



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission
Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí.
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath

Mr. Michael Moynihan, TD
Chairperson
Joint Committee on Disability
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

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Dear Chairperson

The Minister for Education, Ms Norma Foley, TD, has asked the State Examinations Commission to respond directly to your letter of 22 July 2021, on behalf of Meath County Council and South County Dublin County Council, in relation to the provision of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations for students with epilepsy.

The SEC provides a scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE Scheme) to support candidates with a complex variety of special educational needs including learning difficulties as well as permanent or temporary physical, visual, hearing, medical, sensory, emotional, behavioural or other conditions. The purpose of the scheme is to allow candidates who have special educational needs that interfere with their capacity to engage with the standard examination arrangements to demonstrate what they know and can do, without compromising the integrity of the assessment. This involves such candidates being held to the same standard as other candidates with regard to what the examination is intended to measure. In common with similar schemes which operate in other jurisdictions, the focus of the RACE scheme is on the need to remove barriers to accessing the examinations, while retaining the need to assess the same underlying skills and competencies as are assessed for all other candidates, and to apply the same standards of achievement as apply to all other candidates.

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

Range of Accommodations

The range of accommodations provided within the scheme has been designed to ensure fairness when facilitating candidates in demonstrating their level of achievement of the objectives of the course concerned in a manner which is fair to all other candidates.

The range of accommodations available within the scheme includes:

- Access to a reader or reading assistant or use of an examination reading pen for candidates with learning or visual difficulties
- Use of a word-processor, or a recording device or, in very exceptional circumstances, access to a scribe for candidates with learning or physical difficulties
- A waiver from the assessment of spelling, grammar and punctuation in language subjects for candidates with learning difficulties
- Alternative format examination papers (enlarged; Brailled; etc.) for visually or physically impaired candidates.
- A modified oral or aural or an exemption from these tests for hearing impaired candidates
- Use of drawing aids in certain examinations
- Access to a special shared examination centre or, exceptionally, an individual centre

Eligibility for RACE

Conditions of eligibility, including, for some accommodations, specific measurable criteria, apply to the various access arrangements which can be approved under the scheme and accommodations can only be provided in accordance with the principles and requirements of the scheme.

It is important to note that the existence of a learning or other difficulty does not automatically mean that a candidate requires accommodations to access the certificate examinations. For example, even though candidates may have some difficulty with reading, writing or spelling they may not require the provision of any special facilities if they can read the examination papers at the appropriate level and communicate what they know to the examiners.

Accommodating Candidates with Epilepsy

Under the existing provisions of the RACE Scheme, every possible effort is also made by the SEC to accommodate candidates who experience accidents, serious illness or other trauma either immediately before or during the examinations. There are arrangements that can be made between the State Examinations Commission and the school in the best interests of an ill or injured candidate provided the candidate is able to proceed with their examination on the scheduled date. For candidates who suffer from epilepsy, these arrangements might include supervised rest breaks during the examinations; access to a smaller special examination centre; and alterations to the start and end time of the examinations as long as the examination can be taken on the date as on the published timetable.

Interim Pilot Provision in 2019

In 2019, the SEC introduced, on an interim, pilot basis, a limited provision for supporting Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied candidates who experienced the death of a close relative during the period of the written examinations under the emergency provisions of the RACE Scheme. Under that arrangement, a candidate who experienced a bereavement of a close relative was allowed

to defer up to three days of their examinations and to take the examinations that they missed at an alternative sitting of the examinations in July 2019. The purpose of this measure was to allow the bereaved candidate some time to prepare for and attend the funeral of their loved one without having to contend with the added pressure of a full set of examinations.

It is acknowledged that students also experience other forms of trauma and adversity, such as serious illness, around the time of the Leaving Certificate examinations. The issues arising here are complex and must be balanced against the absolute need to maintain integrity and public confidence in the examinations system. Following the interim, pilot measure in 2019, the Board of the SEC had commenced a comprehensive review of the broader issue of how best to support students experiencing all forms of trauma and adversity at examinations time. The review process, which has been interrupted due to COVID-19, included research into practices in other jurisdictions as well as engagement with stakeholders and candidates. The SEC will be recommending this extensive review process as soon as it is feasible.

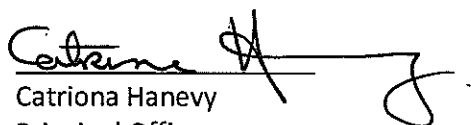
Examinations 2022

On 30 June 2021, Minister Foley announced the adjusted arrangements that would apply to the 2022 Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle examinations to take account of the disruption to learning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These arrangements include adjustments to the assessments similar to that applied by the *Assessment Arrangements For Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021*, as announced in December 2020. The revised arrangements for 2022 also include the intention to run an alternative set of Leaving Certificate examinations, shortly after the conclusion of the main set of examinations. These examinations will be limited to certain students who are unable to sit the main set of examinations due to close family bereavement, COVID 19 illness and certain other categories of serious illness to be determined with due regard for the principles of equity, fairness and integrity which govern all aspects of the examinations system. There will be no second sitting of the Junior Cycle examinations.

The SEC will issue further details regarding the 2022 examinations, with all arrangements guided by prevailing public health advice. There will be further engagement with stakeholders in advance of this.

I trust that this information is of assistance in clarifying the position.

Yours sincerely



Catriona Hanevy
Principal Officer
State Examinations Commission

