

# Reasonable Accommodations at the 2021 Certificate Examinations

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A guide for students

# Contents

About this guide .....	3
What does “Reasonable Accommodations” mean? .....	5
Purpose of examination access arrangements.....	6
Deciding what is needed .....	9
Why we need criteria .....	11
Exemptions, waivers, and explanatory notes.....	14
Getting the arrangements you need .....	18
If you are unhappy with the arrangements being made.....	22
Moving from junior cycle to senior cycle .....	24
Moving on to third level .....	25
Available arrangements.....	26
Accessing print.....	26
Accessing sound .....	28
Communicating your answers .....	31
The examination environment and timing .....	34
External candidates .....	39
More information .....	40
Glossary .....	41
Appendix 1: the principles that the scheme is based on.....	47
Appendix 2: Key dates for the 2021 examinations.....	50

## About this guide

The state examinations, sometimes called the “certificate examinations”, are the Leaving Certificate examinations, the Leaving Certificate Applied examinations and the Junior Cycle examinations. All of the state examinations are run by the State Examinations Commission on behalf of the Minister for Education and Skills.

The purpose of this guide is to explain the arrangements that allow students with special educational needs, such as those caused by visual impairments or dyslexia, to access the state examinations on an equal basis with other students. The guide explains the purpose of these arrangements, gives details of the arrangements available, and tells you how to apply to get these arrangements.

Throughout this guide, “you” means the student and “we” means the State Examinations Commission.

This guide will be updated from time to time. Please make sure you have the latest version. The latest version will always be available on our website. This version was published in October 2020 and is about the arrangements for the 2021 examinations.

This guide can be made available in braille, in large-print format, and in accessible electronic formats. Please contact us for any of these. This is a guide for students. It does not have all of the detailed information and instructions that a school needs to

make an application. Those details are in *Reasonable Accommodations at the 2021 Certificate Examinations – Instructions for Schools*

If you have special needs and require access arrangements in order to undertake the examinations, then you and your parents/guardians should discuss your needs with your school. The scheme of examinations access arrangements is school based and applications cannot be accepted directly from students or their parents/guardians. The only exception to this is in the case of external candidates who are entering the examinations independently.

## **What does “Reasonable Accommodations” mean?**

Anyone providing a service to the public has a duty to make the service equally available to as many people as possible. If a person with a disability is prevented from accessing the service in the normal way, the person providing the service has a duty to do all that is reasonable to accommodate them in accessing it. The particular arrangements that need to be made are then called “reasonable accommodations”.

Many (but not all) of the special access or other arrangements available in the state examinations arise from our duty to provide reasonable accommodations to you, the student. Because of this, the scheme for providing them is called the “Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations”, or the “RACE scheme” for short. The section of the State Examinations Commission that deals with these arrangements is called the “Reasonable Accommodations Section” or “RA Section”.

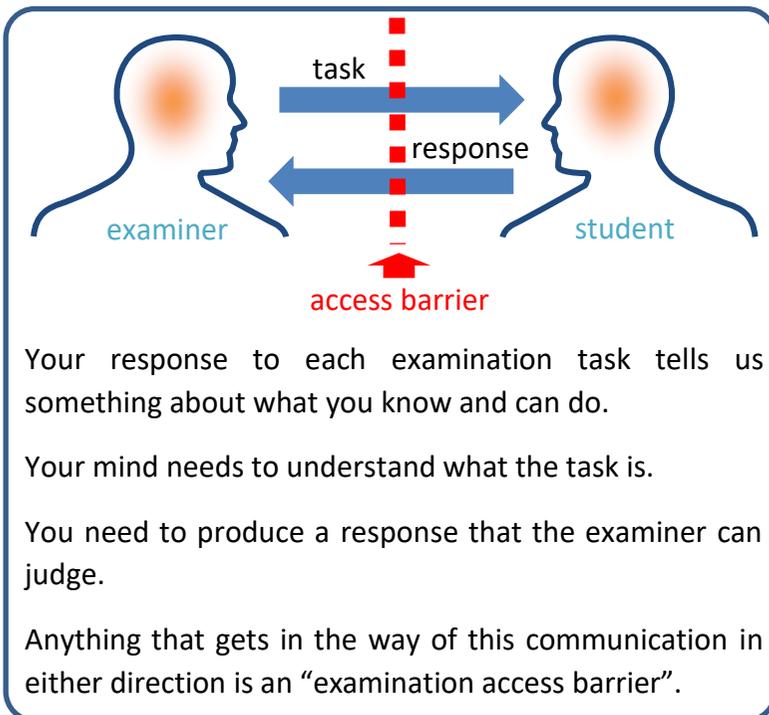
## Purpose of examination access arrangements

The purpose of the examination in each subject is to test how well you have mastered the course set out for that subject. Each course is described in a document called a *syllabus* or *subject specification*. This states what you are supposed to know and be able to do at the end of the course. The purpose of the examination is to test how well you know and can do these things.

Sometimes, a disability or other condition can interfere with the way that the examination does this. Generally, this happens in one of two ways. Either the condition interferes with your ability to understand what you are being asked to do, or it interferes with your ability to show that you can do it.

For example, suppose that you have a condition that prevents you from reading and understanding printed words. This could be because of a visual impairment or because of a learning difficulty like dyslexia. Unless the point of the examination is to test how well you can read, then we should not let this condition stop you from showing us what you can do. We will therefore make arrangements to allow you to overcome this barrier. We will provide a person to read the examination paper to you or help you to read it yourself, or you may be allowed to use assistive technology you usually use to access printed words, such as an exam reading pen (for use in examinations) magnifiers or screen readers.

You will still be expected to demonstrate the same standard of achievement as other students. It is only the way you do it that is different. The arrangements cannot be allowed to make it easier for you than for everyone else to do whatever is being tested. Except in certain cases that are explained later, you still have to show all of the same skills related to the course as everyone else does. This ensures that your grade can be directly compared to everyone else's and have the same meaning. This makes the examinations fair for all.



The basic principles that inform our decisions about examination access arrangements are given in an appendix at the end of this guide.

## Deciding what is needed

Not all students with a learning or physical difficulty will need to have special access arrangements made for them. We design our examinations to be as accessible as possible for all students. We understand that anxiety caused by examinations can interfere with your ability to read and concentrate. We help to overcome this by making the language used in the examinations as clear and straightforward as we can, and by using a well-designed layout. Sometimes we need to use difficult words or phrases because they are important words used in the subject and your ability to understand and use these words is part of what we are testing. But apart from this, we try to make the papers as easy to read as possible. In particular, we try to make the language in our examinations easier to read than what you will find in a typical textbook for the subject.

Because of this, even if you have some difficulty with reading, you still may not need any special arrangement for your examinations. Only if your reading ability falls below a certain level will you need reading assistance in the examination. Your school will be able to carry out the necessary tests to check this.

Likewise, if you have very poor handwriting or spelling, you may be worried that this will prevent the examiners from reading and understanding your work. Our examiners are very well practised at reading all manner of poor handwriting. Also, in subjects where spelling is not an important part of what is being tested, the examiners will ignore spelling mistakes and instead focus on

the meaning of what you are trying to say. Because of this, your writing or spelling would have to fall far below average before it would interfere with your ability to communicate well enough with the examiner. As with reading, your school will be able to carry out the necessary tests to check this.

The next section explains why we need to check that you really need special arrangements to access the State Examinations.

## Why we need criteria

We have already explained that special access arrangements are meant to remove barriers that prevent you from understanding what you are being asked to do or prevent you from showing us that you can do it. Since these arrangements are not meant to give you any advantage over others, you might ask why we don't give every student all the access arrangements that they want.

The following are some of the reasons why we cannot or should not do this.

First, it might not be feasible to allow large numbers of people to use a particular arrangement. For example, there may be many students who would like to use a laptop to do their examinations, even though they have no disability or condition that prevents them from writing. Using a laptop causes extra problems for schools: students have to be accommodated in smaller centres, with enough power sockets; laptops all have to be checked to ensure that they contain no notes or material that is not allowed in the examination, and that wireless access is disabled; after the examination, all of the work has to be printed out, and back-up copies saved. These difficulties can be managed when there are only a few students, but not with larger numbers. Even if some schools could cope, it would not be fair to allow students in these schools to use laptops when other students can't. For this reason, the fairest thing to do is to allow this arrangement only for those who need it because they cannot use the normal arrangement.

Second, some arrangements may give a very slight advantage to the student who gets them, even though this is not their purpose. This very small advantage is acceptable when it is balanced against the very great disadvantage that the student would have without the arrangement. However, if the arrangement is not needed, we can no longer say that even this small advantage should be allowed. For example, some students need to do their examinations in a “special centre”, which is a centre with very few students, or in an “individual special centre”, where they are on their own with a superintendent. This might be needed because they are using a scribe and would disturb other students when dictating their answers, or because they need to be isolated from others due to a contagious illness. Other students who don’t need a special centre might like to have one anyway, because they think the extra quietness or individual attention might help them perform better. We should not let such students have even this small advantage, because it is not justified based on need. We also could not justify the extra cost of providing an arrangement that is not needed.

Finally, some special examination arrangements involve modifications or other adjustments to what is being tested. Even though a main aim in all accommodations is to leave the important aspects of what is being tested intact, sometimes this is not possible. It is an important principle of fair assessment for certification that the test itself and the conditions under which it is taken should be as similar as possible for all students. Any

change from the normal arrangements risks changing the meaning of the grades that students get, making these grades less comparable to each other. This is why adjustments should only be allowed when we can show that they are necessary.

## Exemptions, waivers, and explanatory notes

When making special examination arrangements for you, we will make every possible effort to remove only the access barriers and to leave the purpose of the test entirely intact. However, this is not always possible. It can happen that the nature of your difficulty is doing more than just preventing you from understanding what you are being asked to do or showing us that you can do it. It might actually have prevented you from acquiring one of the skills we are trying to test or it might prevent you from demonstrating that skill to us in any reasonable way.

This is a bigger problem than the access one. We cannot certify that you have shown a skill that you have not shown. If the subject specification states that you are supposed to have a certain skill at the end of the course and we ignore that skill when examining you and giving you a grade, then the certificate is misleading.

There are two things that can happen in this case, depending on how important the skill is to the subject being examined. In some cases, we can grant you an **exemption** or **waiver**. In other cases, we cannot do so. In these cases, if you decide to take this subject anyway, you will then have to forfeit the marks for the skill you cannot show.

An **exemption** is when you are excused from taking an entire component of the examination. It only arises where the nature of your condition makes it impossible for you to take any

meaningful part in the component involved, and where no alternative arrangement is possible. For example, if you have a profound hearing impairment, you may not be able to take the aural component (listening comprehension) of a language examination, even with special sound equipment and headphones. The next best option is to take a **modified aural**, which involves a face-to-face session with an examiner, allowing you to lip-read. If there are legitimate reasons why you cannot do a modified aural, then you may be granted an exemption from the aural component.

A **waiver** is like an exemption except that it does not involve an entire component. Most examination components test lots of skills. If your disability prevents you from developing or demonstrating one or two of these skills, and if it is possible for us to separate out the marks for these skills from the marks for the other skills, then we can excuse you from demonstrating the skills involved.

When you have an exemption or waiver, you do not forfeit the marks for the skills you were not able to demonstrate. Instead, your marks for the remaining elements of the examination are scaled up for the purposes of awarding you a grade.

Exemptions and waivers mean that your grade in that subject no longer has precisely the same meaning as the grades of other students, because the skills you have shown are not the same. Since we need to make sure that the certificate we give you

remains truthful, we must include an explanatory note. This is a note that makes clear which of the course-related skills you were tested on. The explanatory note does not identify your disability or say why the exemption was given. However, a person looking at your certificate could reasonably assume that the exemption was due either to a temporary injury or a long-term condition.

Exemptions and waivers can only be granted where the elements involved are not **core** elements of the course. This has two aspects, as follows:

- (a) an element could be core because it makes up such a large part of the course that, if we leave it out, there is not enough left to properly test what the course was meant to be about.
- (b) an element could be core because it is so important to the study of the subject or so interlinked with other aspects that to exempt it from assessment would undermine the credibility and integrity of the examination.

If you have a disability or condition that prevents you from developing or demonstrating some skills that might be considered important in a certain subject, it is critical that you find out early whether or not these skills can be exempted or waived. If they cannot, and if you choose to take this subject anyway, then you will forfeit the marks for these skills and this will limit the grade that you can get. You should contact your school about this before you start the course. If the school is not sure, they should contact us for advice.

Unfortunately, even if your difficulty is due to an injury or other problem that you did not know about when you started the course, you still cannot get an exemption from core elements of a course.

## Getting the arrangements you need

All special access arrangements must be handled by your school. We cannot accept an application directly from you or your parents, unless you are an external candidate with no links to any school or centre. This is because the decisions about what arrangements are appropriate are not just based on the nature of your disability or condition and/or the criteria that apply. They are also based on your history of your educational needs; how the condition affects your work in school from day to day, what normally happens in school to help you overcome any difficulties caused by the condition, and what effect these everyday arrangements have on your ability to demonstrate your learning in school examinations or other kinds of assessment.

We can only put in place special access arrangements when:

- you have a need identified by the school, and
- you meet the criteria that show you really need the arrangements.

Also, the arrangements should reflect the way you normally work in school and in examinations due to your difficulty or be a natural extension of it.

Any special arrangement that you are not used to could make the situation worse rather than better. For example, suppose that you have a condition that prevents you from writing properly by hand. This would hinder you not only in a written examination but also in your everyday work in school. We would expect that

there would already be arrangements in school to help you overcome this barrier. For example, you might be allowed to use a laptop in class and for your homework when other students are writing by hand. In the state examinations, it would probably not be appropriate for you to use a scribe (a person who writes down what you say). This is because it does not make sense to have an arrangement that you are not used to, when there is already an acceptable arrangement that you are used to – namely, using your laptop. Also, arrangements that allow you to work independently are always preferred over ones that make you dependent on another person, as this reflects best practice in school and beyond.

Another reason that your application needs to be handled by your school is that the conditions for granting some accommodations rely on test results and other evidence that your school can gather and interpret.

Your school will have at least one person who handles the applications from the school. This person is often (but not always) a learning-support teacher. They will have a good understanding of the arrangements that are available and appropriate in various cases. We would also expect them to have a good understanding of your learning needs and how these needs are being met in the school. They will consult other teachers, as needed, to be sure. Long before the examinations, they will be forming a view about the best match between the

arrangements that are possible under our scheme and your needs.

Well before the examinations, the school will formally apply to us to grant you the accommodations you need. (See the key dates in Appendix 2 at the back of this booklet). Provided that what they apply for is available under the scheme, and that they confirm that they have the evidence needed to support the application, we will grant the accommodations that they apply for. Because of this, there should be no surprises for you, your parents, or the school.

Please note that even if the access arrangements you need arise from a learning difficulty, such as dyslexia, you do **not** need a report from an educational psychologist. The school will assemble all of the information needed to support the application, including carrying out whatever tests are needed.

In order to make an application for special arrangements, the school has to give us information about you, including information about any relevant disability. A parent or guardian will need to sign a form to give the school permission to pass on this information to us. If you are over 18, you will also sign this form yourself.

When dealing with the school, you should bear in mind that they have an important role to play in making sure that the scheme is implemented fairly and is not abused. While it is the SEC that makes the decision to grant or refuse any accommodation,

schools are not allowed to apply for an accommodation that they know you do not qualify for. To make sure that all schools in the country are treating students fairly and consistently, we check a sample of schools every year. We check that they are correctly identifying the students who need particular assessment arrangements and that they have the evidence to justify the applications that they make.

Another way that we check that things are happening correctly across the country is by making audio recordings in a sample of individual special centres each year. We check these recordings to make sure that readers, scribes, and superintendents are interacting with candidates in the correct way and not giving any inappropriate help.

## **If you are unhappy with the arrangements being made**

Normally, if you have a learning difficulty or physical impairment, you will have had regular contact with support staff in the school from the start of your time there to help overcome these difficulties. As part of this, they will have explained to you and your parents what arrangements can be made in the state examinations and what ones (if any) they think you will need. They will also establish whether you meet the necessary conditions for those arrangements to be granted.

The teachers who deal with us are familiar with the scheme and also have access to advice and support from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and/or from the Visiting Teacher Service.

For these reasons, it would be very unusual for there to be any disagreement between you, your parents, and the school about the arrangements that should be applied for and granted.

However, it is possible in rare cases that you or your parents do not agree with what the school intends to apply for on your behalf, or do not agree with a decision not to apply for any special arrangements for you. For this reason, we also offer schools a referral and advisory service. They can refer your case to us for a direct decision. In this case, they will give us the reasons for their view. They will also pass on your concerns or those of your parents about it. You or your parents can state

these concerns directly or you can leave it to the school to state them on your behalf.

This referral service is not just for cases of disagreement. The school might also refer your case to us if it is particularly complicated and they are not sure what the most appropriate arrangements are.

If our decision is not to give you the arrangements you want, then our letter will give reasons for that decision. If you are still not satisfied, you are now disagreeing with a decision by us (the State Examinations Commission) and not with a decision by the school. You can appeal our decision. Your appeal will be considered not by us but by a group of people who are independent of us and have been appointed for this purpose, the “Independent Appeal Committee”. The letter giving our decision and the reasons for it will also tell you how to appeal to this group.

After all of this, any candidate, parent/guardian who is unhappy with the processing of their case can make a complaint to the Ombudsman (if you are over 18) or the Ombudsman for Children (if you are under 18).

## Moving from junior cycle to senior cycle

In many cases, if you need some special access arrangements for your Junior Cycle, you will need them again for the Leaving Certificate examinations. Because of this, there is a straightforward procedure for getting the same arrangements again. The school will fill out a form confirming that you had the arrangements before and that you still need them, and we will grant them again, unless there is some very strong reason why we shouldn't.

Provided that you are eligible, you can still apply for special access arrangements for the Leaving Certificate even if you didn't have them at Junior Cycle.

Also, even if you did have them before, you can get different ones now. For example, if you have a writing difficulty, you might have had a scribe for Junior Cycle. If you have become more used to using a laptop or recording device since then, you can get approval for using the laptop or recording device instead of a scribe.

## Moving on to third level

We do not pass on any information about your disability or your examination arrangements to Higher Education Institutions or to the Central Applications Office (CAO). If you want support in making sure that your disability does not get in the way of this next stage of your education, you should contact the access office or disability office of the institution that you want to go to. As part of this support, they will discuss any special arrangements that you may need when you are there.

Also, most third-level institutions are trying to encourage more participation by students with disabilities. Because of this, there is an alternative entry route available for students whose disability has had a negative effect on their second-level education. It is called the “Disability Access Route to Education” (DARE). For information about it, see the website **[accesscollege.ie](http://accesscollege.ie)**.

These arrangements are entirely separate from the examination access arrangements that we operate. You should not assume that the same access arrangements that you get for the Leaving Certificate examination will be provided at third level, or that you will automatically qualify for the DARE scheme. Likewise, you should not assume that qualifying for the DARE scheme entitles you to any particular access arrangements in the Leaving Certificate examination.

## Available arrangements

The most common arrangements are listed below. Some of these arrangements mean that there is a course-related skill that is not being tested, so your statements and certificates, in those subjects where that skill is being tested, will have an **explanatory note**. The arrangements that result in such a note are marked below with an asterisk (\*). For further information, see the section on *Exemptions, Waivers, and Explanatory Notes* and the *Glossary*.

### Accessing print

The following arrangements are made to overcome a difficulty in accessing printed words, whether because of a visual impairment or a learning difficulty.

**Enlarged examination paper.** The standard version of the examination paper is enlarged from A4 to A3 size. It still contains all of the diagrams and other images. It still may contain tasks that require you to draw charts or other diagrams.

**Modified examination paper\*.** The standard paper is modified to make it accessible to people with severe visual impairments. Diagrams and other images may be simplified or removed. Tasks that involve drawing diagrams are replaced by other tasks of a similar demand.

**Braille examination paper\***. A copy of the **examination paper** that is produced in braille format. Tactile diagrams with braille labelling are also provided where necessary.

**Reader/Reading Assistance\***. A person who reads some or all of the question paper for you. They read only what you ask them to read. The reader can only read exactly what is printed, and is not allowed to interpret or rephrase questions or give you any other help. They cannot write for you, unless they are also your **scribe**. If you can read most of the examination yourself and only need help with some words or phrases, then you will share a **reading assistant** with other students with similar needs. If you need everything read to you, you will have an **individual reader**.

**Exam Reading Pen\***. An exam reading pen is a small hand-held device which you can use to scan words, phrases or sections of the examination paper and have the text converted to speech which you listen to using ear-phones. Unlike ordinary reading pens, an exam reading pen does not have the functionality to explain the meaning of words or to translate words as this functionality would undermine the integrity of the exam. If you are using an exam reading pen, you may also be allowed to have a reader or reading assistant for any subject in which the pen cannot be used.

**Colour identifier**. A person available to help, in the Geography and Science examination, if you are colour-blind. You are allowed to ask them to tell you what colour something is, or, for example,

“which of these lines is the red one?” As you will not need to ask such questions often, the colour identifier can be the main or shared centre superintendent. Should it come to light that a colour identifier is required for other subjects, the school must make an application to the SEC.

**Assistive technology\***. The technology you are allowed to use will depend on what you are used to using in school and what you are eligible for. The standard types of assistive technology available under the RACE Scheme include magnifiers or other low-vision aids; laptops or word processors; recording devices; and exam reading pens.

In addition, the SEC provides digital coursework booklets, for completion by students eligible to use a word processor in certain subjects.

We are also open to receiving applications for other types of assistive technology. We deal with applications for use of non-standard assistive technology on a case-by-case basis, so it is important that your school get in touch with us as early as possible if they are proposing anything that is not one of our usual arrangements

### Accessing sound

The following arrangements are made to overcome a difficulty in accessing sound, usually because of a hearing impairment.

**Preferred location within the centre.** The school arranges for you to be placed close to the superintendent. The school also tells the superintendent about your hearing impairment so that he or she knows that you may need to lip-read instructions or ask for them to be repeated or written down.

**Personal sound device in main centre.** For the aural (listening comprehension) part of a language examination, you are allowed to use a personal sound device (CD player) with individual headphones, while remaining in the main centre.

**Special centre for aural examination.** For the aural (listening comprehension) part of a language examination, you are allowed to use a personal sound device (CD player), with or without individual headphones, in a special centre with other students or, exceptionally, in an individual special centre.

**Modified aural examination – language subjects.** Instead of listening to a recording for the aural (listening comprehension) part of a language examination, you have a face-to-face session with an examiner. The examiner reads out a script and this allows you to lip-read if you need to. You get an examination paper with written questions and spaces to write your answers. This takes place in the weeks before the main examinations.

**Exemption from aural component – language subjects\*.** If there are genuine reasons why a modified aural examination cannot be carried out, you may be granted an exemption from the aural

component. The marks for the remaining parts of the examination will be scaled up.

**Exemption from aural component – Music\*.** In 2018, a policy decision was taken to include an exemption from the listening component of the Music examination. If there are genuine reasons why an aural examination in Music cannot be carried out, you may be granted an exemption from the aural component. The marks for the remaining parts of the examination will be scaled up.

**Oral for hearing-impaired candidates.** For the oral component of the examination, the examiner is told of your hearing impairment and can arrange for the lighting and positioning that you need to help you lip-read. You are not penalised if you ask the oral examiner to repeat something because you didn't hear it properly the first time.

**Exemption from oral component\*.** If there are genuine reasons why an oral for hearing-impaired candidates cannot be carried out, you may be granted an exemption from the oral component. The marks for the remaining parts of the examination will be scaled up.

**Sign language interpreter\*.** You can have a sign language interpreter if you have both a hearing impairment and a reading difficulty. The sign language interpreter will sign some or all of the paper to you, as you request. They can only sign exactly what

is printed, and are not allowed to explain it or give you any other help.

### Communicating your answers

The following arrangements are made to overcome a difficulty that you may have in accurately communicating answers in writing, whether this is due to an injury, a physical disability, or a learning difficulty.

**Waiver from the assessment of aspects of spelling, grammar, and punctuation in language subjects\***. With this waiver, you are not penalised for errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation in English, Irish and foreign language examinations. Because these skills are part of what we are supposed to test in these examinations, this is not the removal of an **access barrier**. These are course-related skills that are not being tested.

Whether or not you have this waiver, errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation are not penalised in subjects other than languages, provided that your meaning is clear.

If you are a student in the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) programme there is no need for you to apply for this arrangement as spelling, grammar and punctuation are not assessed in the LCA language subjects.

**Word processor with spellcheck enabled\***. Instead of writing your answers, you type them on a laptop or other word-

processing device. The spelling and grammar checker can be enabled. (See Note 1 below).

**Word processor with spellcheck disabled.** Instead of writing your answers, you type them on a laptop or other word-processing device. The spelling and grammar checker must be disabled. The word processor can have vision aids. (See Note 2 below).

**Word processor with speech-to-text software\*.** Instead of writing your answers, you say them into a laptop with software that can convert your speech into text. (See Note 1 below).

**Recording device\*.** Instead of writing your answers, you say them into a digital or other recording device. (See Note 1 below).

**Scribe\*.** Instead of writing your answers, you say them to someone who writes them down. The scribe can only write down exactly what you say and cannot give you any other help. They can read back what they have written down, but they cannot read the questions for you, unless they are also your reader. A scribe is only approved if there is a reason why you cannot use arrangements that allow you to work independently, such as a laptop. It is not enough that you have *chosen* not to type. (See Note 1 below).

**Note 1:** In a language examination, if you use a recording device, a word processor with spellcheck enabled, speech-to-text software, or a scribe, then we are not

testing your spelling, grammar or punctuation. You are therefore automatically getting a waiver from these elements, so your certificate will have an **explanatory note** to that effect (see the glossary).

**Note 2:** If you are using a word processor with spellcheck disabled, then we can still test your spelling, grammar and punctuation in language subjects. Unless you also have a waiver of those elements as a separate arrangement, your certificate will not have an **explanatory note** (see the glossary).

**Drawing aids.** If an injury or other condition means that you have difficulty using a tee-square or other drawing tools normally used in technological subjects, you may be allowed to use drawing aids such as parallel-motion boards and smaller drawing sheets in the subjects Technical Graphics, DCG, Construction Studies, Material Technology (Wood) or Technology.

**Exemption from Practical Test or Project in Junior Cycle Home Economics\*.** If you have a physical condition that prevents you from taking part in the *Food and Culinary Skills Examination* (the practical test) in Junior Cycle Home Economics, you can get an exemption from it. Similarly, if you have a condition that means that you cannot do any of the three options in *Optional Study* (the project), you can get an exemption from this. Note that it is not enough that you cannot do the option that others in your class are doing. To get an exemption, you must be unable to do

any project on any of the three options. This is the only subject that has an exemption from project work or practical tests.

### The examination environment and timing

The following arrangements are made to overcome a difficulty with being in or coping with the usual examination environment

**Hospital or other location.** If you are in hospital, then we can arrange for you to take your examinations there. In exceptional circumstances, we may be able to arrange an examination somewhere else.

**Special desk or chair.** If you have a medical condition that requires you to use a special desk or chair, this will be allowed. You can still be in the main centre, or the school may arrange for you to be in a special centre with other students.

**Movement within the centre.** If you have a medical condition that requires you to move regularly (such as to stand up and walk around) this can be arranged. You will then usually be positioned in a suitable location in the main centre.

**Medicine, food or drink.** Food or drink is not normally allowed in the examination centre (other than water). However, if you need to take medicine, food, or drink because of a medical condition, this will be allowed. Also, the school can make arrangements to ensure your privacy if needed (such as for insulin injections).

**A helper at the practical exams.** If you have an injury or physical disability, this person can help you in a practical examination. The helper can bring you tools, equipment and materials. They can only do exactly what you ask, and they are not allowed to do anything that is part of what is being tested. For example, in the practical test for Construction Studies, the helper can help clamp your work in a vice and bring you a chisel when you ask for it, but cannot help you use the chisel. A helper can be allowed in the following subjects: Junior Cycle Art – Drawing, Home Economics and Metalwork and Leaving Certificate Art – Life Sketching and Craftwork, Engineering and Construction Studies.

**A helper at the written exams.** If you have an injury or physical disability, this person can help you in any written examination which requires A5 drawing sheets, to clamp the drawing sheets to a board. The subjects in which a helper for the written tests may be approved are Leaving Certificate Construction Studies and DCG and Junior Cycle Technical Graphics, Material Technology Wood, and Technology.

**Special centre.** If there is a good reason why you cannot be in an ordinary main examination centre, you may instead take your examination in a centre that has a smaller number of students. This is referred to as a special centre. In most cases, this has to happen because of some other arrangement that you have. For example, if you are using a laptop, you will be in a special centre with other students using laptops or who have other special arrangements. A special centre can also be arranged if you have

been diagnosed with social, mental or emotional needs that cause significant problems for you being in the main centre.

You will only be in a centre on your own if you are working with a scribe or have an individual reader or if you have a contagious medical condition. We refer to this as an individual special centre. Other than the circumstances listed, access to individual special centres is only granted by us in the most exceptional circumstances

To make sure everything is being done properly, we audio-record the examinations in a random selection of individual special centres. If this happens in your centre, it will not affect how you complete your examinations.

**Rest breaks.** You can be granted rest breaks if you need them because of a medical condition. You must be supervised at all times during the rest periods and are not allowed to read or write. The time you are resting for is added on to the end of the examination, so that you are not losing time during the rest periods. Except in exceptional circumstances, the total amount of rest time cannot be more than 20 minutes per examination. Rest breaks do not represent additional time in which to complete the examination.

**Break for medical attention.** If you are injured or become very ill during an examination, the examination time can be suspended while you receive medical attention. That is, the time you miss can be made up at the end of the examination. You must be

supervised by a member of the school staff at all times during the break.

**Timetable adjustment.** If there is a medically certified or other exceptional reason why you cannot attend the examination at the correct time, you may be allowed to take it at a different time on the same day. This can only happen if it is arranged with us beforehand. You will be fully supervised between the timetabled time and the time you sit the examination. You cannot take the examination on a different day.

For the 2019 examinations, candidates who experienced the death of a close relative were allowed to defer up to 3 days of the examinations. This is being reviewed for the 2021 examinations and details will issue in a separate circular.

**Additional time.** This is not an arrangement that is granted in its own right. It is only allowed as a consequence of other arrangements. If you are using a scribe or are visually impaired you may be given a limited amount of additional time for the examination. Also, in very exceptional circumstances, you might be allowed additional time if you qualify for the use of a word-processor or other mechanical aide but for some reason are not able to use it and end up having to write anyway.

In the circumstances where additional time is allowed, the time is limited to 10 minutes per hour of examination (as timetabled) to a maximum of 30 minutes. There are also limitations in the Leaving Certificate subjects Irish, English, History and Geography.

In these subjects an additional 20 minutes has already been built into the timetable, therefore additional time in these subjects is limited to 10 minutes in total.

## External candidates

The qualifying criteria for access arrangements applies to all candidates whether external or school going. External candidates may be entering the examinations independently or may be attached to a school, private college, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) or Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) Programme.

If you are an external candidate and intend completing your examinations in a school, private college, VTOS or BTEI centre, they will handle your application.

If you are not linked to any of these, you can make an application directly to us when you are applying on-line to do your examinations. A link to the relevant application forms will be available when the on-line examination application system for external candidates opens in 2021. The relevant application form should be downloaded, completed and returned to the reasonable accommodations section of the SEC.

## More information

If you need more information, you should talk to the teacher in your school who deals with us. This is often the learning-support teacher.

You can also get more details about the RACE scheme by looking at the information for schools on our website [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie).

This includes *Reasonable Accommodations at the 2021 Certificate Examinations – Instructions for Schools*, which is the main document that schools use, and the various application forms that schools fill out. Some of the information in those documents is detailed and technical, so they are not as easy to read as this guide.

## Glossary

**Access arrangement.** A special arrangement made for you if you cannot sit your examination the same way that other candidates do.

**Access barrier.** A condition that gets in the way of you participating in the examination in the usual way. See page 7.

**Annotation.** See **explanatory note**.

**Braille examination paper.** A copy of the **examination paper** that is produced in braille format. Tactile diagrams with braille labelling are also provided where necessary.

**Centre.** Each room or group of candidates sitting the examination under the supervision of a superintendent. There are usually several centres in each school, including **main centres** and **special centres**. Sometimes, a large hall has more than one centre in it.

**Core.** An element or aspect of a course is core if it is so central that we cannot exempt or waive the assessment of it. See the section in this guide on **Exemptions, waivers, and explanatory notes**.

**Enlarged examination paper.** A version of the paper that has been physically enlarged from A4 to A3 size.

**Exam Reading Pen.** A small hand-held device which you can use to scan words, phrases or sections of the examination paper and have the text converted to speech which you listen to using ear-phones. Unlike ordinary reading pens, an exam reading pen does not have the functionality to explain the meaning of words or to translate words as this functionality would undermine the integrity of the exam.

**Exemption.** An arrangement where you have been allowed to not do an entire component of the examination (such as the aural component of a language). Used as a last resort and under a narrow set of conditions, it is rare. See the section in this guide on **Exemptions, waivers, and explanatory notes**.

**Explanatory note.** A note added to provisional statements of results and on the final examination certificates in cases where an **exemption** or **waiver** has been granted, resulting in some significant skills not being tested. This is sometimes called an annotation. Most of the explanatory notes that we use are subject specific so even though you may be using an access arrangement, for example an exam reading pen, in all of your subjects the explanatory note will only be linked to subjects in which the skill of reading is a core skill being tested (i.e. in language subjects). See the section in this guide on **Exemptions, waivers, and explanatory notes**.

You can also find the specific wording of the explanatory notes which accompany the various access arrangements (those listed

with an asterisk in the **Available Arrangements** section) in the *Reasonable Accommodations at the 2021 Certificate Examinations – Instructions for Schools*. The wording of any explanatory notes is also clearly set out in the letters which we issue approving reasonable accommodations.

**Individual reader.** A **reader** dealing with you alone, and not giving reading help to other candidates too. Used only when you need everything (or most things) read to you, rather than just help with some words and phrases.

**Individual special centre.** A particular kind of **special centre** where you are the only candidate. Used only when your access arrangements would be too disruptive to other candidates in the same room, such as if you are using a scribe.

**Main centre.** An ordinary centre where the majority of candidates take their examinations, including all those who do not have any special access arrangements. Every **special centre** is connected to a main centre. The superintendent of the main centre provides the examination papers to the special centre and receives back the scripts from the special centre.

**Modified examination paper.** A version of the examination paper that has been modified to make it accessible to people with severe visual impairments. Diagrams and other images may be simplified or removed. Tasks requiring you to draw diagrams are replaced by other tasks of a similar demand.

**Modified aural examination.** Most language examinations have an aural test or listening comprehension test. It usually involves listening to material recorded on a CD and answering written questions about what you hear. In a modified aural, you have a face-to-face session with an examiner instead. The examiner will read out a script and this will allow you to lip-read if you need to. You get an examination paper with written questions and spaces to write your answers.

**National Educational Psychological Service.** State psychological service that works with school communities. They work with teachers, parents and children in identifying educational needs. They offer services aimed at meeting these needs, for example, supporting individual students (through consultation and assessment), special projects and research.

**NEPS.** See **National Educational Psychological Service.**

**RACE scheme.** The “Scheme for Reasonable Accommodations in the Certificate Examinations”. It is the scheme for dealing with all of the special access and other arrangements that are needed to accommodate students with special educational needs.

**RA section.** See **Reasonable Accommodations Section.**

**Reader/Reading assistance.** Assistance with reading the question paper. A person who reads some or all of the question paper for you. They read only what you ask them to read. The reader can only read exactly what is printed, and is not allowed

to interpret or rephrase questions or give you any other help. They cannot write for you, unless they are also your **scribe**. If you can read most of the examination yourself and only need help with some words or phrases, then you will be sharing a reader with other candidates with similar needs. If you need everything read to you, you will have an **individual reader**.

**Reading Pen.** See exam reading pen.

**Reasonable accommodation.** An arrangement that a person providing a service to the public has to make to allow a person with a disability to access the service.

**Reasonable Accommodations Section.** The section in the State Examinations Commission that deals with all applications for the special arrangements available under the **RACE scheme**.

**Scribe.** A person who writes down the answers that you say. The scribe can only write down exactly what you say and cannot give you any other help. They can read back what they have written down, but they cannot read the questions for you, unless they are also your **reader**.

**SEC.** See **State Examinations Commission**.

**Special centre.** A small examination centre shared by a number of examination candidates using access arrangements, such as word processors/laptops, or who have particular physical, medical, emotional or behavioural needs. A special centre will

have no more than 8 candidates. A special centre for students being provided with reading assistance will have no more than 4 candidates. See also **individual special centre**.

**State Examinations Commission.** The organisation that runs the state examinations on behalf of the Minister for Education and Skills.

**Visiting Teacher Service/VTS.** Fully qualified teachers, provided by the Department of Education and Skills. They assist in the development and education of children with varying degrees of visual and/or hearing impairments.

**Waiver.** An arrangement through which you have not been tested on some skill that is properly part of what should be tested. You are not penalised for not showing this skill, even though other candidates are. See the section in this guide on **Exemptions, waivers, and explanatory notes**.

## **Appendix 1: the principles that the scheme is based on**

The principles below are the basis for all decisions about the arrangements that can be made under the RACE scheme. They are from a report by an expert group that considered all of these issues and consulted widely.

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: '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.

## Appendix 2: Key dates for the 2021 examinations

Please note that these dates are specific to 2021 only. All closing dates will be strictly applied.

### Leaving Certificate (including Leaving Certificate Applied)

Forms for reactivating accommodations that were already provided at Junior Cycle and forms for new applications will be available in October 2020. The closing date for your school to send an application to us is 20 November 2020. We will give the school our decision before the end of February 2021. The school should tell you straight away.

### Junior Cycle

Forms will be available in November 2020. The closing date for your school to send an application to us is 22 January 2021. We will give the school our decision before the end of April 2021. The school should tell you straight away.

### Late applications – Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle

Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle late application forms will be available in February 2021. The closing date for your school to send us a late application for either examination is 9 April 2021. We will give the school our decision on a late application in May 2021. The school should inform you straight away.

### Emergency applications – Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and Junior Cycle

These are only for cases of injury, sudden illness, and similar emergencies that happen after the closing dates and that could

not have been foreseen and will be available from May 2021. There are no closing dates. Schools contact us as soon as the emergency happens. They complete the emergency form and we will issue a decision as soon as possible.