Provision of Reasonable Accommodation in State Examinations

Please Note: This section provides some background information on the topic of Reasonable Accommodations. For the most up-to-date information, please visit the website of the State Examinations Commission.

Click here for the State Examinations Commission

The Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations' report, Arrangements for the Assessment of Candidates with Special Needs in Certificate Examinations, stated that as the state certificate examinations "rely heavily on performance on written papers which are administered under controlled conditions in a limited time frame at the end of a long period of study, some candidates may experience difficulty, or may even find it impossible, to communicate what they know in this situation". "Specific learning disabilities are recognised as giving rise to difficulties". Difficulties that may arise for students with specific learning disabilities include:

- reading examination questions;
- interpreting charts and diagrams;
- producing legible answers;
- producing coherent text;
- communicating what is known in the available time.

The object of reasonable accommodation is to assist examiners in distinguishing between a candidate's achievements and their ability to demonstrate these achievements under examination conditions in which a substantial amount of writing is required. Following the publication of the Expert Advisory Group's report, the following revised arrangements for Certificate examinations from the year 2000 were notified to schools:

- An additional 20 minutes would be provided for all candidates taking Leaving Certificate papers in Irish, English, History (including Economic History), and Geography (i.e., subjects with a heavy language content);
- Where an exemption is granted to a candidate (for example, use of a reader or a word processor with spell check enabled), an explanatory note, indicating which examination procedures were altered (but not the nature of the candidate's disability) would be appended to a candidate's certificate;
- Applications for accommodations would be considered for candidates whose general intellectual ability was below the average range and who also had a specific learning difficulty;
- Examiners would continue to be advised to refer scripts that they could not access to their supervising examiner, making it unnecessary for schools to apply in individual cases where the concern related to difficulties that might arise in accessing the work of a candidate;
- A more independent appeals procedure would be implemented and would deal with appeals relating to the proposed inclusion of an explanatory note on a candidate's certificate.

Circular S70/2000 stated that from 2001, a candidate, whose specific learning disability is not severe enough to warrant the grant of facilities such as the use of a tape recorder or computer with spell-check enabled, may
nevertheless opt for a waiver in relation to the assessment of spelling and grammar in language subjects. Decisions on such applications will be determined on the basis of the evidence available in relation to the candidate’s special needs. Where this arrangement is granted, the candidate will have his 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.

N.B. All DES circulars, as well as the Expert Advisory Group’s Report, are available on the DES web pages at the government website

Source URL: https://www.sess.ie/node/896