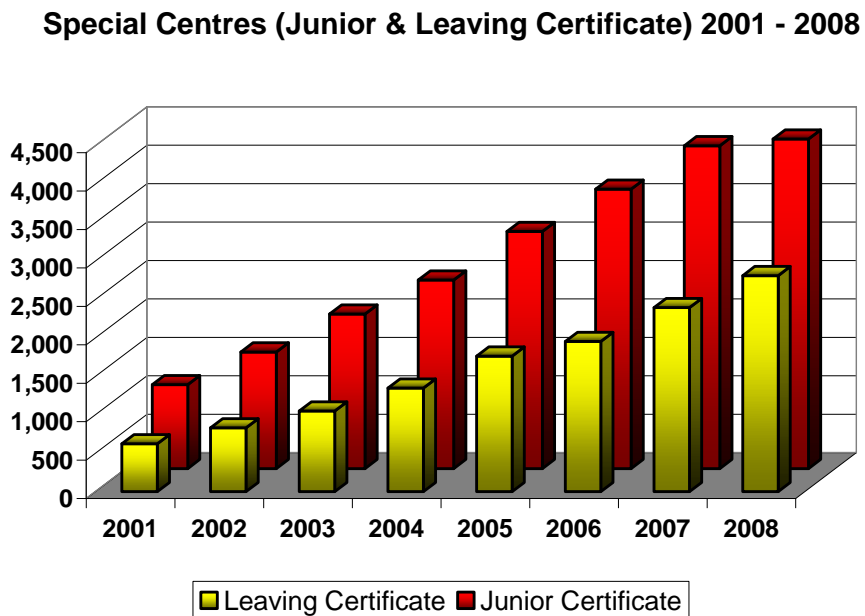


Figure 2.3 - Separate Centres 2001 - 2008



## 2.4 Summary

This chapter has set the context for the operation of the state examinations in Ireland. Primary responsibility for policy and operational matters rests with the Minister for Education and Science, and State Examinations Commission (SEC) respectively. The NCCA elaborates the



curriculum, syllabus content and the assessment specifications, while NEPS determines the eligibility for candidates who apply for accommodations on the grounds of SLDs at Leaving Certificate.

The state examinations are well regarded both nationally and internationally and, in particular, the Leaving Certificate, which represents achievement after many years of education, is used as a selection mechanism for further education and employment.

The principles governing both the preparation of test items, as well as the operation of the examination event include validity, reliability and accessibility, which are of particular relevance in the context of inclusiveness. A scheme of special arrangements (Reasonable Accommodations) has operated for many years, and provides for a range of accommodations, including, for example, test item modifications, alternative formats, exemptions and waivers, as well as the provision of readers, scribes and tape recorders. These arrangements are intended to remove the impact of the disability, whilst giving candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their level of attainment. Of particular importance also is that any accommodation should not confer any unfair advantage over other candidates in the same examination.

Applications for access to the scheme are submitted by schools and processed by the SEC. A key difference at Junior Certificate is the devolution to schools of a significant degree of autonomy in identifying eligible candidates. Leaving Certificate applications for reasonable accommodations on the grounds of a physical / sensory disability are considered directly by the SEC, while applications on the grounds of a specific learning disability are referred to NEPS for determination.

Finally, a noticeable feature of the current scheme is the significant levels of increase in applications and accommodations granted in recent years. This is particularly evident in the case of the spelling and grammar waiver, separate centres, readers and, to a lesser extent, scribes.

The next chapter examines international practice vis-à-vis reasonable accommodations.



## 3. Reasonable Accommodations – some international comparisons

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### 3.1 Introduction

This Chapter outlines examples of practice in Reasonable Accommodations in a number of jurisdictions. It examines the purpose, principles and eligibility requirements regarding examination accommodations. It then describes the range of available accommodations, and any special conditions / exclusions that may be applicable in the case of certain accommodations. It refers to the standards outlined in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* which addresses professional and technical issues of test development and use in education, psychology and employment. The standards are widely quoted in the literature. Finally, it considers international practice regarding the issue of annotation of certificates in particular circumstances.

The Advisory Group's Consultative Document, published in October 2007, outlined some examples of practice in Australia, New Zealand, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Scotland and the United States. Since then, the Advisory Group has considered the situation in other countries, including EU countries such as France, Germany, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Spain and Latvia and non EU countries such as Japan, Singapore and South Africa. This extended study was made possible by information from a number of sources. The International Unit of the Regulation and Standards Division of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England<sup>1</sup> and the EURYDICE unit at NFER<sup>2</sup> made available the outcomes of research in international practice on examination accommodations. Valuable data was also made available via the Educational Research Centre (ERC) in Drumcondra, Dublin which requested information on examination accommodations from individual OECD country representatives. Finally, additional research was also conducted by the Advisory Group and its support staff.

As noted in Chapter 1, an analysis of the available data shows that there is no universally recognised set of terms within the sphere of what is referred to in Ireland as Reasonable Accommodations. The terminology in other countries includes, for example, 'access arrangements', 'special arrangements', 'accommodations', 'reasonable accommodations', 'reasonable adjustments', 'standard accommodations', 'non-standard accommodations', 'alternate assessment' and 'modifications'. As previously noted, the term 'Reasonable Accommodations' is used throughout this report. Appendix III of this report contains a list of terms which the Advisory Group recommends should be used in Ireland for purposes of clarity and consistency.

In making comparisons with practice in other jurisdictions, it is important to consider the context in which the state examinations system in Ireland operates, and the salient features of the system. As previously noted, it is a highly centralised system, characterised by terminal examinations. The examinations are externally supported, examined and moderated. This is in contrast with some other systems where school-based assessment plays a more significant part

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<sup>1</sup> The Advisory Group wishes to record its appreciation of the role played by David Pepper of the International Unit, QCA in co-ordinating this information.

<sup>2</sup> Response to Enquiry no. 1608: Assessment arrangements for pupils with disabilities, July 2007.

in assessment. The role of the Leaving Certificate as a selection mechanism for 3<sup>rd</sup> level and further education must also be considered.

## **3.2 Principles and purpose of Reasonable Accommodations in the international context**

### **3.2.1 Principles**

In examining the principles that underpin the operation of schemes in other jurisdictions, a number of commonalities may be identified. These broadly cover the following:

- Accommodations must not compromise the integrity of the assessment
- The granting of any accommodation must not confer an advantage to any candidate or group of candidates
- All candidates are assessed in the same knowledge, understanding and skills
- All candidates take examinations under comparable conditions.
- Decisions on applications for accommodations should be evidence-based
- Accommodations should reflect a candidates normal way of working

In Scotland, for example, the SQA has published a set of principles on which decisions regarding assessment arrangements for candidates with particular needs should be made. It states that the principles are intended to ensure ‘consistent interpretation and application of the policy across all centres and that no candidate is disadvantaged’. The SQA principles are:

1. Candidates with disabilities and/or additional support needs for whom adjustments are requested should be potentially able to achieve the national standards but be unable to do so using the published assessment arrangements.
2. Any adjustment to the published assessment arrangement should not compensate for a candidate’s inability to meet set standards. There should be no change to the published assessment criteria which state the standards for a Unit or Course.
3. Any adjustment to the published assessment arrangements requested should be tailored to meet the individual needs of candidates.
4. Any adjustment to the assessment arrangements should reflect, as far as possible, the candidate’s normal way of learning and producing work.

In Scotland, an emphasis is placed on candidates taking subjects in which they can demonstrate achievement and on accommodations mirroring the supports in place for candidates in their normal school setting. For example, the SQA documentation states that some of the key responsibilities of centres are to:

- ensure that candidates choose a qualification in which they are potentially able to attain the national standards
- identify as early as possible (ideally before a candidate embarks on a qualification) any difficulties a candidate with a disability and/or additional support needs might have in accessing the published assessment procedures
- plan how any adjustment could be made, or an arrangement could be employed, to make a difference to the candidate’s ability to access the assessment procedures and to demonstrate attainment in each subject area, making use of relevant specialist advice from external sources, if appropriate

- ensure that any adjustments or arrangements requested relate, as far as possible, to the candidate's usual way of working, and that the candidate has experience of, and practice in, the use of the requested arrangements
- ensure that the adjustment to the arrangements adequately assists the candidate to demonstrate his or her attainment without changing national standards and without giving any advantage.

Regarding the requirement that an accommodation should not confer an advantage on a candidate or group of candidates, the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* refers to

...the need for concern for fairness to all parties, as comparisons must be made between test scores obtained by individuals with disabilities taking modified tests and scores obtained by individuals under regular conditions. While test takers should not be disadvantaged due to a disability not relevant to the construct the test is intended to assess, the resulting accommodation should not put those taking a modified test at an undue advantage over those tested under regular conditions. (American Educational Research Association, 1999).

Most countries document the principles under which the scheme of accommodations is operated and the purpose of the scheme is outlined. Reference is frequently made in the documentation to the potential conflict between facilitating access to the assessment on the one hand, and maintaining the validity of the assessment on the other. In this regard, most countries require that all candidates are assessed on the same criteria in order to maintain fairness to all candidates in the assessment.

Research carried out on behalf of the Advisory Group by the Regulations and Standards Division of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England highlights the importance of equity and validity in most countries, summarising the findings as follows:

On the one hand, equity is emphasised, in terms of equality of opportunity. In Finland, the policy states that assessment methods should be used to enable students to demonstrate their capabilities and performance as well as possible. In Singapore, special arrangements are designed to ensure students are not disadvantaged by factors irrelevant to the assessed constructs. In Australia, the purpose of special consideration procedures is to give all students the opportunity to show what they know and can do.

On the other hand, validity is emphasised, notably in regard to assessment of reading and writing. In Texas, it is stated that, whilst accommodations can reflect those present during teaching, they must not make the test invalid. Thus no assistance is permitted in the reading of test papers that assess reading or writing. Similarly, in Queensland, there are restrictions on special considerations in the test of reading and writing because "one of the characteristics of the test is that the candidate sitting the test does the required reading and writing". The test is therefore not produced in Braille and the use of a scribe, reader, interpreter, dictionary or voice recognition technology is not permitted. In Australia, the states and territories have agreed that, in the interests of fairness to all students, certificates must show what the student did do, not what the student might have done in other circumstances.

### **3.2.2 Purpose of Reasonable Accommodations**

Most of the countries considered in the course of this report emphasise that the purposes of accommodations are to enable candidates to access the assessment and to enable them to demonstrate their attainment in the examinations setting.

For example, the Joint Council for Qualifications arrangements which cover England, Wales

and Northern Ireland, notes that access arrangements are intended 'to allow attainment to be demonstrated'. They are intended to increase access to assessments, but 'cannot be granted where they will directly affect performance in the skills that are the focus of the assessment' (JCQ, 2006, p.1). Similarly, they will not be permitted if they 'compromise the assessment criteria' (JCQ, 2006, p. 2). It states that

It should be remembered that where assessment criteria... would be compromised by any adjustment made to take account of the impairment, the assessment criteria will take precedence and will not be waived. This includes the demonstration of knowledge, understanding and skills required by the specification. (JCQ, 2006, p. 32)

In Australia, the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* state that 'the assessment *procedures* and *methodologies* for the course or program are adapted to enable the student to demonstrate the knowledge, skills or competencies being assessed (our italics).' In Western Australia, the regulations state that 'The same knowledge, understandings and skill requirements, and performance standards are applied to all students whether or not they are granted special provisions' and that 'Special provisions do not confer an advantage to any candidate over other candidates' (Government of Western Australia, 2005, p. 1).

On the basis of national assessment guidelines in Finland, schools determine their own set of guidelines for their teachers' assessment of pupils, including those with disabilities. Pupils with special needs have an individual education plan. This defines whether they will be assessed in relation to the national core curriculum with methods that enable them to demonstrate their attainment, or assessed in relation to an individualised programme of study, possibly verbally. At post-compulsory level, "allowances are made for the hindrances to learning resulting from the pupil's disability or disorder".

A key consideration is the possibility that a modification or accommodation in an examination may result in a change to the assessment construct. The construct is the knowledge or skill that is the focus of the assessment. Essentially, if the construct is changed, the grades (or scores) awarded to the candidates who sat the original test item and the grades (or scores) awarded to the candidates who sat the modified test item are not comparable. The *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* notes

Modifications designed to accommodate persons with disabilities may also change the construct measured by the test or the extent to which it is fully measured. For example, a test of oral comprehension may become a test of reading comprehension when administered in a written format to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. Such a change in test administration may alter the construct being measured by the original test. When this occurs, the scores on the standard and modified versions of the test will not have the same meaning. Similarly, modification of test administration may also alter the predictive value of test scores. For example, when a speed test is administered with relaxed time requirements to a person with a disability, the relationship of test scores to criteria, such as job performance, may be affected. Appropriate professional judgment should be exercised in interpreting and using scores on modified tests. (American Educational Research Association, 1999, p.102)

It also notes that 'issues of validity and reliability are critical whenever modifications or accommodations occur' (p. 103).

The literature on accommodations in assessment sometimes refers to target skills and access skills. Target skills refer to the skills that are the focus of the assessment, such as, for example, knowledge of a particular experiment in Science. The target skills are the same for all candidates regardless of whether or not they are in receipt of accommodations. The access skills refer to the skills required to access the test instrument. For example, a student with a visual impairment

might be unable to access the test instrument but could be accommodated by a Braille version of the test or by having the test read to them by a reader. The key point in the literature is that accommodations are intended to facilitate access to the test, but should not affect the skills that are the focus of the assessment i.e. the assessment construct.

### **3.3 Eligibility**

In terms of eligibility, a number of characteristics may be noted from a review of the evidence. The most common requirement noted is that accommodations should mirror a candidate's 'normal way of working'. In many cases, supporting evidence from the school regarding the supports that have been provided in the school environment is required as part of the application and verification process. Many countries place a prohibition on the granting of accommodations in the absence of the above.

In New Zealand, for example, candidates with permanent or long-term conditions or learning difficulties which they believe will significantly impair their performance in specified external assessments and, in particular, written examinations, may apply to the Qualifications Authority for special assessment conditions (for example, a time allowance, modifications to question and answer booklets, or the use of an examination assistant such as a reader/writer). Evidence is required in support of an application. The type of evidence required includes medical diagnosis and/or professional testing, evidence that the school has recognised that a candidate has a significant learning difficulty, and that the school has been providing learning assistance and special assessment conditions during the school year. All independent evidence in support of an application must have been recorded within three years of the year of examination and relate to the candidate's record at secondary school.

### **3.4 Classification of accommodations**

Hooper (2001) developed a typology of assessment accommodations for students with disability. This typology enables reasonable accommodations in almost all jurisdictions to be classified under four headings as follows:

*Presentation accommodations:* changes made to the presentation of the test or test directions such as large print versions, Braille versions, sign language translations, or reading aloud

*Response accommodations:* changes made to the way students respond to a test question or prompt, such as allowing a student to indicate an answer by pointing or gesturing, using a scribe to record written answers, and technological recording methods.

*Setting accommodations:* changes to the testing environment or location, such as administering the test in small groups, individually, or even at a student's home

*Scheduling accommodations:* described as changes in the timing or scheduling of testing such as extending the length of given time for the test to be completed and allowing test breaks.

The classification of accommodations in Ireland has already been set out in Chapter 2.

The range of accommodations available in the countries researched, especially in relation to sensory disabilities such as visual, language or speech impairment is broadly similar to those available in Ireland. These usually take the form of changes to the way the assessment is presented to candidates or the way in which the candidates respond. These arrangements may take the form of Braille papers, large print papers, a reader, audio playback, a writer (scribe or amanuensis), audio recording of oral responses, use of headphones, a sign-language interpreter, or additional time.

In some instances, a candidate may be exempted from part of the assessment. In England, for example, candidates with severe sensory disabilities may be exempted from part of an assessment. In these instances an award is issued on the basis of the units taken without the zero score in the exempted part affecting the final grade awarded. In these cases, the candidate's certificate indicates that he or she has not undertaken all parts of the assessment. Similarly, in Ireland, a candidate may be exempted from an element of the assessment and the certificate will be annotated to indicate the parts of the examination that were not assessed. It is important to note that in these instances, the grade is calculated on the basis of the elements of the assessment that were taken. The issue of annotation of certificates is considered in more detail in Section 3.6 below.

In relation to other physical and cognitive disabilities, it was noted that there are often arrangements for students to use computers, recorders or similar aids to make responses to questions. Additional time, supervised rest breaks, and permission to stand up, stretch or move around are also frequently available. Several countries make provision for a different test centre for a student to be assessed at if they are unable to attend the usual place of examination. It has been noted elsewhere in this report that over 7,000 'special' or separate centres were made available in Ireland in 2008 for candidates who have been approved for this particular accommodation.

The U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "the Nation's Report Card," is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Since 1969, assessments have been conducted periodically in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. history, civics, geography, and the arts. In relation to accommodations, NAEP does not provide spelling or grammar accommodations in writing assessments on the basis that spelling and grammar are part of the measured construct. In other subjects (such as science), misspellings and grammatical errors are not counted against the student. This is also the situation in Ireland.

Regarding the availability of particular accommodations, Ireland would appear to be unique in the availability of the waiver in spelling/grammar/punctuation in language examinations. No evidence was found of the existence of a similar provision in any other country. This accommodation is considered in more detail in Chapter 8. In Finland, where some specific arrangements are in place for candidates with dyslexia, these are limited to providing longer pauses in tests of listening comprehension and in providing greater flexibility in how they present their responses in written tests (e.g. candidates with dyslexia are exempted from the requirements that they respond in ink in written tests). In the Netherlands, specific provision for dyslexia takes the form of additional time (up to 30 minutes), large print papers or other formats such as recorded or oral examinations.

### **3.5 Exclusions / special conditions**

As indicated above, particular exclusions and conditions are in place in many jurisdictions regarding certain accommodations. Many of these are described in Chapter 8.

For example, in New Zealand, certain conditions are attached to the provision of readers and scribes in the case of language subjects. The candidate must read the target language as that is part of the test or assessment construct. The NZQA notes that writer assistance (scribe) 'may risk invalidating a candidate's responses in some standards' (examinations). Special assessment conditions are not available for externally assessed achievement standards for Technology, Graphics, and Visual Arts, and those specifically excluded (a list of specific exclusions is published). In New Zealand, schools are precluded from applying for special assessment conditions in situations where particular exclusions are provided in the regulations, or where the integrity of assessment would be compromised by reducing the validity and reliability of assessment.



If a candidate has writer assistance (scribe) in a language examination, many countries require that the candidate must spell each word in the language being assessed to the scribe and tell the scribe of any punctuation necessary for the language. The rationale for this is that the demonstration of the ability to produce the target language is part of the test for the candidate. As noted previously, this is commonly referred to as the assessment construct. The scribe must ensure that the candidate contributes directly to these requirements during the examination i.e. the candidate must tell the writer about the spelling of words, where to start paragraphs, what punctuation to include, and grammatical conventions. This requirement does not currently apply in Ireland in the case of candidates who are permitted to use a scribe in language subjects; however, in these cases, the certificate is annotated to the effect that all elements of the examination were assessed except the writing element. In other subjects, no annotation is required as writing is not part of the assessment construct.

In England, 'a reader will not be allowed in sections of papers testing reading, such as English, Irish (or Gaelige), Welsh, Modern Foreign Language reading papers, some Classical specifications requiring the candidate to read in Greek or Latin or in subjects testing reading such as GCSE English Literature or GCE English Language or Literature or combined Language/Literature specifications' (JCQ, 2006, p. 6, section 2.2.6). In relation to scribes, the following is the relevant regulation:

A scribe will not be allowed in subjects testing writing, such as Modern Foreign Language writing papers, unless the candidate can dictate foreign words letter by letter. In other subjects testing written communication skills, including English, Irish (or Gaelige) and Welsh, a scribe will be allowed, but the candidate will be assessed only on those aspects of written communication which he or she can demonstrate independently, such as use of language, effective and grammatical presentation. If separate marks are awarded for spelling and punctuation, these cannot be credited to a candidate using a scribe. Marks may be awarded for punctuation if this is dictated, and the fact is noted on the scribe cover sheet. A scribe will not be allowed if a candidate's literacy difficulties are primarily caused by English not being their first language (p. 9, section 2.3.6).

In Scotland, the following is the regulation regarding the use of scribes in language examinations

...in the assessment of writing in Modern Languages, Gaelic and Gàidhlig, where it is the overall quality of the written language, particularly spelling accuracy, which is being assessed, the scribe must follow explicit instructions from the candidate with regard to spelling and/or the placement of accents. A scribe cannot assume that the candidate knows how to spell a word/phrase in the foreign language. If the candidate is unable to instruct the scribe in such a way because of, for example, a severe specific learning difficulty, then the centre will have to consider a more appropriate and reasonable adjustment for the candidate — one which does not compromise the integrity of the assessment. (SQA, 2004, p.36)

The Advisory Group has noted that, on the basis of the evidence, it may reasonably be concluded that where exclusions or special conditions are applied to particular accommodations, it is on the basis of ensuring that the integrity and validity of the assessment is maintained.

### **3.6 Annotation of Certificates**

The annotation of certificates has been the subject of considerable debate in Ireland since its introduction in 2000.s It was the subject of a challenge taken to the Equality Tribunal on the basis that the practice was allegedly discriminatory under the Equal Status Acts. The Equality Tribunal upheld the complaint and the matter was subsequently the subject of an appeal to the

Circuit Court. The Circuit Court overturned the decision of the Equality Tribunal and ruled that annotation of certificates was not discriminatory under the Equal Status Acts. At the time of writing, it is understood that the issue will be appealed to the High Court.

During the consultative process, the Advisory Group noted that, it appeared that there were certain misunderstandings and possible misconceptions with regard to a number of issues associated with annotation. These included the rationale for annotating certificates in the first instance, the particular circumstances in which annotation is applied, and the nature of the actual annotation.

As noted in Chapter 2, one of the principles proposed by the Expert Group in 2000 was the following:

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 (Principle 12).

The circumstances in which annotation of certificates is applied are quite straightforward. Annotation is only applied in the specific circumstances where there has been an alteration of what has been tested. Only those accommodations that alter *what* is being tested, or where the accommodation has the same effect, result in annotation. The rationale for annotating certificates is based on the premise that the integrity and validity of the national certification process must be upheld. The premise is that annotation is required in order to avoid a situation where examination reporting or certification is apt to mislead or is apt to give a false comparison in respect of the achievements of candidates who have done all elements of all the examination, on the one hand, and candidates who have not done all elements of the examination on the other.

In cases where certain skills are part of the assessment specification and an individual is exempted from assessment in those, it would appear from the research that the test developer is, in fact, obligated to annotate so under both national and international standards in assessment.

Reference is commonly made in the literature to the 'meaning' of a test score or examination result. The basic premise here is that making an alteration to a test also results in altering the meaning of the scores or test results. Whenever an alteration to a test is made of any kind, unless there is direct evidence to indicate that the alteration does not, in fact, change the meaning of the score, the test developers are obligated to flag or annotate that score as having a different meaning. Flagging or annotation would not be appropriate in circumstances where there is a body of evidence to show that the alterations that were provided do not affect the meaning of the score. The research indicates that annotation is applied in order to preserve the integrity of the examination.

It is also of note that in Ireland, as noted above, a candidate granted an exemption is examined on the remaining elements of the examination and the candidate's grade in the subject is determined on the balance of the work in the subject.

In the course of its research, the Advisory Group found no evidence of a system of national assessment and certification in which exemptions were granted from core elements of the syllabus without being flagged, annotated, or indicated in some manner. It would appear from the research that the issue may be stated as follows: In order to credibly exempt a candidate from assessment in respect of an element of a subject which is the part of a published syllabus, an annotation is not just desirable, but is, in fact, essential. Fundamentally, as test developers are mandated to provide accurate assessments and certification, it is the annotation that makes the exemption possible from an educational and assessment point of view. The issue is commonly regarded as one of accurate reporting of examination outcomes. The end-user must have

confidence that the results that are reported in the certification process accurately reflect what was actually assessed. Consequently, to exempt without indicating what was actually assessed would result in undermining the validity of the assessment and certification process.

The Scottish Qualification Authority's (SQA) approach to exempting candidates with certain disabilities from undertaking certain components of an award, differs from the approach of General Qualifications Bodies in England & Wales. In Standard Grade qualifications, a candidate can omit a complete Element or Elements of the qualification and only the Elements completed are reported on the Certificate. The overall award gained by the candidate and reported on the Certificate shows exactly what the candidate has done to achieve the particular Grade. For example, a candidate who cannot speak may omit the Speaking Element in Standard Grade French and get an overall mark based on the other Elements (Reading, Writing and Listening) successfully completed. In this case, it is clear from the candidate's certificate what the candidate has actually demonstrated to achieve the overall grade for the Standard Grade qualification. This accommodation is not available in Higher Grade qualifications.

A number of submissions alluded to the fact that certificates are not annotated in some other jurisdictions. However, when the actual situations are examined, it is generally the case that either exemptions from elements of the assessment are not permitted or the available accommodations do not impact on the assessment construct. In New Zealand, for example, the issue of annotation of certificates does not arise as exemptions from components or a waiver in spelling and grammar are not permitted accommodations in externally assessed language examinations.

Practice in Ireland is consistent with international standards. In relation to the issue of annotation of certificates, international practice indicates that where the candidate demonstrates attainment in the specified elements of the assessment, even if the *means* by which the candidate demonstrates attainment is changed to facilitate access, the issue of annotation does not arise. In relation to exemptions from particular components, international practice suggests that when the grade awarded is based on the other components (in other words, the grade has been computed on a different basis to the generality of candidates), annotation is a requirement.

It is generally accepted that annotation should exclude information about the candidate's status. In this regard, the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999) states

When there is sufficient evidence of score comparability across regular and modified administrations, there is no need for any sort of flagging. When such evidence is lacking, an undifferentiated flag provides only very limited information to the test user and specific information about the nature of the modification is preferable, if permitted by law."

The Advisory Group considers that it is reasonable to be guided by the international approach to providing exemptions from elements of examinations and accompanying annotations. The annotation should make explicit the element(s) of the examination that were not assessed. No reference should be made to the reason why the accommodation was permitted or to the status of the candidate in any other respect. This is the current practice in Ireland.

## 3.7 Summary

This Chapter has outlined examples of practice in Reasonable Accommodations in a number of jurisdictions. It examined the purpose, principles and eligibility requirements regarding examination accommodations and described the range of available accommodations, and any special conditions / exclusions that may be applicable in the case of certain accommodations.

Research on international practice in Reasonable Accommodations in jurisdictions where anti-discrimination legislation has been enacted would suggest that the following are common features:

- A published set of principles in which the importance of maintaining the validity and integrity of the assessment is explicitly stated
- The purpose of the accommodations is commonly stated to be to enable the candidate to access the test instrument and to demonstrate his/her attainment
- Particular exclusions attaching to certain accommodations where the granting of the particular accommodation may impact on the assessment construct, and hence, on the validity of the assessment. For example, a scribe might not be a permitted accommodation in language subjects where spelling is part of the assessment construct
- Exemptions from elements of the assessment with either accompanying annotation of certificates or with certification that makes explicit the elements of the examination that were actually assessed. In some jurisdictions, no exemptions from the published assessment specification are allowed.

## 4. Review of Principles underpinning the RACE Scheme

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### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the context and rationale for reviewing the principles underpinning the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. A number of key issues were taken into consideration by the Advisory Group in its deliberations. These include the general assessment principles within which the state examinations operates; recent relevant legislation (see Chapter 2); and principles and practices from other jurisdictions (outlined in Chapter 3). A revised Framework of Principles concludes the chapter.

In reviewing the existing Framework of Principles and proposing a revised Framework, the Advisory Group was conscious of a range of circumstances, events and developments that have taken place since 2000. In this context, the issues considered by the Advisory Group included, for example:

- Developments in legislation, and in particular, the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000; the Equal Status Act, 2000-2004; the EPSEN Act, 2004 and the Disability Act, 2005. The Education Act, 1998 and the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999 were also taken into consideration by the Advisory Group in its work
- The recommendations of the Task Force on Dyslexia in relation to the RACE Scheme. The Task Force on Dyslexia reported to the Minister in July, 2001
- The establishment of the State Examinations Commission in 2003
- The publication of *The preparation of test items – principles and protocol (SEC, 2006)* which includes the assessment principles that underpin the work of the SEC
- Documentation published in other jurisdictions regarding accommodation for candidates with special needs and the principles on which schemes in these jurisdictions are based
- The judgement of the Circuit Court in October 2007 in the matter of an appeal under the provisions of Section 28 of the Equal Status Act 2000
- Submissions received by the Advisory Group as part of the consultative process and contributions made at the Consultation Session in Dublin in October 2007.

In reviewing and revising the principles, the core purpose of the Advisory Group was to agree a Framework of Principles that would serve as a sound basis upon which decisions on Reasonable Accommodations could be made. The Advisory Group was mindful of the importance of promoting high standards of quality and integrity in the assessment process, while, at the same time, ensuring access and participation for all students. The Group was also aware that new circumstances might arise in the future which would have to be interpreted within the Framework. The Advisory Group considered that a Framework of Principles would provide the basis for decision-making within currently known and some unanticipated circumstances.

Many of the principles within the existing Framework remain equally valid today and are therefore incorporated within the proposed revised principles.

For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that two separate sets of principles are relevant to the debate. Firstly, there are the assessment principles published by the State Examinations Commission in the document *The preparation of test items – principles and protocol (SEC, 2006)*. They include, for example the principles of validity and reliability, among others, and are summarised in Chapter 2. Given that these principles underpin the work of the State Examinations Commission generally and the preparation of test items in particular, the Advisory Group is of

the view that all test items, including those prepared for candidates requiring Reasonable Accommodations, must uphold, and be in accordance with, these core assessment principles. The complete publication is available on the State Examinations Commission website [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie)

The second set of principles relevant to the debate is the Framework of Principles that underpins the current Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. The initial Framework was proposed by the Expert Advisory Group in 2000 and is outlined in Chapter 2. The Advisory Group considers that the Framework of Principles in relation to Reasonable Accommodations must uphold and be consistent with the assessment principles as published by the SEC.

In relation to providing for the needs of students with disabilities and/or special needs in the context of the state examinations, the Advisory Group considered the definition of special educational needs in the legislation to be helpful and appropriate. However, further considerations were necessary when interpreting and applying this definition to the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. While the definition used in the EPSEN Act was considered suitable for students with physical, sensory and/or specific learning needs, other categories of students were identified by the Advisory Group who might require accommodations and who would not be included in the Scheme on the basis of this definition. These might include, for example, students who suffer accidents, bereavements or other trauma immediately prior to, or during, the examination period or, for example, students who are recent immigrants to Ireland. The Advisory Group was also conscious of the fact that a candidate may have a special educational need as defined under the EPSEN Act 2004, but may not necessarily require an accommodation within the examination context.

Thus, in determining eligibility for accommodations under the scheme, the Advisory Group proposes that accommodations should be provided for candidates who have a special educational need *and/or* who have special assessment needs in examinations in order for them to access the test instrument and to demonstrate their attainment. As outlined in Chapter 9, the Advisory Group considers that further work is required in order to provide for the needs of candidates who encounter trauma and adversity at examination time.

## **4.2 The Framework of Principles**

In addition to the contextual issues outlined above, the rationale for the revised framework needs to take account of developments in the use of language and terminology in the area, and also highlight the need to consider all requests in the context of the proposed Framework as a whole, rather than on the basis of selected principles in isolation.

In drafting the revised Framework of Principles, the Advisory Group considered that the use of language should be examined with a view to ensuring consistency with the relevant legislation and developments in the field since 2000. Arising from this, for example, the term ‘special educational needs’ has been used in place of ‘disability’, and the usage of the term ‘special arrangements’ has been discontinued. Noting suggestions in a number of submissions regarding the possible simplification of language, the Advisory Group has also attempted to standardise and simplify the language and terminology used throughout the Framework and has attempted to frame the principles in a positive manner.

The Advisory Group was also of the view that the principles should be re-aligned so that elements of commonality between principles were more clearly in evidence. Thus, in the current proposals, principles with common or related elements are grouped together. In this context, it is also important to re-state that the Advisory Group is of the view that the principles should be

considered in their entirety and that individual principles should not be considered in isolation from the overall Framework.

In summary, therefore, the Advisory Group has tried to ensure that the Framework of Principles

- Promotes an inclusive approach for candidates who have special assessment needs in examinations through facilitating access to the test instrument
- Provides opportunities for candidates who have special assessment needs in examinations to demonstrate their attainment in the examination
- Promotes an evidence-based scheme in which the accommodations sought generally reflect a candidate's normal way of working
- Upholds the published assessment principles of the State Examinations Commission
- Upholds and maintains the integrity of the assessment and certification process, and does not compromise or undermine the assessment of syllabus objectives
- Facilitates alternative assessment procedures and exemptions, in certain circumstances
- Facilitates clarity for candidates so that, prior to embarking on a course of study, the available options in terms of any possible modifications, alternative assessments or exemptions to the assessment specification are clearly stated.

The Advisory Group has given consideration to the current provision for candidates who have accidents, illness, or who suffer trauma and adversity at examination time (see Chapter 9) and has made recommendations regarding a possible way forward in these areas.

### **The proposed Framework of Principles:**

1. Reasonable Accommodations will be made for candidates who have special educational *and /or* assessment needs to enable them to access the test instrument and to demonstrate their attainment in the examination.
2. The assessment of eligibility for Reasonable Accommodations will be based on appropriate evidence of need.
3. Reasonable Accommodations will be underpinned by, and uphold the integrity of the assessment principles, as published by the State Examinations Commission.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. There should be continuity between learning and assessment; accordingly Reasonable Accommodations should reflect a candidate's normal way of working, as far as possible\*.
7. Applications for, and decisions on Reasonable Accommodations will be made in a timely manner.
8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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.

12. Exceptional circumstances that may affect a candidate's performance (e.g., illness, trauma, accidents, bereavement) should, insofar as is possible, be addressed.

\*A student 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: The Advisory Group considers that '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.

## **4.3 Summary**

In preparing a revised Framework of Principles, the Advisory Group considered a broad range of contextual factors, and in particular, developments since 2000. The intention of the Advisory Group was to create a Framework of Principles that would underpin the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations and facilitate the consideration of applications under the Scheme.

The Advisory Group considers that the Framework should be considered as an entity and that in considering applications, it is not intended that individual principles should be taken in isolation. It is intended that, under the Framework, the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations will facilitate candidates who require accommodations to access the test instruments and to demonstrate their attainment, while at the same time preserve and uphold the integrity of the assessment and certification process.



## **4.4 Recommendations**

The Advisory Group recommends that a revised Framework of Principles, which takes account of legislative, educational and social environment changes, should replace the current Framework of Principles set out in the 2000 Report. This Framework reiterates the fundamental principle that Reasonable Accommodations must be made for candidates with special educational needs to enable them to access the test instrument and to demonstrate their attainment in the examination. This Framework also states that eligibility for Reasonable Accommodations will be based on appropriate evidence of need and emphasises the importance of continuity between learning and assessment. The Advisory Group expects that the revised framework of principles will assist in the improved delivery of and understanding of the RACE scheme.



## **5. Eligibility and operational issues**

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Chapters 1-4 consisted of contextual issues in relation to Reasonable Accommodations. This Chapter addresses issues relating to eligibility for the scheme. It also considers issues relating to the operation of the Scheme at school level.

Issues surrounding the manner in which applications are administered at Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate are considered. In essence, a devolved model operates at Junior Certificate while at Leaving Certificate, a centralised model is in place. The Advisory Group notes the inherent challenge in providing coherence, continuity and alignment within the context of the different models, and the additional challenge of ensuring that decisions on applications are available as soon as possible to candidates.

Currently, all applications for reasonable accommodations at Leaving Certificate level, apart from those relating to sensory and physical disability, are considered by psychologists from the National Educational Psychological Service. In some cases, applications may be accompanied by privately commissioned psychological reports. This Chapter considers the issues involved and, in particular, the requirement to maintain fairness and equity within the application process.

The Advisory Group considered the eligibility issues in cases of candidates with General Learning Disabilities (GLDs) within the context of the overall purpose of the scheme and the particular aim of facilitating candidates to demonstrate their attainment. In considering this issue, it also examined practice in other jurisdictions.

The introduction of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) as provided for under the EPSEN legislation may provide a signpost in the future with regard to accommodations that may be required in the examination context. This Chapter recommends a number of measures in that regard.

The significant growth in newcomer students presents a number of particular challenges. Assessment and diagnosis of particular conditions presents a challenge primarily due to the absence of standardised tests in languages other than English. This is also an issue in the case of candidates whose first language is Gaeilge.

Issues relating to the delivery of the Scheme at school and centre level are also considered.

Greater collaboration between state agencies in relation to Reasonable Accommodations is one that the Advisory Group believes could be beneficial. These include, for example, the State Examinations Commission, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Department of Education and Science, the National Educational Welfare Board, the National Council for Special Education, the National Educational Psychological Service and the Health Service Executive.

### **5.1 The purpose of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations**

Arising from the consultative process, it was apparent that there were some misconceptions with regard to the purpose of the scheme and the measures and accommodations that were possible within the Scheme. For example, a common misconception appeared to be that special

allowances are made within the marking process and that Examiners are made aware of the particular circumstances that may have affected a candidate in the examination.

In this context, the Advisory Group considers that greater clarity could be brought to bear with regard to the purpose of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations and the measures that are possible under the Scheme.

As noted in Chapter 3, the principle of not giving any candidate, whether in receipt of an accommodation or otherwise, an advantage over other candidates is one that appears consistently in the literature. The literature also commonly refers to the requirement for all candidates to be assessed under the same criteria and specifications, and on the need to ensure that any accommodation granted does not compromise the integrity of the assessment. Reference is frequently made to the potential conflict between facilitating access to the assessment on the one hand, and maintaining the validity of the assessment on the other.

One of the six assessment principles underpinning the state certificate examinations is that of accessibility (SEC, 2006). The accessibility of an examination refers to the extent to which all candidates are facilitated in demonstrating their achievements, in the context of the need to preserve the integrity, fairness and standards of the examination. This implies that, while every effort must be made to facilitate candidates to demonstrate their level of attainment, any such measure must not compromise the integrity of the examination and must uphold the principle of inter-candidate equity.

There are a number of conclusions that may be drawn from the above. Firstly, a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations is intended to facilitate access to the test; it is not intended to be a measure to compensate for a lack of attainment. All candidates are expected to be assessed against the same syllabus objectives whether or not they have received accommodations. Secondly, accommodations must not confer an advantage to a candidate vis a vis the other candidates taking the examination. Thirdly, while modifications may be made to a test item in order to facilitate access to the test, the modified test item must assess the same construct as the original test item. Fourthly, accommodations must not compromise the integrity of the assessment. In this context, for example, the provision of a reader in a case where reading was part of the assessment would compromise the integrity of the assessment. Fifthly, where exemption from an element of an assessment is an available accommodation, or where a particular accommodation has the effect of changing the assessment construct, annotation of the certificate awarded is a requirement. As noted in Chapter 3, most assessment organisations place some restrictions on certain accommodations where the integrity of the assessment would be compromised by their use.

## **5.2 Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate eligibility issues**

The RACE scheme is intended to cater for candidates with special educational needs to allow them to demonstrate their attainment in the certificate examinations. These include candidates with physical and sensory disabilities, and specific learning disabilities.

There is a fundamental difference in the application process for accommodations at Junior Certificate and at Leaving Certificate. In both cases, applications for reasonable accommodations are submitted by a candidate's school on prescribed application forms. However, one of the key features of the application process at Junior Certificate is the devolution to schools of a significant degree of autonomy in identifying candidates with a disability and/or additional support needs in the examination setting. Approval of an accommodation at Junior Certificate does not assure approval for accommodations at Leaving

Certificate. This issue was raised on a number of occasions during the consultative process and it was apparent to the Advisory Group that awareness of the difference between the process at Junior and Leaving Certificate was limited.

In the case of a Leaving Certificate candidate, as with a Junior Certificate candidate, applications for reasonable accommodations are submitted by the school which the candidate attends on prescribed application forms. Applications for reasonable accommodations on the grounds of a physical / sensory disability are considered by the SEC on the basis of the supporting medical evidence provided. At Leaving Certificate, all applications for reasonable accommodations, apart from those on sensory or physical grounds, are referred to a psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Services (NEPS). All documentation in relation to each application, including all psychological assessments, samples of a candidate's hand writing, and any other appropriate material are made available to the NEP's psychologist for evaluation as part of the decision-making process.

In all cases, there is provision for appeal by the candidate to an Independent Appeals Committee.

It was clear from a number of submissions and contributions that the differences between the processing of applications at Junior and Leaving Certificate were not apparent to all. A number of contributors alluded to situations in which candidates had received an accommodation at Junior Certificate but had been refused the same accommodation at Leaving Certificate. One contributor questioned the difference in process between Junior and Leaving Certificate, noting that the candidate 'is still dyslexic' at Leaving Certificate and 'still needs these reasonable accommodations in order to demonstrate his level of attainment in his certificate examinations'. In particular, the Advisory Group noted the expectation created by the granting of an accommodation at Junior Certificate and the subsequent difficulties created if the accommodation was not subsequently approved at Leaving Certificate.

Another contributor believed that there is a need for more straightforward guidelines regarding eligibility for accommodations at Junior Certificate. While accepting that not everything can be legislated for, 'increasing pressure from parents to grant the accommodation is placing quite an onus on teachers and school authorities'.

A number of reasons may be proposed for a candidate being granted an accommodation at Junior Certificate and not receiving the accommodation at Leaving Certificate. The availability of suitable personnel to administer the standardised tests in the schools, for example, may be one factor.

The context in which the different models are employed at Junior and Leaving Certificate was considered in some detail by the Advisory Group. The Advisory Group considered a number of options with regard to the current system. For example, the Group considered the possibility of reversing the current model and involving NEPS at the Junior Certificate stage or indeed in the early stages of post-primary education. While this proposal held certain merits, the Advisory Group considered that the currency of the psychological assessment conducted at such an early stage would become an issue, particularly in relation to applications at Leaving Certificate. There was also the possibility of change occurring in the student's condition in the intervening years. An additional issue was the currency or status of the Leaving Certificate examination. In this regard, the involvement of NEPS in the processing of applications at Junior Certificate could have the effect of increasing the status of the Junior Certificate to that of the high-stakes of the Leaving Certificate.

### **5.2.1 The role of the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) within the Scheme**

The role of NEPS within the RACE Scheme is significant. While they are not normally directly involved in the processing of applications at Junior Certificate, they provide an advisory and consultative role to the SEC at both Junior and Leaving Certificate levels. NEPS has estimated that their contribution to the scheme constitutes up to 25% of their casework (NEPS, 2007, p. 26). In considering the different models currently in operation at Junior and Leaving Certificate, the Advisory Group was mindful that any further extension of NEPS involvement in the Scheme would undoubtedly create practical and logistical difficulties. Notwithstanding this, the Advisory Group believes that the role of NEPS in processing applications on grounds of Specific Learning Disabilities at Leaving Certificate is an important one. Consequently, at this juncture, the Advisory Group considers that NEPS should continue to be directly involved in the scheme at Leaving Certificate level.

### **5.2.2 Junior Certificate**

The Advisory Group considered a number of issues in relation to the operation of the scheme at Junior Certificate. These included the timing of notification of decisions, the eligibility criteria, and compliance issues.

A number of contributors to the consultative process alluded to the issue of approval of applications and the timeframe within which notification is received. It is clearly preferable that decisions on applications should be made and communicated to the school and the candidate as soon as possible. It is also desirable that a candidate has the opportunity to prepare for the examination in the knowledge that a particular accommodation has been granted or otherwise. In this context, the Advisory Group has noted that most jurisdictions require that an accommodation applied for is the candidate's normal way of working. This would appear to be a reasonable requirement. The Group has also noted that most jurisdictions require a file on a candidate requesting accommodations to be maintained in the school. The file would record previous evidence of need, records of meetings, case conferences, and record of accommodations normally provided in the learning setting. The Advisory Group considers that this is good practice. The Advisory Group has noted that many candidates currently apply for accommodations despite the fact that there is no history of need or evidence of previous application within the learning setting. The Advisory Group has proposed that there should be continuity between learning and assessment and that accommodations sought should, in general, reflect the candidates normal way of working.

The Group is also of the view that the eligibility criteria for all accommodations should be as clear and unambiguous as possible. They should be published and reviewed regularly to ensure compliance with best practice.

### **5.2.3 Leaving Certificate**

The Advisory Group considered a number of issues in relation to the operation of the scheme at Leaving Certificate. In particular, the Group noted the points made by a number of contributors to the consultative process regarding the timing of notification to applicants.

Many contributors felt that decisions should be in place by the end of 5<sup>th</sup> year and a number commented that it was unfair for candidates to be informed that their application was refused in the months before the examination. One contributor suggested that 'it could be argued that decisions relating to reasonable accommodations should be made a full year in advance of the examination to which they refer'. This view was shared by a number of contributors.

Having carefully considered the issues involved, the Advisory Group considers that there is merit in proposals to bring forward the application and decision-making process to the year prior to the examinations. The implementation of this proposal would have a number of practical implications, particularly in the initial stages of implementation. For the National Educational Psychological Service, for example, there would effectively be a doubling of their involvement in the first year as they deal with both 6<sup>th</sup> year and 5<sup>th</sup> year applications. However, the Advisory Group considers that the logistical issues are not insurmountable and that the implementation of this proposal would bring significant benefits for candidates.

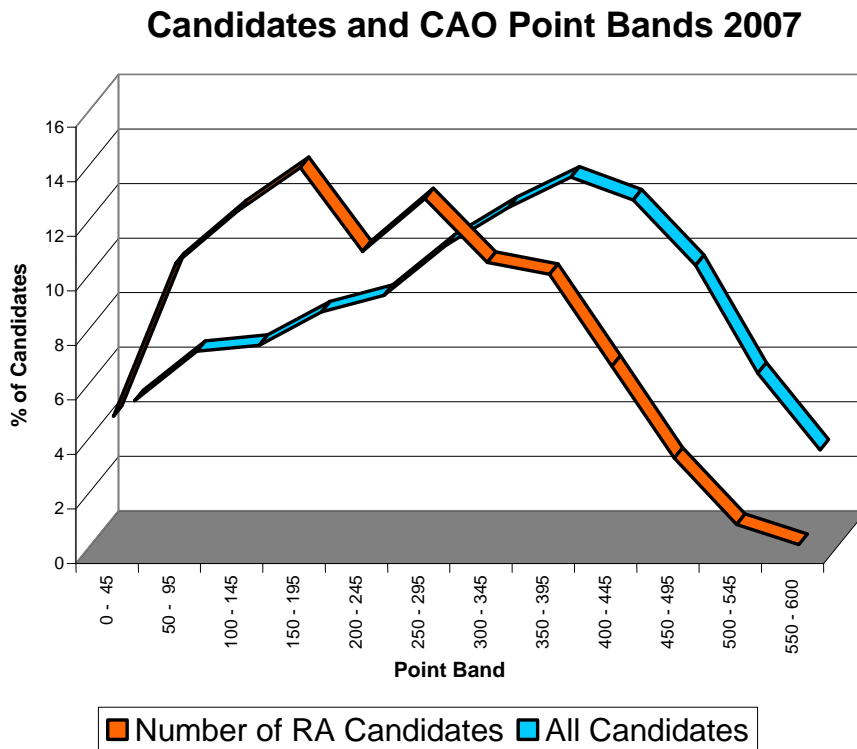
In relation to the issue of subject choice, it would be desirable that information on the extent to which accommodations are possible in particular subjects should be available to students before selecting subjects for Leaving Certificate. This would, of course, have implications for a range of organisations, such as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the State Examinations Commission, among others.

The issue of privately commissioned psychological reports within the application process was also considered by the Advisory Group. The Group understands that some applications under the grounds of specific learning disabilities are accompanied by such reports, while many are not. The Advisory Group is keen to promote equity and fairness in the system. The issue of concern to the Advisory Group in this regard relates to the perception of equity within the application process. An additional issue raised during the consultative process was the extent to which some practitioners in the private sector were familiar with the provisions of the scheme and the eligibility requirements. The Group suggests that this issue is best addressed through the use of a common template created by NEPS that would be used by practitioners from the public and private sectors. This would bring some consistency of approach to bear, even though it is acknowledged that the fact that some applications are accompanied by privately commissioned psychological reports may, in itself, create a perception of inequity. However, the fact that all such applications, whether accompanied by private psychological reports or otherwise, are assessed by a psychologist from NEPS to a large degree alleviates any such concerns.

It was represented to the Advisory Group that high achievers were disproportionately represented within the candidates granted accommodations. It was also represented to the Group that candidates from high socio economic backgrounds were disproportionately represented. The Advisory Group considered these issues in the context of analysing the CAO points achieved by all candidates and those candidates availing of accommodations.

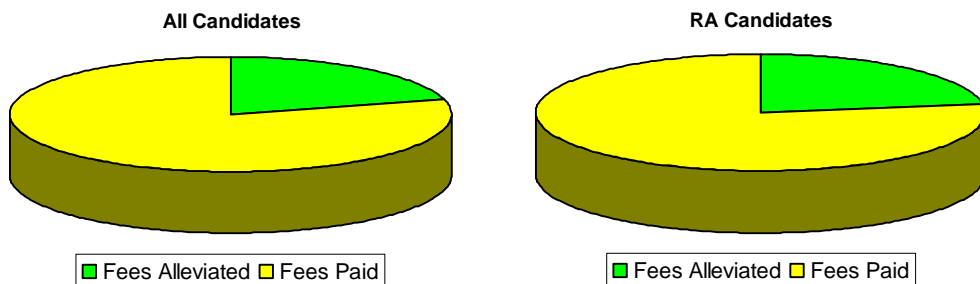
The data in Figure 5.1 suggests that the CAO points bands attained by candidates granted accommodations broadly correlates with the CAO points attainment of all candidates, and is spread across the attainment range.

Figure 5.1 CAO points bands of (i) all candidates and (ii) candidates granted Reasonable Accommodations 2007



In terms of socio-economic background, the Advisory Group analysed the available data on candidates granted fee alleviation which is based on medical card eligibility. As can be seen in Figure 5.2, the proportion of all candidates and Reasonable Accommodations candidates granted alleviation from examination fees is similar.

Figure 5.2 Proportion of candidates granted fees alleviation





### **5.3 Students with General Learning Disabilities (GLDs)**

The Advisory Group has considered the issue of students with General Learning Disabilities (GLDs) and notes the fact that these students are not eligible under the terms of the current scheme, unless the co-existence of an SLD is also diagnosed. In considering the issue, the Group focussed on the purpose of the scheme and, in particular, on the purpose of facilitating candidates to demonstrate attainment. International practice was also researched in this regard and no example was found where a scheme was intended to compensate for a lack of attainment, howsoever caused.

The continuing development of appropriate curricula and modes and techniques of assessment that caters for a diversity of learners would appear to be the appropriate strategy in relation to students with GLDs.

### **5.4 Individualised Education Plans (IEPs)**

The Advisory Group notes the development of Individualised Education Plans, as provided for under the EPSEN Act and the subsequent reference to IEPs in the NCSE Implementation Report on the EPSEN Act.

The Advisory Group considers that the development of IEPs is relevant to the issue of accommodations in the State Examinations to the extent that the IEP may serve as a useful signpost or indication that accommodations in the examination context may be required. An application for an accommodation will, of course, be required to the State Examinations Commission in the normal way, and the responsibility for approval of accommodations rests with the State Examinations Commission.

In terms of awareness of the Scheme and the eligibility requirements, the Advisory Group considers that it is important that the personnel involved in the drafting of IEPs are aware of the purpose and provisions of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations and of the central role of the State Examinations Commission in considering applications under the scheme. In this regard, the Group believes that it is also important that an IEP does not give rise to expectations on the part of a candidate or his/her parents regarding examination accommodations that may not be met, for whatever reason.

### **5.5 Newcomer students**

The Advisory Group notes the significant increase in the numbers of newcomer students in Ireland in recent years. In terms of examinations and assessment, two particular issues present themselves.

Firstly, newcomer students whose first language is not English or Irish in some instances may have difficulties in accessing the state examinations. Measures currently provided include the use of bi-lingual dictionaries in the examinations. This approach is consistent with the requirement to provide accommodations that relate to the access skills required i.e. in this instance, their ability to understand the questions posed in the examination.

In terms of psychological testing and assessment, a particular issue arises relating to newcomer students in that standardised tests are not available in other languages. This is also the case in Gaeilge.

The Advisory Group considers that the issue around newcomer students and accommodations in the State Examinations is a relatively recent one in this country. It would seem appropriate that further research into the issues involved would be helpful in informing the debate and in planning the way forward.

## **5.7 Delivery of the Scheme at school and centre level**

The Advisory Group has considered issues relating to the delivery of the scheme at school and centre level. During the consultative process, a number of submissions referred to practical issues such as the roles of the various school personnel within the processing of applications for accommodations. Some suggested that there was a need for more clarity in relation to the specific roles involved. One, for example, suggested ‘there should be greater clarity regarding the person responsible for making the application. Is it the school, the visiting teacher or the individual?’

Another proposed that Guidelines should be issued to every person participating in the provision of Reasonable Accommodations to students with disabilities. A recurring theme in the consultative process was the desirability of further clarity in respect of the roles and responsibilities of various personnel within the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. A number also suggested that the role of the Examinations Aide should be reviewed in this regard.

Another suggested that a designated person within the school would greatly assist on the day of the examination. One suggested that ‘some recognition should be made regarding the workload someone has to do in preparing the applications (usually the Learning Support Teacher), and subsequently following up with letters advising parents of the outcome of the applications etc.’ Another suggested that a template to assist schools in the early identification of students who might require accommodations would be helpful.

A consistent theme in the context of the delivery of the scheme at school level was the desirability of a single point of contact for parents and candidates with regard to information, eligibility, application process and procedures, and appeals options. On the basis of the consultative process, the delivery of the scheme at school level may involve the Principal, post-holders, the Career Guidance teacher, the Examinations Aide, the Examinations Secretary, the Learning Support Teacher, and the Special Needs Assistant.

Due to the number of people involved at school level, it is necessary that information about the scheme, its purpose and practice, is easily available to all parties. It is also important that school personnel are familiar not only with the operation of the RACE scheme, but also its purpose and principles. Decisions regarding eligibility for the scheme often begin with a subject teacher in consultation with parents, guidance teachers, resource teachers, deputy principals and principal.

The process of diagnosis of eligibility and provision of accommodation under the RACE scheme happens over an extended period of time and, ideally, matches the support provided for the student in the normal learning and school-based assessment situation. Leading and co-ordinating this task for each individual student requires clear designation of responsibilities.

The school aims to support students in their learning and play an advocacy role for them throughout their schooling. While upholding the principle of being fair to all students, staff will generally want to facilitate students as much as possible in learning and assessment situations. In

the absence of professional expertise to guide judgement, and mindful of the wishes or pressures of parents, schools may decide that a student is eligible for an accommodation, particularly at Junior Certificate level, where the examinations do not carry the same “high stakes” as the Leaving Certificate. Schools are also aware of their legal responsibilities and without training in this area, they may feel vulnerable to litigation.

Decisions regarding students’ needs are made collaboratively, involving the student, parents, teachers of various subjects, year heads, guidance and resource teacher and principal. Time is required for these people to meet and discuss the relevant issues. The complexity of school timetabling often militates against such collaboration. Co-ordination and designation of responsibility is required.

## **5.7 Recommendations**

### **The Candidate’s Normal Way of Working**

The Advisory Group recommends that Reasonable Accommodations should, as far as possible, reflect a candidate’s normal way of working. For example, candidates who do not normally have access to reading assistance or a reader, or to a scribe, either in their learning environment or in house or “mock” examinations, will not normally encounter such an accommodation for the first time during a State examination, except in rare cases where an unexpected injury or accident during the course of the examination resulted in a candidate being unable to access the examination in the normal way.

### **Timely decisions in relation to Reasonable Accommodations**

The Advisory Group recommends that applications for, and decisions in relation to Reasonable Accommodations should be made during the academic year prior to the year in which they are due to sit the examination and should be communicated to candidates by the end of that year. The Group expects that a student’s need for Reasonable Accommodation will normally become apparent and be identified early in the student’s academic career. There may be exceptions to this situation, especially in the case of unexpected illness, accidents or trauma and provision should continue to be made for such exceptions.

### **Assessing eligibility at Junior and Leaving Certificate**

The Advisory Group recommends that:

Advisory and training sessions be provided by the SEC, and where appropriate by NEPS, for school staff, especially staff members directly involved in assessing applications for Reasonable Accommodations.

Each school’s Special Needs Policy document should include a statement of policy and practice on RACE, including assessment of eligibility.

NEPS continues to be involved in assessing eligibility at Leaving Certificate level, and advises that reports from private psychologists, where provided, should be required to conform to a pre-determined template. Appropriate guidelines should also be made available for private psychologists, including guidelines on identifying and applying appropriate tests; interpretation of the results of tests and implications of results of tests for RACE. Advisory and training courses/sessions might be provided to ensure that private psychologists are accurately informed of the purpose and scope of Reasonable Accommodations.

The SEC should examine, in consultation with other education agencies, the feasibility of establishing an approved list of private psychologists whose reports conform to and are aligned with the requirements of the different agencies.

Regular monitoring and audit of the implementation of the RACE scheme be undertaken, with priority being given to monitoring schools which are significantly above or significantly below the national average, and that such data be collected, collated and published on a regular basis.

#### **Candidates with General Learning Disabilities.**

Notwithstanding the progress that has been made in recent years in the inclusion of students with GLDs in mainstream education, the Advisory Group considers that the provision of a range of appropriate awards for which curricula and assessment can be elaborated, is the most appropriate means of addressing the needs of all students, including those with General Learning Disabilities, and hence, candidates with GLDs should not normally be included in the RACE scheme.

The Advisory Group notes that the original circular setting out the purpose of the RACE scheme (Circ. S40/94) stated that the special arrangements were intended for candidates “who would have difficulty in communicating what they know to an examiner because of a physical disability, including visual and hearing impairments, or a specific learning disability”. The scheme was clearly not intended to compensate for lack of attainment and was not devised to include students with a General Learning Disability. The Advisory Group did not locate an example in international practice where a RACE scheme was intended to compensate for a lack of attainment, however caused.

#### **Immigrant/Newcomer Candidates whose first language is not English.**

The Advisory Group is of the view that the issue of linguistic barriers to accessing the examination papers is not one which should be addressed under the RACE scheme. The Advisory Group notes the significant increase in recent years in the numbers of immigrant and newcomer pupils whose first language is not English. Their lack of English presents particular problems for them in accessing both the curriculum and the examinations. Such candidates are permitted to use bi-lingual dictionaries in the examinations and this approach is consistent with the requirement to provide support for such students to access the examination (and should continue). Guidelines have recently been made available by the NCCA on Intercultural Education and these guidelines address many of the issues of supporting access to learning and assessment by these students.

#### **Responsibility within school**

The Advisory Group recognises the key role of the school principal in liaising with the SEC on matters relating to the State examinations, it is also aware that in view of the increasing responsibilities which devolve on the principal, it may be desirable that a person be designated within each school with specific responsibility for the RACE scheme. He/she might act as a conduit between candidates, parents and school and the SEC. S/he should also liaise with Resource and Learning Support and other relevant personnel during the school year and at the time of examinations. One possibility in this regard would be to extend the remit of the Examinations Aide and to give appropriate recognition to this additional role. Such a development would need to be considered by the SEC in conjunction with the DES and the education partners.

## **6. Curricular and syllabus issues**

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### **6.1 Introduction**

This Chapter considers the role of curriculum and syllabus design in the context of Reasonable Accommodations. It examines the extent to which modifications may be made to examinations and test items to facilitate access to the test without compromising the validity of the assessment. It also examines the issue of modifications, adaptations and exemptions from elements of examinations in the context of ensuring that the essence of the subject as outlined in the syllabus document is not compromised.

While the issues involved are complex, the Advisory Group believes that addressing them at the syllabus design stage will be to the benefit of all candidates. In particular, the Advisory Group believes that by addressing these issues at an early stage, there can be clarity for all candidates with regard to the accommodations that are possible prior to embarking on a particular subject or course of study. The Advisory Group supports the principle that if syllabi are designed to be accessible at the design stage, then the need to provide accommodations at the assessment stage will be greatly reduced. If, on the other hand, limited consideration is given to issues of accessibility at syllabus design stage, a large number of accommodations may be required at the assessment stage.

The terms ‘curriculum’ and ‘syllabus’ are sometimes used interchangeably. In Ireland, the term ‘curriculum’ is generally used to describe the range of learning experiences in a programme that is prescribed for a particular group of students as in the ‘primary school curriculum’. The term ‘syllabus’ has a more limited interpretation and generally refers to the published document in which the prescribed material for a course of study in a particular subject is specified.

As noted in Chapter 2, the key statutory agency in relation to curriculum design and development is the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The NCCA is a statutory agency whose role is to advise the Minister for Education and Science on all matters relating to curriculum and assessment at pre-school, primary and post-primary levels. According to its Mission Statement, the role of the NCCA is

to lead developments in curriculum and assessment and to support the implementation of changes resulting from this work. The NCCA works in a spirit of consensus and partnership. It seeks to promote an innovative and creative environment for all learners in schools and other educational settings ([www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)).

### **6.2 Syllabus design issues**

In considering accessibility and inclusion issues within the context of syllabus design, the Advisory Group notes the inherent challenges in that a highly flexible syllabus with many optional elements may require little or no need for the consideration of exemptions compared to a highly prescriptive syllabus which may require consideration of a greater number of exemptions.

In relation to integrated programmes of study, such as, for example, the Leaving Certificate Applied, the Advisory Group has given consideration to the possible extent to which the integrity of the programme may, in itself, be a barrier to participation. Similarly, in a programme such as the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme, is it possible that the Link Modules, in which particular subject groupings are prescribed, may serve as a barrier to participation and have implications for the overall accessibility of the programme?

The Advisory Group notes the recent developments regarding the development of full subjects, short courses, and transition units. The Group would make the general point that accessibility issues and any potential barriers to participation should be fully considered at the early stages of design. The Group would also refer to the continuum in access issues from syllabus design to assessment design to particular accommodations. If it were possible to design a totally inclusive and accessible syllabus, then no exemptions would be required.

The Advisory Group also notes the work currently underway by the NCCA in support of the inclusion and equality agenda. These include, for example, the development of curriculum frameworks, flexible programmes of study, review and research, and the preparation of support materials for schools, teachers and parents. In relation to Senior Cycle developments, the NCCA is promoting greater autonomy in managing learning, access to learning pathways and improved learning experience for students. In terms of subject review, the subject template aims for greater alignment between key skills and learning outcomes. The Advisory Group considers that, in addition to the foregoing, a number of issues arise.

Firstly, the Advisory Group suggests that the issues of access and Reasonable Accommodations should be considered at the syllabus design stage, as well as at the test development stage. This would imply that consideration should be given to access issues and, in particular, to the issue as to whether there are some skills or outcomes that are so fundamental to a subject or discipline that they cannot be exempted from assessment under any circumstances. In this regard, the Advisory Group would emphasise the process illustrated in Figure 6.1 below in which the concept of exemption is the final stage in a process and should only be considered when all other avenues of access have been exhausted. The Advisory Group considers, therefore, that every possibility regarding alternative and modified assessments should be fully explored prior to considering exemption.

The Advisory Group accepts that there are certain skills and competencies that are fundamental to a given domain which must be assessed. The challenge is to ensure that the fullest consideration is given to the possibility of alternative modes of assessment that can validly assess these skills and competencies. Increased awareness of developing and emerging technologies may be an important element in this context. The Group also accepts that it may be the case in certain circumstances that having explored every option in this regard, it is not possible to establish an appropriate means of validly assessing a particular skill or competency except through the standard modes of assessment.

As noted previously, the Advisory Group considers that, prior to embarking on a course of study, there should be clarity for candidates with regard to the course requirements and, in particular, with regard to access issues and the elements of the course that are 'core'. The Group envisages that each subject syllabus would have an 'access statement' in which the skills that are deemed core to the subject are stated. This process, in itself, presents a number of challenges, including consideration of the issue of defining 'core'. Having considered the matter, the Advisory Group believes that core in this context has two parts. The first part relates to the proportionality of the element vis a vis the syllabus. In this regard, it may be that a particular component constitutes such a significant portion of the syllabus specification that to exempt it from assessment would undermine the integrity of the syllabus itself. The second part relates to elements that would reasonably be regarded as so fundamental or essential to the subject domain that to exclude them from assessment would sunder or undermine the assessment and certification process. As noted above, the Advisory Group accepts that despite considering

access issues at each stage, it may be the case that no alternative mode of assessment is possible and exemption may not be appropriate. In summary, therefore, the Advisory Group considers that ‘core’ in this context has two elements, 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 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 process.

### **6.2.1 The syllabus**

The starting point for assessment in any subject is the syllabus. It defines the content, the objectives and learning outcomes in a particular subject. The examination in a particular subject measures the extent to which a candidate has met the objectives of the syllabus.

If considering these issues, it may also be appropriate to consider the question of alternative curricular provision or explicit adaptation of existing curricular provision in order to make the system more inclusive and accessible and in order to accord with 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 other educational needs, is stated. For example, if a particular element of a subject was a barrier to participation, perhaps a syllabus should be available in which this element was not specified. An example commonly cited is that of a language subject in which two syllabi might be available – one on literature and another on language, for example.

A common analogy in the context of the syllabus, the assessment and Reasonable Accommodations is the use of the terms ‘access skills’ and ‘target skills’.

Braden and Elliott (2003) note that access skills are the skills that are required by a candidate in order to take the test. For example, reading achievement tests require candidates to be able to see test items (visual acuity skills), sit upright throughout the test session (gross motor skills), indicate correct answers (fine motor skills), and work on test items throughout the testing interval (attention, stamina skills). These skills are not the focus of the assessment; rather, they are skills required to access the test items and content. In most countries, it is generally accepted that accommodations in respect of access skills are both appropriate and indeed, are a requirement in many instances, under equality legislation.

On the other hand, target skills are the skills prescribed in the syllabus that are the focus of the assessment. Braden and Elliott note

Target skills are the skills that assessments are intended to measure or reflect. Examinees with disabilities do not have the right to accommodations that address target skills because such accommodations would be unfair (i.e., they would incorrectly inflate the examinee’s scores relative to those who did not have accommodations). To return to the example of a reading achievement test, some of the target skills in the test would be the ability to decode text (word reading), understand text (comprehension), and apply previous knowledge to information in the text (evaluate and extend meaning). Providing a large print version of the test to an examinee with a visual impairment would be appropriate (i.e., the accommodation addresses the access skill of visual acuity), but reading the test aloud to the examinee would not be appropriate (i.e., it changes the target skill—decoding text—by substituting a different skill—listening comprehension). (Braden and Elliott, 2003, p.4)

Target skills have significant implications for syllabus design and should be carefully considered by all involved in the process.

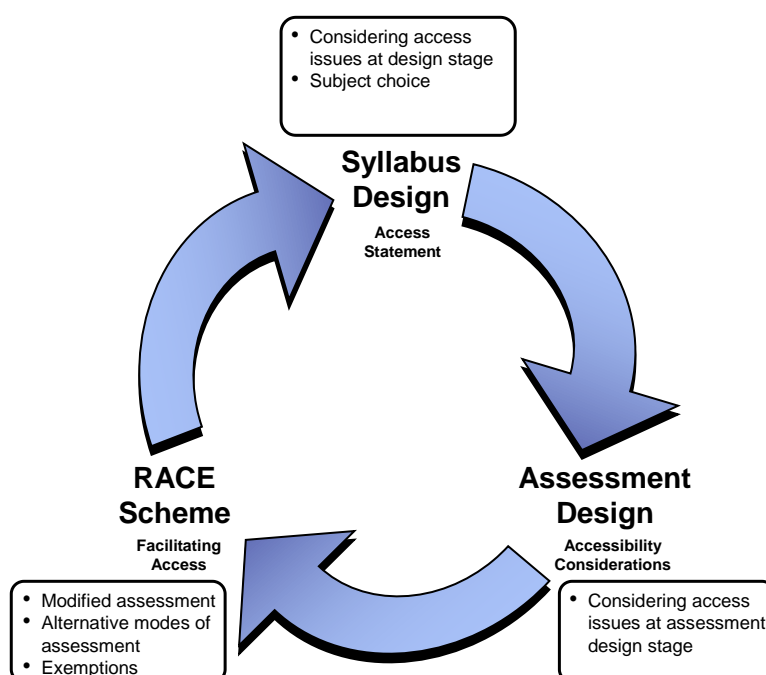


Figure 6.1 Access considerations

## 6.2.2 Exemptions from assessment in elements and/or components of a syllabus

The concept of exemptions from elements of the assessment was initially proposed by the Expert Advisory Group in 2000 – ‘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’ (Principle 9).

It is important that, as noted above, consideration of the granting of an exemption within the assessment process is the final option with an access continuum. Access issues are fully considered at syllabus design stage in the first instance. Access issues are also considered within the assessment design process, including consideration of modification of the test item or alternative modes of assessment. The Advisory Group envisages the issue of access issues generally, and accommodations in particular, as part of a continuum involving syllabus design, assessment design and the RACE Scheme, as illustrated in Figure 6.1 above.

Within the Irish context, it may be appropriate to briefly outline the current practice regarding a candidate who seeks an exemption from assessment in an element of the examination. An application is made to the State Examinations Commission for an exemption from an element of the examination in the subject. The application is supported by appropriate medical or psychological evidence. In considering the application and any deviation from the standard assessment, a number of general principles have to be considered by the State Examinations



Commission, in accordance with the published assessment principles of the SEC. These include, for example:

- Facilitating and enabling access to the test instrument, whilst maintaining the integrity of the syllabus, including the rationale, aims, learning objectives and outcomes
- Maintaining the integrity of the test instrument and, in particular, the equivalence between the existing and any proposed modification to the test instrument
- Consideration of modifying the assessment or the provision of alternative means of validly assessing candidates
- Upholding the assessment principles of the State Examinations Commission, including the principle of inter-candidate equity.

If the application for the exemption is granted, the candidate is informed that the certificate awarded will be annotated. For example, in the case of a candidate granted an exemption from the aural component in a language examination, the annotation would state that 'all parts of the examination were assessed except the aural component'. As noted in Chapter 3, if the accommodation involved accommodations in respect of access skills only, or if the same skills were assessed in a different way, then no annotation would be required. It is noted that in the event of an exemption from, for example, an aural component in a language examination, the candidate's result is calculated on the balance of work undertaken by the candidate. The rationale for the annotation of the certificate is that the target skills have been changed in that the candidate was exempted from a particular element of the assessment and as a consequence, the meaning of the test results has changed. Annotation is effectively the means by which the validity of the assessment is maintained.

The Advisory Group is aware that there have been instances where applications for exemptions from elements of the assessment have been refused, primarily because the State Examinations Commission considered that to grant the exemption would, in effect, sunder the integrity of the assessment in the subject. Thus, exemption in the Life Sketching element of the Art examination is not permitted on the basis that the Life Sketching element constitutes such a significant proportion of the syllabus content that to exempt it from assessment would result in insufficient remaining syllabus content to maintain the validity of assessment in the subject. As a general principle, the Advisory Group considers that this type of information should be available to a candidate prior to commencing a course of study in a particular subject. In this context, it notes the following excerpt from the Joint Council for Qualifications (note that the term 'centre' in the UK context refers to a place of learning, usually a school. See the Glossary in Appendix III):

Candidates and Centres need to be able to make informed choices about the qualification routes they choose. This means that candidates need to be aware if they are choosing a course where they will not be able to demonstrate attainment in all parts of the assessment and consequently will be unable to gain credit in all parts of the assessment. A candidate may still decide to proceed with studying a particular subject and not be entered for all or part of the assessment. The Centre should ensure that candidates are aware of the range of subject options open to them and in which they can cover the course and demonstrate attainment across the whole of the assessment (JCQ, 2006, p. 3).

The Advisory Group considers that this is good practice.

### 6.2.3 Reasonable Accommodations in the Leaving Certificate Applied

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) is a single award made on the basis of the credits accumulated over two years and in the final examination. Participants may accumulate a maximum of 200 credits.

Candidate achievement is recorded in three modes as follows:

1. Satisfactory Completion of Modules	62 credits	31%
2. Student Tasks (7)	70 credits	35%
3. Final examinations	68 credits	34%

The LCA award is made on the basis of the number of credits awarded, as follows:

Distinction	170-200 credits	85-100%
Merit	140-169 credits	70-84%
Pass	120-139 credits	60-69%
Record of Credits	119 credits or less	59% or less

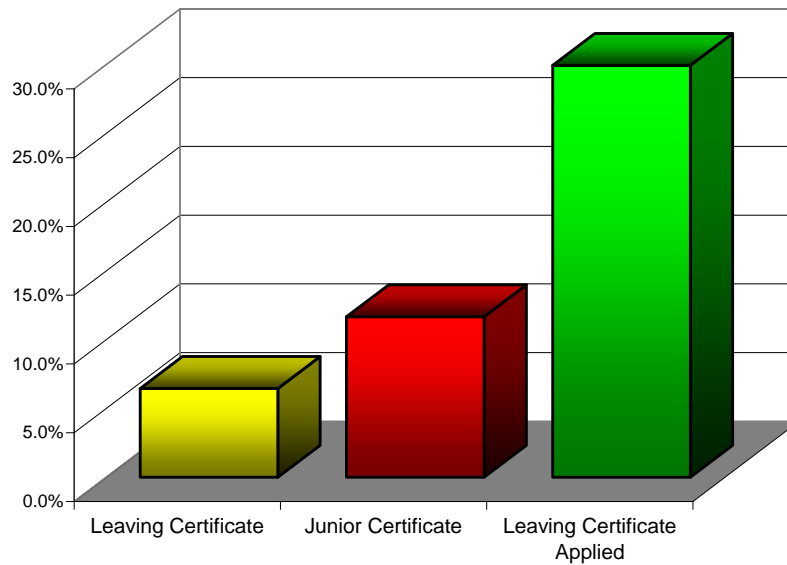
Since the introduction of the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) in 1995, the number of students participating in the programme has risen from 1200 in 1995, to 7515 in 2005. Participation by students with both physical and learning disabilities has also risen significantly in that period.

The current Reasonable Accommodation scheme was devised in the context of the Junior Certificate and the established Leaving Certificate programmes, both of which comprise stand alone subjects with terminal examinations. The appropriateness of the application of the scheme to the LCA must be considered in the context of the objectives, structure and features of the LCA programme, and the growth in accommodations granted for Leaving Certificate Applied candidates (see Figure 6.2).

The Advisory Group notes that although exemptions from whole subjects are not specifically provided for either in the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*, or in the *LCA Programme Statement*, the Reasonable Accommodations Section in the SEC has had to deal with requests for whole subject exemptions since the introduction of the programme. The Advisory Group believes that the current system of granting whole subject exemptions, without substitution, requires further consideration. Given the structure of the LCA programme, it may be suggested that the integrity of the programme may be compromised by the granting of whole subject exemptions. As the issue of exemptions in the context of the LCA has not been addressed either in the Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools or via Department of Education and Science or State Examinations Commission circulars, an additional issue arises in that schools may be unevenly informed regarding the possibility of exemptions from whole subjects within the programme.

The Advisory Group believes that further consideration should be given to the issue of the accessibility of the LCA programme for students with special educational needs.

**% of Reasonable accommodations Granted 2008**



**Figure 6.2 Percentage of candidature granted accommodations in Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and Junior Certificate 2008**

#### **6.2.4 Disabled Peoples' Advisory Panel**

The current model of syllabus development involves the NCCA establishing a committee representing various organisations that are mandated to design the draft syllabus in a particular subject (see Chapter 2). These committees are made up of 'representatives of the Department of Education and Science and State Examinations Commission, teacher unions and school managerial bodies, parent organisations, subject associations and higher education interests including universities and other colleges' (NCCA website [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)).

The Advisory Group has noted with interest the establishment in May 2007 of the Disabled Peoples' Advisory Panel by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in England. Its role is 'to advise and assist the QCA on the most effective ways to address inequalities and barriers facing disabled learners, service users and employees'. The panel currently comprises 20 members with expertise across a range of areas including pre-school, primary and secondary education, further and higher education, research, health and nursing, advisory work and equalities practice (Source: QCA website).

In relation to syllabus design and development, the Advisory Group considers that there is merit in giving serious consideration to a model that allows for formal comments and feedback from people with disability on the deliberations of Course Committees during the design stage. While it is acknowledged that syllabus documents already go through an extensive consultation phase, the Advisory Group believes that a formal consultative role for people with disability specifically in relation to access issues in general and equality-proofing of learning outcomes in particular, would be a positive development. The proposed Panel could advise, input and inform the process, as required from time to time. The establishment of the Panel would also ensure that any issues regarding access could be considered at an early stage in the design process, and that information on developments in technology that could be used in order to facilitate the demonstration of attainment would be available.

## **6.3 Recommendations**

### **Link between Curriculum Design, Assessment and RACE**

The Advisory Group recommends that where there are core elements of a subject, from which no candidate should be exempt, such core elements should be identified at syllabus design stage. Students with special educational needs should be made aware from an early stage of the implications of this for examination and certification purposes. The Advisory Group is aware that the NCCA and the SEC work closely together, in collaboration with the education partners, to design curricula and syllabi. The Advisory Board is also aware that the NCCA is paying increasing attention at design stage to the implications of curriculum and syllabus content for learners with special educational needs.

### **Exemptions**

The Advisory Group supports the principle of exemptions from elements of an examination, but recommends that an exemption should be the final option for candidates with special educational needs. A well designed curriculum or syllabus should take account of the learning challenges of pupils with special needs. Modes and techniques of assessment should also be sensitive to candidates with special needs and, where a candidate with special needs may not be able to access an assessment instrument, the feasibility of modifying the test item or providing alternative modes of assessment should also be considered at syllabus design stage. Only when all these approaches fail, should exemptions be considered. This continuum might be illustrated as follows (see Figure 6.1 above):

- Syllabus Accessibility inbuilt at Design Stage
- Learning and Assessment (Normal Way of Working)
- Assessment/Test Design Accessibility
- Modified Assessment
- Alternative Modes of Assessment
- Exemption sought

### **The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Programme**

The Advisory Group notes the importance and value of the LCA Programme and recognises the contribution it has made since its introduction.

The Advisory Group also acknowledges that the integrated structure of the programme poses particular challenges in considering applications for reasonable accommodations from LCA candidates and recognises that it is important that a balance be maintained between the requirement to provide LCA candidates with an accessible and inclusive programme and the need to protect the programme's integrated structure.

Accordingly, the Advisory Group recommends that the SEC consults with the NCCA as a matter of urgency to review this matter so that the policy in dealing with RACE applications in the LCA programme is clarified and agreed. The outcome of this review should then be circulated to those concerned.

### **Setting up of a Disability Advisory Panel**

The Advisory Group recommends that the SEC together with the NCCA, considers setting up a Disability Advisory Panel, consisting of people with special educational needs and their representatives, to advise on disability issues in the design and delivery of syllabus and assessment arrangements. Such a panel, the Disabled People's Advisory Panel, has been set up

by the QCA in England, and that experience could be drawn upon in setting up a similar panel in Ireland.

### **Annotation of Certificates**

The Advisory Group recommends that where exemptions are granted, it is recommended that certificates continue to be annotated, as is currently the situation. The purpose of annotating certificates is to provide information on the elements of subjects from which a candidate was exempt and to maintain the integrity of the assessment. If the recommendations of this report are implemented, it is likely that the number of exemptions and waivers and therefore the need for annotations, will be reduced in future years. If core elements of a subject are identified at the syllabus design stage, students can be advised to select subjects appropriate to their learning needs, and to avoid presenting for examination in subjects which they cannot access or can only partially access. .



## 7. Provision of Information

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### 7. Introduction

There is a Reasonable Accommodations section in the offices of the State Examinations Commission. The section manages applications and responds to queries and requests for information. There is also a dedicated email address [sec.specialneeds@examinations.ie](mailto:sec.specialneeds@examinations.ie).

The State Examinations Commission publishes a range of information, on the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations. Information is available both in hard copy and on the SEC website ([www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie)).

### 7.1 Information currently available

The information currently available includes the following:

#### General information/documentation

S40/94 *Certificate Examinations – Special Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities*

S11/2000 *Report of the Expert Group on Certificate Examinations in relation to arrangements for the assessment of candidates with special needs in the Certificate Examinations*

S70/00 *Information Note regarding the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations which will apply at the 2001 Certificate Examinations*

*Current list of tests suggested by NEPS for use by schools in considering applications for Reasonable Accommodations at Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied levels*

*Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations – Procedures relating to the conduct of the Certificate Examinations where a candidate has assistance from a scribe or reader  
is using a tape recorder or word processor  
is hospitalised  
requires an individual centre*

#### Junior Certificate documentation

1. Circular S68/07 *Junior Certificate Examination 2008 Reasonable Accommodation for candidates with physical disabilities and Specific Learning Difficulties*

2. A Booklet *Reasonable Accommodations 2008 Junior Certificate*. Information in this publication is provided under the following headings:

- general information
- guidelines for completion of the application forms
- contact details including direct phone lines if further assistance is required
- the Principles on which the provision of arrangements for candidates with special needs are based
- Application on the grounds of a Specific Learning Difficulty
- Assistance of a Reader
- Use of a Tape recorder or Word Processor

- Waiver from the assessment of spelling, grammar and punctuation in the language subjects
  - Application on the grounds of a Visual Difficulty
  - Application on the grounds of a Hearing Difficulty
  - Application on the grounds of a Physical Difficulty
  - Use of a tape recorder
  - Use of a word processor
  - Assistance of a scribe
  - Helper in practical subjects
  - Exemption from Practical Test in Home Economics
  - The Examining Process and Difficulty accessing Material
  - Appointment of Superintendent/Scribe/Reader
  - Appeal Procedure
3. Application Forms on grounds of a Hearing Difficulty
  4. Application Forms on grounds of a Specific Learning Difficulty
  5. Application Forms on grounds of a Physical Difficulty/Difficulties
  6. Application Forms on grounds of a Visual Difficulty

### **Leaving Certificate documentation**

Circular 14/07 *Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied examination 2008 – Reasonable Accommodation for candidates with physical disabilities and specific learning difficulties*

Form R.A 1/2008 *Application on the grounds of a specific learning difficulty Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied*

Form R.A 2/2008 *Application on the grounds of a physical difficulty Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied*

## **7.2 Dissemination of Information**

The circulars and guidelines on Reasonable Accommodations are disseminated annually to principals of second-level schools and are available on request to any member of the public. This documentation is also available on the SEC website.

During the course of the consultative process, it became clear that some candidates and their parents are unaware of the existence of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations or have an inaccurate or inadequate understanding of its operation. In some schools, information on the scheme is readily available to those who need to access the scheme, but this does not seem to be the case in all schools. Where candidates have access to a guidance counsellor and/or a resource or special needs teacher who is familiar with the various options within the RA scheme, that candidate is best placed to avail of the scheme.

Various suggestions were made during the consultative process in relation to improving general awareness of the Reasonable Accommodations scheme. One submission indicated that the application process was confusing and another wrote that ‘it is vital that this review ensures...that the system of application for reasonable accommodations is more transparent and as user-friendly as possible (or not unnecessarily complicated)’. It was suggested that user-friendly and attractive booklets be made widely available – possibly mirroring the design and dissemination of the General Information booklet on examinations produced by the SEC. It was also suggested that public information sessions and seminars should be held around the country at which the scheme would be described and explained and questions answered. The Advisory Group considers that specific information and training workshops might also be provided for various professional and specialist groups such as the Inspectorate, the staff of the



National Council for Special Education, especially those involved in the preparation of Individualised Education Plans, the staff of the NEPS, school principals, guidance counsellors, special needs teachers and resource teachers.

The possibility of having a Questions and Answers page on the website of the SEC and employing (perhaps at key times of the school year) what is referred to in England as “an Examinations Doctor” who could deal with questions relating to reasonable accommodations in examinations, might also be considered. It may also be helpful if RA section of the SEC liaised with the media education correspondents who provide examinations advice in the national press and on radio.

### **7.3 Variations in the use of the Reasonable Accommodations scheme**

The Advisory Group noted that in some areas and in some schools, the proportion of candidates using the scheme is greater than in others. The proportion varied significantly from school to school. In some schools, for example, no candidates availed of the scheme, whereas in another, over 35% of candidates received accommodations. While the data available to the Advisory Group did not enable the Group to carry out a detailed analysis of the reasons for this variation, there does not appear to be a direct correlation between schools who have a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and those which have a high proportion availing of the reasonable accommodations scheme. The Advisory Group recommends that an analysis of the correlation between schools which accommodate pupils with special needs and those which avail of the Reasonable Accommodations scheme be carried out on a regular basis and that an audit be undertaken of those schools where there is a poor correlation.

During the consultation process, it was suggested that the availability of a principal or teachers or special educational needs organisers familiar with the operation of the scheme was a significant factor in the take-up of the scheme.

The Advisory Group is of the view that wider dissemination of information relating to the Reasonable Accommodations scheme would provide greater equity in the take up of the scheme and would help to ensure that pupils who need to avail of its provisions have the necessary information and understanding to do so. Other issues relating to accessing the scheme are addressed elsewhere in this report.

#### **Trends in Applications**

The significant increase in recent years in the numbers of candidates availing of Reasonable Accommodations in the state examinations system has already been noted. Whereas the numbers availing of accommodations for visual and aural impairment has remained more or less constant since 2001, the numbers seeking accommodations under the spelling and grammar waiver, reader and scribe categories has grown exponentially. In the (established) Leaving Certificate category, a total of 264 candidates availed of a spelling and grammar waiver in 2001. This increased to 2136 in 2008.

The overall increase in the number of separate centres was more than fourfold from 1,776 in 2001 to over 7000 in 2008. Some of the implications of these increases are addressed elsewhere in this report.

## **Support of candidates by staff of the Reasonable Accommodations section of the SEC**

During the consultative process, the Advisory Group was impressed by the positive comments made by members of the public in relation to the support and help provided by the RACE section of the SEC. Many of the submissions praised the prompt and efficient way in which queries were answered and the way in which relevant advice was made available as appropriate. Many also referred to the sympathetic way in which concerns were treated, and how solutions were found to unexpected emergencies at examination time. In particular, they noted with appreciation, the efficient manner in which the staff of the SEC responded to requests for Special Centres in hospitals and other venues, which, by their nature, tend to occur at very short notice. These issues are also considered in Chapter 9.

## **7.4 Recommendations**

### **Information and Training**

In relation to the provision of information on the Reasonable Accommodations scheme, the Advisory Group recommends that Information and Training sessions on the RACE scheme and its implications for individual students, should continue to be made available for Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs) in the context of the preparation of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs).

### **Greater communication and collaboration between various agencies**

The Advisory Group recommends that communication between the SEC and the range of agencies in relation to developments and changes in the RACE scheme, continues and develops further, thus ensuring that these groups are aware of the purpose and application of the scheme.

The Advisory Group notes the significant growth in the number of State and semi-state agencies involved in education and training, and in the provision of certification and qualifications in the past decade. These include the NCCA, SEC, NEPS, the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), the National Education Welfare Board, the National Qualifications Authority, FETAC and HETAC. There are also a wide range of non-statutory support bodies and groups which provide advice and support to schools. These include DES funded bodies, such as the Leadership Development in Schools (LDS), the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI), the Special Education Support Service (SESS), the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), the National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS), and the Visiting Teacher Service etc., as well as teacher unions and principal and management organisations such as the TUI, ASTI, ACCS, IVEA, JMB, and NAPD. In addition there is a variety of groups and organisations which support students with special needs such as ASPIRE, AHEAD, Brainwave, Dyslexia Association of Ireland, Deaf Hear, Irish Deaf Society, National Council for the Blind of Ireland etc.

These agencies could play a role in disseminating information.

## 8. Specific Accommodations

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This Chapter outlines the range of accommodations currently available within the scheme and refers to some particular issues associated with each. Where appropriate, the Advisory Group has made recommendations at the end of the Chapter in respect of specific accommodations.

The available accommodations may be grouped into four main categories, as follows:

**Alternative versions of the test instrument:** These include, for example, Braille and enlarged formats, modified versions, and the provision of readers.

**Variations in examination setting:** These include, for example, separate centres, additional time, and the provision of a helper in practical subjects.

**Variations in the medium of presentation:** These include, for example, scribes, tape recorders, and the use of technology / assistive technology.

**Exemptions and waivers:** These include, for example, exemptions from elements of the assessment, whole subject exemptions in the Leaving Certificate Applied, and the waiver in spelling and certain grammatical elements in language subjects.

All accommodations are underpinned by the overarching Framework of Principles set out in Chapter 4.

### 8.1 Alternative versions of the test instrument

#### 8.1.1 Braille, text format of Braille and enlarged paper format

Test items provided by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for candidates with visual impairment are available in the following formats:

##### **Braille format**

While all examinations papers are available in Braille format on request, the number of candidates applying for examination papers in Braille has declined in recent years. The State Examinations Commission has procedures in place for the preparation of Braille and modified papers to ensure that the principles of validity and reliability are maintained.

Notwithstanding the above, there are two issues in particular that the Advisory Group believes should be considered. Firstly, the Advisory Group understands that National Braille Production Centre (NBPC) has set out Braille standards. The Group notes that the quality of the Braille production is benchmarked against the standards defined by the NBPC.

The second issue relates to additional time. The Advisory Group understands that particular issues of time arise in the case of Braille format examinations and that the adoption of a more flexible and focused approach to additional time would be particularly relevant in the case of candidates taking Braille format examinations.

### Text format of the Braille version

This accommodation was first introduced following Circular S70/2000. In preparing Braille format examination papers, certain adjustments or modifications may be made to the original test instrument, and to visual or graphics material in particular, in order to facilitate the Braille process. The Circular noted

Certain question papers containing visual or graphics material are adjusted by the Department to facilitate production in Braille format. The adjusted version in non-Braille format will be made available on request to candidates with a severe visual impairment who do not make use of Braille. This improvement should help such candidates to overcome the difficulties presented by visual or graphics material (Examinations Branch, (2000, b).

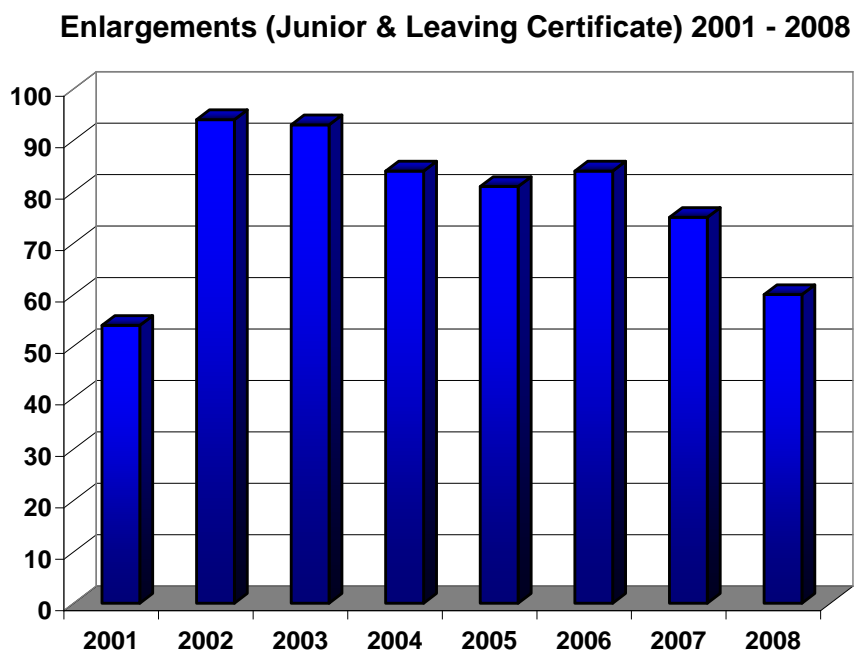
The Advisory Group does not consider that any particular issues arise in relation to this accommodation. It notes that ‘reliability requires that all forms of an examination paper, including those modified for particular candidates, such as candidates with a visual impairment, are similar in demand’ (State Examinations Commission, 2006, b).

### Enlarged paper format

There is general agreement in the literature that large-print is a useful accommodation. However, it is likely that large-print examination papers are less user-friendly than regular print papers in that they require more page turning than standard examination papers. There may also be issues relating to the actual physical size of the paper i.e. currently A3. It also seems important to ensure that the page turns occur at appropriate points in the text so as not to interfere with the candidate’s train of thought.

As illustrated below (Figure 8.1), the number of candidates seeking enlarged paper format is relatively low and has remained consistent in recent years.

Figure 8.1 Number of examination paper enlargements 2001-2008



In relation to enlarged format, the Advisory Group notes that the current practice is that the original examination papers are enlarged from A4 size paper to A3 size paper. Practice in other

jurisdictions would suggest that Large Typeface format is the preferred format for candidates with visual impairment.

It is recommended that Large Typeface examination papers should replace the current enlarged papers and the large-print accommodation should be offered to any students for whom it is determined that they will benefit from the accommodation. The Advisory Group considers that candidates who use the large-print accommodation may also require additional time due to visual processing difficulties.

### **8.1.2 Readers**

The regulations regarding the role of a reader in the examinations are specified by the State Examinations Commission. The relevant excerpt states

The reader should read through the entire question paper with the candidate, if required, ensuring that each word is recognised. The reader may not give the meanings of words, nor amplify what is written. The candidate may ask for parts of the paper to be read again as often as may be necessary, but the reader may not suggest or choose parts of the paper for repetition without the candidate's direction (State Examinations Commission, 2004, p. 9).

As has been noted, some jurisdictions place certain restrictions or conditions in relation to the accommodation of reader. For example, in New Zealand, in the case of languages, a reader can only read any English words on the examination paper. The candidate must read the target language as that is part of the test or assessment construct.

Similarly, the JCQ outlines some examples where the accommodation of a reader may not be appropriate

A candidate with severe dyslexia wants to take English Language and Modern Language examinations but cannot read or write adequately. As the assessment criteria being tested in these subjects include reading and writing, he cannot have an adjustment in the form of a reader in the reading papers. He cannot have a scribe in the writing paper for Modern Languages. A decision is made as to whether to enter him for these subjects on the basis of how much he could complete independently (p. 40).

The JCQ regulations state that 'a reader will not be allowed in sections of papers testing reading, such as English, Irish (or Gaelige), Welsh, Modern Foreign Language reading papers, some Classical specifications requiring the candidate to read in Greek or Latin or in subjects testing reading such as GCSE English Literature or GCE English Language or Literature or combined Language/Literature specifications'. The common characteristic here, as is the case with other accommodations referred to above, is the reliance on the interrogation of the assessment construct or specification in considering whether a particular accommodation is appropriate or otherwise. The crucial consideration is the purpose of the examination and the potential impact of the proposed accommodation on the assessment construct.

In the submission made by NEPS to the Advisory Group, NEPS (2007) citing Leipzig (2001) note

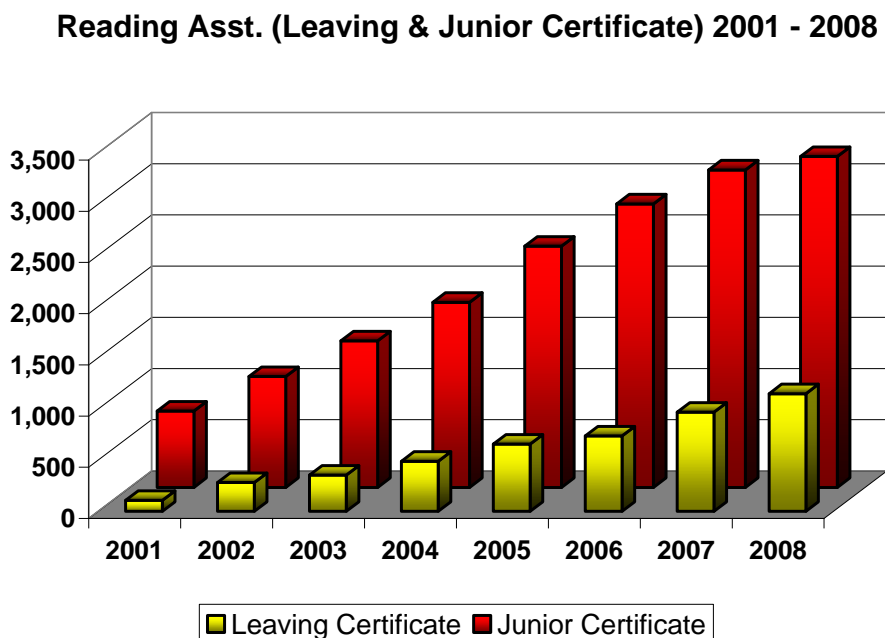
Reading is a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, and fluency. Reading is making meaning from print. It requires that one:  
Identifies the words in print – a process called word recognition  
Constructs an understanding from the text – a process called comprehension

Coordinates identifying words and makes meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate – an achievement called fluency. Therefore, reading in its fullest sense involves weaving together word recognition and comprehension in a fluent manner (NEPS, 2007, p. 14).

NEPS submits that ‘with regard to the reader accommodation the purpose of the examination, inter alia, may be to assess the ability to read literary or descriptive passages in context. In that event this ability may not be accurately assessed if the extracts are read to the candidate’ (p. 14). NEPS also expresses the concern that ‘the inclusion of reading comprehension difficulties as a basis for granting the Reader accommodation may in fact militate against the purpose of the examination and confer an unintended advantage on the candidate’. Given that one of the principles underpinning the scheme is that the granting of an accommodation should not confer an advantage, this issue may require further consideration.

As noted in Chapter 2, there has been a significant growth in the number of reader accommodations granted since 2001. The increase is illustrated in Figure 8.2 below.

**Figure 8.2 Reader accommodations 2001-2008**



While the SEC recognises that it would not be appropriate to nominate as reader a near relative of the candidate, or another student from the school, it also states that ‘the Commission recognises a candidate may have worked with a particular person during his/her course of study and in the interests of the candidate the Commission accepts that the school may wish to nominate as reader such a person or some other person from the school locality’ (p. 9). With regard to possible alternatives to the reader as an accommodation, NEPS has suggested that the availability of audio versions of examination papers would have a number of potential advantages, suggesting that it would

- address the issue of the inclusion of reading comprehension difficulties as a basis for granting the Reader accommodation. Candidates who have difficulty in assimilating the import of the questions on first reading could replay the questions as often as required.

- ensure standardised reading of questions without leading emphasis, or inflections
- address any concerns about the possible misuse of Separate Centres (NEPS, 2007, p. 16)

There is a direct correlation between the large number of reader accommodations and the number of separate centres required. The availability of examinations on digital recording would be likely to alleviate the need for the current large number of separate centres and significantly, may be a more appropriate accommodation. The Advisory Group notes that a recommendation of the Task Force on Dyslexia was

The Department of Education and Science should examine a range of accommodations that might be offered to students with specific learning difficulties arising from dyslexia in state examinations, including the provision of test papers with enlarged print, and the option of listening to the examination questions on tape (Task Force on Dyslexia, 2001, p. 101).

Considering all of the issues involved, the Advisory Group believes that the availability of audio versions of examination papers merits serious consideration.

### **8.1.3 Modified versions**

The State Examinations Commission prepares modified papers annually. The modified papers provide access to the examinations for candidates with, for example, visual impairment. While questions may be altered, or the presentation of the paper may be different, the modified papers assess the same construct as the main papers. The modifications generally relate to graphics and diagrams and, as noted above, the Commission has established procedures to ensure reliability between the original version and the modified version of the test item (State Examinations Commission, 2006, b).

On rare occasions, where the modification results in a change to the assessment construct as, for example, in the case of the substitution of the mapping question in Geography with an alternative question testing a different construct, annotation to the certificate is applied, since the assessment construct has been altered.

## **8.2 Variations in examination setting**

### **8.2.1 Separate Examination Centres**

In Ireland, the term ‘centre’ refers to a place in which the state examinations are held. It is commonly a classroom within a school and typically contains 20-30 candidates. One Superintendent is appointed to each centre. In a larger venue, such a school hall, for example, a number of centres might be accommodated with the venue, with each having its own Superintendent. A separate centre refers to a room that has been allocated to an individual candidate who, due to the granting of a particular accommodation or circumstance, requires separate examination accommodation. In the case of a reader or scribe, that person also acts as the Superintendent in the separate centre.

The very significant growth in the provision of special centres in recent years has been noted in Chapter 2. There were over 7,000 separate centres approved in 2008, while there were some 4500 regular centres. In the case of some individual schools where there were one or more regular centres, the number of reasonable accommodations granted required the provision of multiple special centres. A number of schools had more than 10 separate centres and the Advisory Group notes that in one school in 2007, more than 25 separate centres had to be

provided. The Advisory Group is also aware that in a number of instances, additional external accommodation had to be acquired in order to meet the demand for separate centres.

The increase in the provision of separate centres has been discussed in Chapter 2.

It may be helpful to consider the type of situations in which a separate centre may be required. In the case of candidates granted a reader, a scribe, or the use of a tape recorder, it is clear that a separate centre is required in order to avoid distractions in the main centre. In addition, a school may apply to the State Examinations Commission for approval to establish a separate centre for a candidate who has particular needs or whose behaviour, in the opinion of the school, might potentially disrupt the regular centre. Therefore, to a large extent, the increase in the number of separate centres is attributable to the increase in the number of candidates granted readers (4812 in 2007), scribes (732 in 2007) and tape recorder (1054 in 2007).

A number of issues need to be considered in relation to the provision of separate centres. These include the availability of physical space and administrative issues, the availability of appropriate personnel, and potential integrity issues.

The physical space and administrative workload required for separate centres is becoming a significant issue for many schools. It was clear from the consultative process that many schools are encountering significant difficulties in terms of the availability of appropriate rooms for separate centres. As one submission noted, the increase in separate centres 'poses a number of practical difficulties at school level'. The Advisory Group notes that the growth in the number of separate centres is difficult to sustain on logistical grounds alone. However, it also notes that the increase from 2007 to 2008 is less than previous years. This may suggest that the level of demand for separate centres has been met. However, practical and logistical issues remain in attempting to meet the current demand for separate centres.

In terms of the availability of suitable personnel, during the consultative process a number of schools referred to the difficulties encountered by them in attempting to 'procure sufficient readers for candidates granted this accommodation'. Additional issues that arise in this context are the desirability of the candidate having had the opportunity of working with the reader prior to the examination. The Advisory Group considers that it is clearly not ideal that the first time that the candidate works with the reader is during the actual examination, apart from the day allocated for practice.

The Advisory Group has noted that many candidates who have worked with a particular individual during the school year request that this person acts as scribe during the state examinations. While the rationale for this is understandable, the Advisory Group notes the potential for conflict between the simultaneous duality of roles of scribe and superintendent. The regulations state that

the duty of the scribe is to transcribe only what is dictated by the candidate. The scribe must not advise the candidate regarding which questions to attempt, when to move on to the next question or the order in which the questions should be done. The scribe should write down answers exactly as they are dictated. The scribe should not read any part of the question paper to the candidate unless the Commission has also granted reading assistance and should only converse with the candidate where it is necessary to clarify the candidate's instructions (SEC, 2004, p. 12).

The Advisory Group believes that separate centres should only be provided for candidates who are likely to benefit from them in accessing the test instrument. The provision of accommodations, such as readers, scribes and tape recorders should reflect the candidate's normal way of working except in the case of temporary injury, to an eye, for example. Greater use of separate centre consolidation could be considered, where appropriate.



## 8.2.2 Additional time

Under the existing arrangements, there are two main elements to the accommodation of additional time. These are:

(a) the Pilot Project in additional time that was introduced in 2000 in Irish, English, History and Geography at Leaving Certificate and

(b) the additional 10 minutes per hour of examination time that is available to candidates in particular circumstances, up to a maximum of 30 minutes.

In considering the issue of additional time, the Expert Group in 2000 proposed that ‘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’ (Expert Advisory Group, p. 16). Specifically, it proposed 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’. It also suggested that ‘if the proposal is adopted, its implementation should be monitored and the situation should be reviewed in the light of experience gained in the pilot’ (p. 16).

The Advisory Group has considered the issues around the current pilot project in additional time. It involves the subjects Irish, English, History and Geography at Leaving Certificate. In these subjects, an additional 20 minutes of examination time is available to all candidates. On the official examination timetable, these subjects are highlighted in red and the following is stated on the timetable: ‘The examination sessions highlighted in red have been extended by 20 minutes over and above the time traditionally allocated for the papers concerned’ (SEC, 2008). The Advisory Group has noted that the de facto position is that what was originally conceived as a pilot project in relation to the accommodation of additional time has become the accepted timetable for the Leaving Certificate examinations in these subjects. There is provision for an additional ten minutes of examination time to be made available for candidates availing of scribes and in some other circumstances. It was noted from the submissions received that ‘students are put in an unfavourable position in English, Irish, Geography and History in comparison to the general allocation of additional time’. A number of contributors shared the view that the pilot project was not serving the purpose for which it was intended. One stated that ‘there is, for some time, a strongly held view among teachers that this measure in fact confers an advantage on students who do not have special educational needs and who tend to be in the higher achievement groups’ and went on to ‘strongly recommend that this measure be discontinued’. This view was shared by another who believed that this measure ‘confers benefit primarily on the most able academically and does not achieve its intended aim of facilitating completion of these examinations by students availing of reasonable accommodations...its general effect is to exacerbate rather than mitigate inequity’. Most submissions on this accommodation strongly recommended that ‘the provision be discontinued and a more targeted scheme be introduced.

It is generally accepted that the purpose of extra time as an accommodation is to provide access to the test. The Advisory Group considers that the continuation of the pilot project does not serve to facilitate access to the examinations for those candidates for whom the time element is critical to their ability to access the test instrument.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) regulations allow the head of a school or college to arrange up to an additional 25% of examination time for candidates with special needs without having to seek permission from the awarding body. The published regulations set out a number of conditions under which this accommodation is granted. The school or centre also needs to register every candidate with disabilities or difficulties. Further extra time – up to 100% – can be granted by the awarding body, and this is decided on the basis of the individual combination of circumstances of the candidate. In general, it may be said that a somewhat more flexible and targeted approach to the issue of

additional time as an accommodation is in evidence in other jurisdictions. Such an approach is not without its challenges. The capacity to increase the time available for assessment is constrained by practical considerations such as, for example, timetabling issues.

The Advisory Group considers that the pilot project in additional time in Irish, English, History and Geography at Leaving Certificate should be discontinued and that a more focussed approach to the accommodation of additional time should be introduced.

## **8.3 Variations in the medium**

### **8.3.1 Scribes**

Scribes may be permitted in cases of candidates with severe visual impairment, physical disability or where the handwriting of the candidate would be impossible to decipher. This arrangement may also be approved where the candidate's speech would be extremely difficult to interpret on tape or where a tape recording would not meet the particular requirements of the examination, such as, for example, making calculations in subjects such as Mathematics and Accounting.

The use of a scribe, it itself, does not present any particular difficulties except in the case of certain examinations such as, for example, languages where the ability to write appropriately in the target language is part of the assessment. Thus, while the ability of the candidate to spell correctly may not be part of the test construct in, for example, a Geography examination, it may be an essential requirement in the case of a language examination.

As noted previously, a number of practices may be discerned in other jurisdictions with regard to the use of a scribe as an accommodation. These may be categorised as follows:

- (a) the use of a scribe may not be a permitted accommodation in certain subjects (this generally applies in the case of language subjects where the ability to write accurately in the target language is part of the assessment, or subjects such as Technical Drawing or Art, for example, where the drawing element is central to the assessment in the subject)
- (b) the use of a scribe may be permitted, but in the case of language subjects, the candidate is required to clearly indicate the spelling/grammar and punctuation to the scribe

Thus, for example, in Scotland, in the assessment of writing in Modern Languages, it is the overall quality of the written language, particularly spelling accuracy which is being assessed, the scribe must follow explicit instructions from the candidate with regard to spelling and/or use of accents.

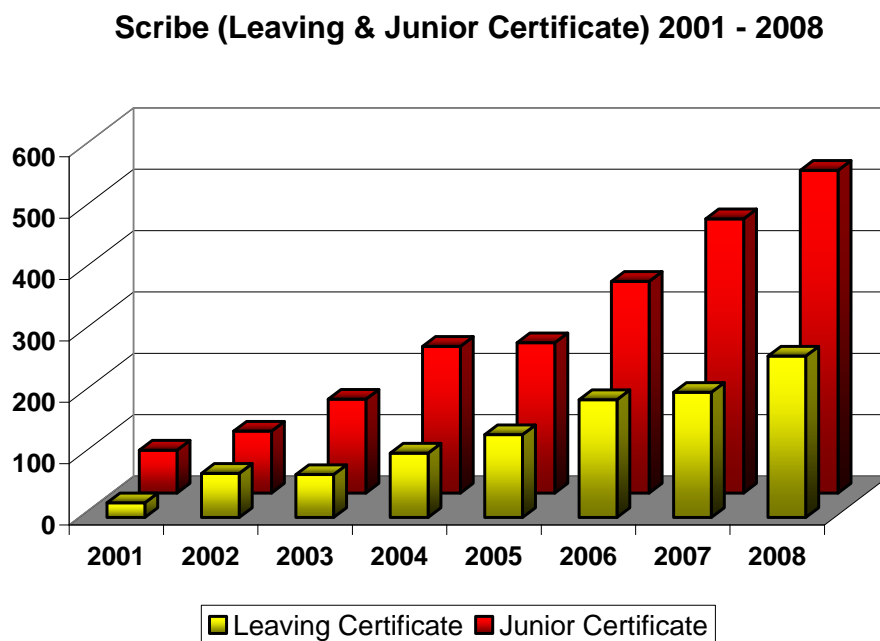
The situation in New Zealand may be helpful in illustrating practice in other jurisdictions. In New Zealand, if a candidate has writer assistance (scribe) in a language examination, the candidate must spell each word in the language being assessed to the writer and tell the scribe of any punctuation necessary for the language. The rationale for this is that the demonstration of the ability to produce the target language is part of the test for the candidate. For example, some English standards require the student to have an independent command of language features which may require the candidate to dictate spelling and punctuation features. Some standards require the candidate to use writing conventions (e.g., spelling, paragraphing, punctuation, grammar, etc) without intrusive errors (i.e., errors of such frequency and level that they detract from the reader's ability to read fluently, understand and enjoy the piece). This example places the focus on the assessment construct i.e. what the examination or test item is attempting to assess and the relationship between this construct and the possibility of a particular accommodation impacting on the actual integrity of the assessment. Thus, in the above instance, as spelling and grammar are part of the assessment construct, the candidate is required to indicate the spelling and grammatical conventions to the scribe.

Where the registered achievement criteria of the standard being assessed specifically state that it must be all the candidate's own work, significant input from the candidate to the scribe would be required to avoid invalidating the candidate's response. This would apply, for example, where the achievement criteria stated 'The student must demonstrate an independent command of written English, including the accepted usage of writing conventions'. It must be noted, however, that candidates need not enter this externally-assessed standard and that there is a similar standard which assesses formal writing which is internally assessed and which allows candidates to use a computer or craft their work over time. This raises the issue of syllabus design and the possibility of different examinations in the same subject area.

In Ireland, the use of a scribe may be permitted, but in the case of language subjects, the certificate may be annotated to indicate that the candidate was assessed in all elements of the subject except spelling, grammar and punctuation.

The number of scribe accommodations has risen significantly in recent years, as illustrated in Figure 8.3.

**Figure 8.3 Scribe accommodations 2001-2008**



The State Examinations Commission regulations state that

In the subject Art, a scribe can only be used for the History and Appreciation element of the examination. In the subjects Engineering and Construction Studies the scribe may be permitted to answer the theory-type questions only. The Scribe cannot under any circumstances complete any sketches or drawings. A Scribe is not permitted in the subject Technical Drawing. ...It is important to note that the use of a scribe in the language subjects will necessitate the inclusion of an explanatory note with the result in those language subjects. The wording of such annotation will read as follows:

All parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and written punctuation elements. (this applies in the language English)

All parts of the examination in this subject were assessed except spelling and some grammatical elements. (this applies in the case of all other language subjects being undertaken by this candidate) (SEC, 2007)

Other considerations relating to the use of a scribe in an examination involve the possibility that the scribe may inadvertently encourage candidates to elaborate on responses, help candidates organise their thoughts, or facilitate writing mechanics such as capitalisation and punctuation skills.

In general, the Advisory Group considers that the provision of a scribe is an appropriate accommodation for students who could physically not respond without a scribe and particularly in the case of the assessment of subjects not intended to test certain writing skills. On the other hand, if a test is designed to measure grammar and other specific writing skills in the target language, this accommodation may be less valid.

The Advisory Group considers that particular emphasis should be placed on this accommodation reflecting the candidates normal way of working in school or in-house examinations as otherwise, this accommodation may not serve its intended purpose of enabling the candidate to demonstrate his/her level of attainment.

### **8.3.2 Assistive Technology**

Many submissions referred to the use of emerging technologies. One suggested that 'the key to the provision of reasonable accommodations in certificate examinations is to use all of the technological facilities in an imaginative way to overcome the obstacles that people face'

Given ongoing developments in technology, it seems likely that further opportunities will present themselves with regard to the potential use of technology and assistive technology in the future. SEC (2007, b) noted

...certain candidates, by nature of the visual impairment cannot read black print on a white background but can read blue print on a yellow background. Others can access test items provided in electronic format through the use of Assistive Technology Software.

The use of computers may also facilitate access to other accommodations, such as large print. This may be an appropriate accommodation for candidates who cannot physically use a pen.

Increased use of technology generally within the examinations may present possibilities in the future in relation to accommodations. There is already evidence of this in a number of subject areas. The State Examinations Commission has noted that

...candidates commencing the Leaving Certificate *Design and Communication Graphics* course from 2007 onwards will be submitting a computer-aided design (CAD) project in electronic format. This will allow not only the finalised design itself to be assessed, but also the developmental processes leading to this end-product. This capacity to externally assess *process* as well as *product*, facilitates a greater alignment of the assessment with the syllabus objectives than has been possible heretofore. It is understood that discussions are underway in relation to implementing similar modes of assessment in other recently revised subjects, such as *Art*. (SEC, 2007).

The Advisory Group considers that a proactive approach should be taken to the potential use of developing technologies and in particular, to considering how technologies might be appropriately adapted and utilised in the area of Reasonable Accommodations.

In this context, the Group would also refer to its recommendation in Chapter 7 regarding the proposed establishment of a Disability Advisory Panel. It is envisaged that the members of the Panel would have relevant expertise in assistive technologies and, in that context, would be well placed to provide advice at syllabus design and development stages regarding the possibilities presented by emerging technologies.

## **8.4 Exemptions and waivers**

In January 2000, Circular S11/2000 *Report of the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations in relation to arrangements for the assessment of candidates with special needs in the Certificate Examinations* outlined the revised arrangements ‘that enhance and extend the provisions set out in circular S40/94 which the Minister has decided should have immediate effect arising from the Advisory Group’s set of principles and recommendations’ (Department of Education and Science, 2000, (b) p. 1). A new provision of exemption from elements of the standard assessment, with accompanying annotation of certificates was introduced.

The scheme was further developed in November 2000 when circular S70/2000 introduced the availability of ‘a waiver in relation to the assessment of spelling/grammar etc. in language subjects’ (Department of Education and Science, 2000, (a) p. 1). The circular noted that

under the principles identified by the Expert Advisory Group candidates with specific learning difficulties who are granted the use of a tape-recorder, computer with spell check enabled or the assistance of a scribe effectively are granted a waiver in relation to the assessment of the spelling and grammatical elements in language subjects. From 2001 a candidate whose specific learning difficulty is not severe enough to warrant the grant of such facilities may nonetheless opt for a waiver in relation to assessment of spelling/grammar etc. in language subjects (p. 1).

The Circular also noted that where this arrangement is granted, ‘the candidate will have his/her grade determined on the balance of the work in the subject and the results will be accompanied by an explanatory note to the effect that all elements of the language subject in question were assessed except the spelling and grammatical elements’

It is important to note that the waiver only applies in the case of language subjects. As spelling is not part of the assessment construct in other subjects, the issue of a waiver in these subjects does not arise.

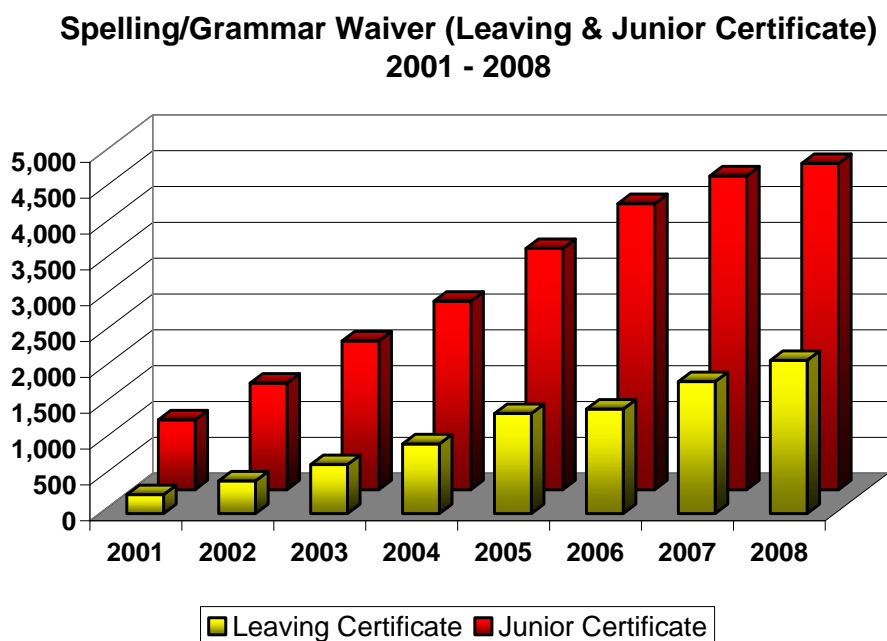
The waiver in spelling and certain grammatical elements has been the subject of considerable discussion. A number of issues have been raised. These include, for example:

- the growth in numbers granted this accommodation
- the absence of a similar or parallel provision in other jurisdictions
- the appropriateness of the waiver in respect of its impact on the construct being assessed; many educationalists regard spelling and grammar as core elements of language
- the difficulties in assessing eligibility for the waiver
- issues in the application and implementation of the waiver in a consistent manner within the marking process in the language subjects

- the absence of research on the effects of the waiver on the quality of the assessment
- the perception that the waiver may confer an unfair advantage and that it may contravene the principles on which the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations is based.

The Group has noted the significant annual increase in accommodations granted in this category since its introduction in 2001. The rate of increase in relation to this particular accommodation is illustrated in Figure 8.4

**Figure 8.4 Spelling and Grammar waiver 2001-2008**



In researching practice in other jurisdictions, the Group has found no evidence of a similar provision or parallel arrangement in existence. This finding was corroborated by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS, 2007, p. 16). During the consultative process, it was represented to the Group that spelling and grammar are inherent elements of language, are intrinsically linked and that to exempt them from the assessment in a language could be seen to impact on the integrity of the syllabus and its assessment. It was also suggested that because spelling and grammar were intrinsic parts of a language, they cannot be considered as clearly identifiable separate components from which exemption may be granted. The following comment was noted in the Focus Groups:

Doubt was expressed by participants as to whether it was desirable to waive such a core element as grammar and spelling in languages. Educationalists expressed uncertainty as to whether some accommodations were really suitable... ‘Waivers shouldn’t apply to core competencies’... ‘(German/French) – grammar and punctuation are key cores of the subject’ (Ralaheen, 2007, p.15).

The Advisory Group also noted the lack of specific research in relation to the effect of the waiver and on the impact of the accommodation in the marking process within the different language subjects. Given that this particular accommodation appears to be unique to Ireland, no international research was available. The Group has also examined the inherent practical issues arising in implementing the waiver within the marking process. Chief Examiners noted the challenges in ensuring consistent application of the waiver and expressed particular concerns

regarding the issue of spelling and grammar as core to the study of language. Notwithstanding the foregoing, it is clear from the statistics that a significant number of candidates regard this particular accommodation as an important one.

In addition, NEPS has noted some practical difficulties encountered by psychologists in assessing eligibility for the waiver. (NEPS, 2007, p. 17)

To a large extent, the waiver in spelling and grammar is linked to the accommodations of tape-recorder, computer with spell check enabled, or the assistance of a scribe. As mentioned above, Circular S70/2000 noted that candidates granted these accommodations are 'effectively granted a waiver in relation to the assessment of the spelling and grammatical elements in language subjects'. The reason for this is that as a result of the accommodations granted, the candidate has not demonstrated attainment in these particular elements of the assessment.

A number of conclusions may be drawn in relation to practice in other jurisdictions concerning these issues. Firstly, as noted previously, in relation to the spelling and grammar waiver there is no evidence of the availability of a similar or parallel accommodation in any other jurisdiction - it would appear to be an accommodation uniquely available in Ireland. Secondly, in relation to the use of scribes as an accommodation, most jurisdictions place some restrictions or conditions on the use of this accommodation in certain examinations. These restrictions or conditions generally pertain to the issue of the assessment construct i.e. what is the examination attempting to assess? A common example cited is that of an assessment testing reading comprehension. In this case, most jurisdictions do not allow a reader as reading is the skill that is the focus of the assessment and to grant a reader in that circumstance would be regarded as compromising the validity of the test. Similarly, where other jurisdictions place restrictions on the use of scribes, it is generally in the case of language subjects and more specifically, where the ability to write in the target language and to demonstrate attainment in the grammatical, spelling and other written conventions in the target language are part of the focus of the assessment.

The Advisory Group is of the view that in considering the waiver as it currently exists, the fundamental issue is the syllabus document in each subject and the learning outcomes prescribed in the syllabus. The Advisory Group considers that the syllabus and accompanying 'access statement' should make explicit the core elements that are being assessed. In that context, the Group believes that, as outlined in Chapter 6, an 'access statement' should be prepared in each syllabus. This statement would clearly outline the elements or components of the syllabus that are regarded as core requirements and which must constitute part of the assessment in the subject.

In the event that the proposed 'access statement' considers that spelling and grammar are core elements of the syllabus in language subjects, and an appropriate alternative means of assessing this core skill, or an accommodation e.g. extra time is not possible or appropriate, the view of the Advisory Group is that the accommodation of waiver in spelling and grammar should be discontinued. In this event, the expectations of current students must be recognised and appropriate notice of the removal of the accommodation should be given. Consideration will also have to be given to issues such as the provision of additional time, if appropriate, and the potential for the development of separate language syllabi for language and literature.

The Group considers that the proposed 'access statement' will serve as guidance with regard to the appropriateness of exemptions and waivers. As noted in Chapter 6, exemption is the final stage in a process that should commence at syllabus design. Every other possibility of enabling the candidate to demonstrate their attainment should be explored prior to the consideration of exemption. It may be the case that exemption is the only accommodation available and in this context, the proposed access statement will be relevant in determining whether in fact exemption is appropriate in the particular case.

The issue of annotation of certificates, which is inextricably linked to exemptions and accommodations that change the assessment construct, was considered in Chapter 3.

## **8.5 Recommendations**

### **Enlargements**

Enlarged print examination papers should continue to be made available, as should examination questions on audio-tape/CD where appropriate.

The current practice of enlarging the pages of the examinations paper, be replaced by a system where a Larger Typeface be used. Consideration might be given to making the Enlarged Typeface versions available to candidates with specific Learning Disabilities such as Dyslexia, where such an accommodation is appropriate

### **Readers and Scribes**

Readers and scribes should continue to be permitted for those for whom such accommodations are appropriate.

The role and function of the reader or scribe may need to be more specifically delineated and monitored to allay concerns that readers and scribes may sometimes go beyond their prescribed role and provide prompting or other inappropriate supports to candidates. The Advisory Group noted that in some countries, candidates who are granted the use of a scribe, must spell out each word of the examination script.

### **Audio versions**

The use of an audio version of the examination papers could be made available, thereby reducing the need of special centres, as well as helping to increase efficiency and ensure the integrity of the examination.

### **Technology**

The use of other forms of technology, such as computers instead of scribes and increased use of silent assistive technology, might be an appropriate form of reasonable accommodation for some candidates and might also help to reduce the number of special centres.

### **Additional Time**

The Advisory Group recommends that the pilot project of 10 additional minutes per hour for some selected papers for all students be discontinued at the earliest possible date.

Accommodations of additional time – normally to a maximum of 10 minutes per hour- should continue to be made available for candidates with special educational needs or a specific learning disability. In exceptional situations, the amount of additional time might be as much as 25% extra.

### **Spelling and Grammar Waiver**

The Advisory Group recommends that serious consideration be given by the State Examinations Commission to the withdrawal of the spelling and grammar waiver in those subjects where it is currently permitted. Following detailed consideration of the matter and an extensive examination of international practice in relation to it, it appears to the Advisory Group that spelling and grammar are a core element of language subjects and it is recommended that the views of NCCA be sought on this particular issue as a matter of urgency. On receipt of these views the SEC should give immediate attention to reviewing its current practice in this area of the RACE scheme.

Other reasonable accommodations, including availability of large print papers, papers on audio-tape or CD and/or additional time should continue to be available for candidates who require such accommodations.



## **Chapter 9 Trauma and Adversity / absentee candidates**

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### **9.1 Introduction**

This chapter sets out that part of the RACE scheme that deals with trauma and adversity. It describes current provision and outlines a number of options for discussion that the Advisory Group considered in the course of its work. It also draws on the experience of other countries in its consideration of the issues involved.

### **9.2 Current provision**

Each year, arrangements are made by the SEC to cater for a wide range of emergencies and other situations. These include accidents, illness, and bereavement or other trauma. The SEC estimates that over 1,000 such cases present annually, although only very few of these can be accommodated under current arrangements. This is due, in the main, to the nature of the state examinations and their characteristics as terminal written examinations.

The most common measure available to candidates in these circumstances is a special sitting of the examination in a venue such as a hospital or separate centre. Another measure that may be put in place is a delay to the official start time of an examination on the specified day to accommodate a candidate. This is permitted when appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that the integrity and security of the examination are not compromised. In practical terms, this results in a candidate perhaps attending the funeral of a close relative under the supervision of, for example, a Principal, and sitting an examination immediately afterwards. Other available measures include the provision of a scribe or the facility to record the responses of the candidate on tape.

In addition to the foregoing, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) works in close co-operation with the State Examinations Commission and is available to assist schools in managing crisis situations during the examinations.

Having considered the views expressed to the Advisory Group through submissions and, in particular, at the Consultative Session, the Advisory Group is of the view that the current provision for candidates who suffer trauma, accidents or bereavement at examination time is, at present, inadequate and in need of review and development. One contributor commented that ‘...the whole area of trauma really has to be addressed and it has to be struggled with in a very real way’. Another stated that ‘there’s nothing in place for students with bereavement.’ This theme was adopted by a number of contributors at the Consultative Session.

The Advisory Group commends the SEC for its efforts in accommodating candidates who encounter trauma and adversity as far as possible within the current structures and parameters of the Scheme. Many contributors to the consultative process referred to the positive manner in which the SEC responds to candidates who experience trauma or other difficulty during the examinations. One submission noted the ‘very positive partnership that exists between schools and the SEC’ and stated that ‘the SEC is most supportive of any individual student who may, for reasons foreseen or otherwise, require any measure of accommodation during the certificate examinations’. The consensus view was that, within the parameters of the existing scheme, the SEC was doing as much as it could to facilitate candidates in these situations. The Advisory

Group has noted, and concurs with, the many positive comments made during the consultative process in relation to the efficient, prompt and compassionate response of the SEC to these issues. The Advisory Group accepts that these cases present particular challenges given that they most often arise in the period immediately before or during the examinations, that they are often sensitive in nature and that they have to be dealt with in a timely manner and with an individualised response to each case.

Notwithstanding these comments, the Advisory Group notes that, in most jurisdictions, some provision is made for candidates who cannot attend the examination for legitimate reasons. At present in Ireland, there is no such provision for candidates. The Advisory Group is particularly conscious of comments made by participants regarding the arrangements that are currently in place for candidates who suffer bereavement through, for example, the death of a close family member. The Advisory Group has listened carefully to the views of principals, teachers and candidates on the human issues involved and is in agreement with the view that a more humane and compassionate approach is required. The Advisory Group believes that a consultative process should be undertaken with a view to developing an appropriate scheme. However, the issues and challenges in attempting to achieve this are not insignificant, and are considered below.

### **9.3 Issues arising**

While acknowledging the need to establish and implement appropriate measures to cater for candidates who experience particular trauma or bereavement at examination time, the significant challenge is to devise a system that will facilitate this requirement and, simultaneously, uphold the integrity and validity of the examinations.

In considering this challenge, the Advisory Group agreed that there are two main issues that have to be considered. These are:

**(a) Eligibility for the scheme:** Given the nature of the state examinations and the assessment principles under which they operate, careful consideration is required to ensure that in attempting to devise a system to cater for cases of trauma, the integrity of the assessment process is not compromised. One may, for example, pose the question as to which candidates would be catered for in any potential scheme. In the case of bereaved candidates, for example, would one confine eligibility to candidates in which the death of an immediate family member has occurred? How would one define an 'immediate family member'? In the case of illness, what would be the qualifying criteria for eligibility? What measures should be considered to protect the integrity of the system and to prevent potential abuse of any scheme that might be established? It is clear that defining eligibility for any proposed scheme is, in itself, a particular challenge.

**(b) The overall context in which the State Examinations operate:** Consideration also needs to be given to the context in which the state examinations are conducted. As described in Chapter 1, the state examinations are centrally administered, terminal examinations, which are examined by external examiners. This contrasts with the examination systems in many other countries where assessment is conducted on a continuous basis, or where assessment takes place at regular intervals, and where some of the assessment is conducted by the student's own teachers. It is clear that in the context of a terminal point-in-time system of assessment, some candidates will take particular tests at a time that they do not consider optimum for them. As noted in Chapter 2, the fact that the Leaving Certificate is a high stakes examination places an additional onus to ensure that all candidates are treated fairly.

## 9.4 Options for discussion

In its examination of the issues for candidates who experience trauma, the Advisory Group considered the international literature and the views raised by those in the consultative session and in submissions. Overall, the Group concluded that there are four possible options that could be considered in order to address the issues highlighted. These are

1. Special consideration and allowance of additional marks
2. Rescheduling of the examinations
3. A model based on predicted results (where the predictive data is captured in advance of the examinations)
4. A model based on predicted results (where the predictive data is captured after the examinations)

The characteristics of each of the four options are presented below.

### 9.4.1 Special Consideration

‘Special consideration’ is the term used in England where a proportion of additional marks are given to students who experience trauma. It involves the addition of marks to the candidate on the basis of a range of levels from minor adversity to more severe adversity. The current position in Ireland is that the published marking scheme is applied to the work of all candidates and it is not possible for an Examiner to deviate from the published marking scheme. Changing the marking scheme for particular candidates has the potential of affecting the reliability of the examination.

In England this option is available in certain circumstances. Special consideration will normally be given by applying an allowance of marks to each component affected in a particular scheme of assessment. The size of the allowance depends on the timing, nature and extent of the illness or misfortune. The maximum allowance given is 5% of the total raw marks available in the component concerned. For example, a maximum of 5% of the total raw marks awarded is available to candidates in the case of terminal illness of the candidate, terminal illness of a parent, recent death of a member of the immediate family, or serious and disruptive domestic crises leading to acute anxiety about the family.

Similarly, a maximum of 4% of the total raw marks available is available in cases of very serious problems such as incapacitating illness of candidate or member of immediate family, major surgery at or near the time of the examination, severe disease; severe car accident; recent death of member of extended family, severe or permanent bodily injury occurring at the time of the examinations or domestic crisis at time of examinations (JCQ, 2006, pp54-58).

The Advisory Group found the description of categories of incident or trauma that are used in England useful in considering eligibility issues and the types of cases that might be covered if a similar scheme was developed for the Irish context. There are other categories involving less severe experiences or incidents involving, equating to a 1% special consideration. The Advisory Group considers that if a ‘special consideration’ scheme were to be established in Ireland, then only the 5% and 4% categories, as described above, should be available.

In support of this type of model is the fact that some recognition is made in the marking process for the existence of difficult or traumatic circumstances which a candidate may encounter. Notwithstanding this, the Advisory Group considers that the model possesses a number of limitations.

Firstly, the model does not cater for absentee candidates. A candidate would still be required to sit the examination in order to benefit from the model so the issue of a candidate sitting an examination immediately after or before the funeral of a close relative would remain. Secondly, while the amount of marks involved may appear relatively limited, the fact that the grade boundaries in the Irish state examinations are set at 5% intervals, the impact of the model on grade outcomes could be significant. Thirdly, it is likely that the administrative work involved in such a scheme is likely to be substantial.

A significant issue is the difficult, if not impossible task, of quantifying the impact of a particular event or trauma on an individual candidate. In addition, although the personal circumstances of some candidates are brought to the attention of the SEC, many other events or experiences are private and personal and it is unlikely that the SEC would be aware of, and be able to make provision for, all such cases.

### **9.4.2 Rescheduled examinations**

Rescheduled examinations are where the candidate is allowed an opportunity to sit the examination perhaps at a later stage in the summer. This model would pose very significant logistical and other challenges. The certificate examinations are, in the main, marked by examiners appointed by the SEC. They are conducted within a tight timeframe – the majority of them in the course of the summer when schools are closed and examiners, usually teachers, are available to examine. There is a pressing requirement to have results made available as quickly as possible to candidates. This is particularly the case in relation to Leaving Certificate results which are required for purposes of progression into third-level and for entry into the world of work.

There are a number of issues that require careful consideration in the context of re-scheduled examinations. These include, for example:

- the time required for holding a further set of examinations
- eligibility issues– on what basis would eligibility for the rescheduled examinations be determined?
- obtaining sufficient additional suitably qualified persons to act as superintendents and examiners
- providing adequate time and personnel for the preparation of examination papers and test instruments to the required professional standard, considering that main, contingency, Irish and modified versions of papers also have to be prepared
- providing adequate time for the preparation of marking schemes for the re-scheduled exam papers and arranging for the comprehensive briefing and training of examiners that is required
- providing sufficient time for those examiners to conduct the marking to a high standard
- the requirement of having results available to feed into the college entry process which is conducted by the CAO and college admissions departments in mid-August each year.

Another limitation associated with this approach is that, in addition to the logistics of providing an alternative sitting, the timing of the sitting is important. For example, if it were held six weeks later, the candidates would be too late for a third level place. In addition, the rescheduled examinations option would not cater for all candidates. Students who, for example, were unable to sit the examinations due to illness may not be ready to sit six weeks later. One of the biggest limitations of this option would be the significant examiner/superintendent supply issues. A further potential issue is that the alternative sitting may be open to abuse. Rather than be seen as an option for genuine cases of trauma and adversity, it may be regarded by some as a second opportunity to increase the points achieved.

### **9.4.3 A model based on predicted results (where the predictive data is captured *in advance* of the examination period)**

This essentially involves the collection of a set of predicted grades for each candidate prior to the examination period. This data would be stored and would only be used if required

In Ireland, at present, there is no tradition of teachers assessing their own students for state examinations purposes. Consideration of this model would, therefore, require the full cooperation of all stakeholders and a willingness to engage in such a process. A limitation of this approach is that it would require resources at school level to provide the predicted grades for all candidates despite the fact that only a small number of these grades might actually be used.

It is useful to note that in the past, an Order of Merit list was used in the case of absentees from orals. This practice may provide a way of developing this model.

When the actual examination grades are awarded, this model would facilitate statistical comparison of the predicted grades against the actual grades achieved by candidates and, consequently, the correlation between the predicted grades and the actual grades could be established. This could then assist in generating an assessed result for a particular candidate who was unable to sit the examination as a result of particular circumstances.

### **9.4.4 A model based on predicted results (where the predictive data is captured *after* the examinations period)**

The Advisory Group notes that the State Examination Commission has, in cases of system failure, taken into account school-based assessment material as part of the certification process. The difference between this and the predicted grades option is that the anticipated result is sought *after* the examination.

Currently, the key element in deciding to take such an approach is that the candidate (or candidates) presents for, and is in a position to take the examination but, because of unique, unforeseen and exceptional circumstances, the Commission or its agents are unable to facilitate the execution of the general examination session for those presenting, or the process of producing a result based on work presented during an examination session fails to execute. The key issue in these circumstances is that the Commission must ensure that a candidate is not disadvantaged because of those circumstances, not of the candidate's making.

In considering school-based assessment material, schools have been asked to provide such data as

- A merit list for the class or group of which this candidate is a part, based on the school's estimate of the levels of attainment in the subject within that group
- The result (sub-grade) anticipated by the school in the case
- Results obtained by the candidate in recent mock and/or house examinations

All material received from the school is made available to the Chief Examiner of the subject. This material, in conjunction with assessment material already to hand (such as Paper 2, orals, aural paper), is considered when determining the overall subject grade to be awarded.

The main limitation of this approach is that it may be difficult to obtain a post-hoc estimate of attainment that accurately reflects the candidate's actual level of achievement.

In the case both predicted grade models, it would be worth considering the placing of a cap or restriction on the maximum grade that could be awarded to a candidate.

## 9.5 Recommendations

The Advisory Group does not underestimate the challenges presented by each of the above options. Some options address particular problems in the Irish context and some may perhaps be more readily implementable than others. The Advisory Group is of the view that it is not tenable to maintain the current situation going forward. The Advisory Group is also mindful, however, of the significant issues and challenges involved in attempting to establish an appropriate scheme. These include, for example:

- Establishing appropriate eligibility criteria for any proposed scheme
- Maintaining the integrity of the assessment and certification process
- Establishing sufficient safeguards and measures to prevent any abuse of a future scheme.

The Advisory Group is also cognisant of the many interests and issues involved. The State Examinations have a high currency value and particularly the Leaving Certificate, which is used to determine 3rd level allocation and employment. The stakeholders represent a broad coalition of students, their parents and families, in partnership with teachers, school communities and other agencies, including education institutions and employers that use the results. In this regard, the Advisory Group recommends that a collaborative and partnership-based approach is required to address the needs of students who experience trauma and adversity at the time of the examinations.

The Advisory Group recommends that the current provision for candidates who encounter trauma and adversity during or close to the examination period, is inadequate and is in need of review and development. Four possible options are put forward for consideration by the SEC, to address the issue of trauma and adversity. These include:

- Special consideration and allowance of additional marks, possibly at Junior Certificate only
- Rescheduling of the examinations
- A model based on predicted results (where the predictive data is captured *in advance* of the examinations)
- A model based on predicted results (where the predictive data is captured *after* the examinations)

The Advisory Group recommends that the SEC consider the pros and cons of each of these four options and that it engage in a process of consultation with the education partners to discuss all relevant issues and to consider the feasibility of devising, agreeing and implementing an appropriate scheme to cater for cases of trauma and adversity.

# Appendix I

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Eurydice – the European Commission's information network on education in Europe [www.eurydice.org](http://www.eurydice.org)

INCA - Qualification and Curriculum Authority's international curriculum and assessment network [www.inca.org.uk](http://www.inca.org.uk)



## Appendix II

### Submissions received

A total of 42 submissions were received. These included 20 individual submissions and 22 submissions on behalf of groups/organisations and associations.

<b>Individual submissions (20):</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Status</b>
Marion Allen	Parent
Business Studies Teachers	Coláiste Choilm, Swords, Co Dublin
Susan Brophy	Learning Support Teacher
Ken Concannon	Individual
Fergus and Mary Cosgrave	Parents
John and Mary Davey-Borresen	Parents
Nora Doran	Parent
Margaret Ferguson	Parent
Philomena Garvey	Parent
Audrey Halpin	Parent
Audrey Herlihy	Teacher
Regina Leahy	Parent
Elayne McDermott	Teacher
Lorna Mulvihill	Department of Finance Disability Advisory Officer
Anne Price	Parent
Alan Quinn	3rd level student
Julie Quinn	Parent
Michael Redmond	Principal
Val Reilly	SEN co-ordinator
Anne O'Brien and Mary Waddell	Teachers
Anonymity requested*	Parents
Anonymity requested*	Parent

\*Details provided to Advisory Group but anonymity in publication requested.

<b>Submissions from organisations (22):</b>
ACCS – Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
AHEAD – Association for Higher Education Access and Disability
ASPIRE – Asperger Syndrome Association of Ireland
ASTI – Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland
Brainwave - Irish Epilepsy Association
CURAM – Irish NGO seeking recognition for unremunerated parents and carers.
DAWN – Disability Advisors Working Network
Dyslexia Association of Ireland
HADD - offering support to families with Hyperactivity and Attention Deficit Disorder
IVEA – Irish Vocational Education Association
JMB – Joint Managerial Body
NADP – National Association for Deaf People

NAPD – National Association of Principals and Deputy-Principals
NCBI – National Council for the Blind in Ireland
NCCA – National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS – National Educational Psychological Service
NPSA – National Parents and Siblings Alliance
PACCS – Parents’ Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
REHAB
TUI – Teachers’ Union of Ireland
Union of Secondary School Students
Visiting Teacher Service (Hearing Impaired)

### Glossary of Terms

#### **Accommodations**

Accommodations are changes in test item format and/or in examination arrangements in order to enable all candidates to participate in assessments and to demonstrate their level of achievement. These changes do not compromise the assessment objectives of the syllabus nor do they result in the candidate gaining an unfair advantage.

#### **Alternate Test Item Format**

An alternate test item format tests the same construct as the original test item but in a different format. Such alternate formats include Braille, Tactile Graphics, Enlarged Print, Large Typeface, Large Print Graphics and Electronic versions.

#### **Centre**

a place where an examination is held (usually a classroom or hall within a school). Note that in the UK, a centre refers to a school.

#### **Construct (Assessment Construct)**

The syllabus assessment objective which the test item is designed to measure.

#### **Electronic Format**

The original test item presented electronically. This includes CD, DVD and computer files including PDF or Microsoft word format.

#### **Enlarged Print Format**

The original test item format is enlarged through photocopying e.g. from A4 size to A3 size format, while retaining the original layout and visual presentation.

#### **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**

An Individual Education Plan is a written document prepared for a named student which specifies the learning goals that are to be achieved by the student over a set period of time and the teaching strategies, resources and supports, including assessment accommodations, necessary to achieve those goals.

#### **Large Typeface**

An A4 version of the original test item format with larger typeface e.g. from Times New Roman 12-point type to Arial 24- point type or larger.

#### **Modified Test Item**

The original test item is changed. Such changes include visual simplification and/or replacing visual stimuli with text. The modified test item tests the same construct i.e. the same syllabus assessment objective as the original test item.

#### **Modifier**

A specialist who advises the SEC on alternate formats including modified test items accessible for candidates with visual impairment.

#### **Original Test Item**

The test item in its original format which is presented to the general candidate cohort.

**Separate centre**

An accommodation that facilitates a candidate to take the examination in a room separate from the main centre

**Test Item**

An instrument used to assess attainment in a particular subject or programme. It includes, for example, written examinations, oral, aural, practical tests, coursework, projects, performing tests, interviews

**Syllabus**

The published document in which the prescribed content of a subject is specified for study. The examination in a particular subject measures the extent to which a candidate has met the objectives of the syllabus.

**Programme**

The term usually used to describe an integrated course of study, such as the Leaving Certificate Applied

**Acronyms**

NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
SEC	State Examinations Commission
DES	Department of Education and Science
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
RACE	Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations (as in the RACE Scheme)
IEP	Individualised Education Plan
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
SLD	Specific Learning Difficulty (or disability)
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SNO	Special Needs Organiser

