

STATE EXAMINATIONS COMMISSION

PRESS RELEASE

SEC Announces the Establishment of an Advisory Group on Reasonable Accommodations

15th March 2007

The State Examinations Commission (SEC) today announced the establishment of an advisory group to re-examine/review policy and practice in the area of reasonable accommodations provided for students in the certificate examinations.

Through the scheme of reasonable accommodations the SEC provides a range of measures which are designed to facilitate candidates with special needs in taking the certificate examinations. These measures are intended to diminish, as far as possible, the impact of a physical or learning difficulty on a candidate's ability to demonstrate his or her level of attainment. The current policy and practice on reasonable accommodations are based on the work of an earlier group which advised on this matter in 2000.

In announcing the establishment of the group the Chairman of the State Examinations Commission, Mr Richard Langford, said *"We are fully committed to providing an examination and assessment system with the highest possible standards of inclusiveness, equity and fairness and which enables all candidates to display their achievements. I welcome the establishment of this group to advise the Commission so that our examinations system continues to evolve in line with best practice, both national and international, in providing the highest standards of quality and integrity while ensuring access, participation and benefit for all students."*

The composition and terms of reference of the group are attached.

The advisory group is as follows:

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

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

Mr Liam Arundel, former CEO of City of Dublin VEC

Ms Isabel Nisbet, Director of Regulation and Standards, Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority (UK)

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

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

The group's terms of reference are:

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 Commission 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.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

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Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations

The State Examinations Commission provides a range of measures to enable students with disabilities to access the certificate examinations. These include the provision of readers and scribes; the production of modified papers; brailled and enlarged papers; the use of tape recorders and personal computers; and exemption or waivers in respect of particular components.

In keeping with the advice of the Expert Advisory Group (2000) a system of annotation is applied to any case where a student is exempt from a core area of assessment, or where the mode of assessment used had the same effect. For example, a hearing impaired student can be exempt from the aural component of language subjects. His/her marks on the balance of the examination are grossed up proportionately towards 100%, and the certificate includes a note to the effect that all elements of the subject were assessed except the aural component. Spelling and grammar waivers in language subjects are provided to cater for students with dyslexia on a similar basis, with annotation of the certificates.

All decisions made by the SEC in relation to the provision of reasonable accommodations are open to appeal to a Reasonable Accommodations Independent Appeals Panel.

In 2006, some 12,000 reasonable accommodations were made for candidates in the certificate examinations. Some of the measures require the establishment of special examination centres. The following tables illustrate the significant increases in the provision of reasonable accommodations and special centres in recent years.

Type of Accommodation	2004	2005	2006
Tape Recorder	998	1,043	898
Reading Assistance	2,552	3,357	3,877
Scribe	383	428	550
Word Processor	147	175	241
Visually Modified Papers	125	171	133
Component/Subject	587	687	997

Exemption			
Spelling/Grammar Waiver	3,602	4,763	5,450
TOTAL	8,394	10,624	12,279

Special Centres	3,852	4,710	5,589
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