

Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations

ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF CANDIDATES

WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

Report to the Minister for Education and Science

January 2000

Any consideration of arrangements for the examination of candidates with special needs has to recognise that the Leaving Certificate Examination is a key point in the lives of students. On the one hand, performance on the examination is taken to represent students' achievements after 13 or 14 years of education. On the other, it is used to make important decisions about students' future education which, in turn, seriously affects their life chances. The examination enjoys a high status and is regarded by most people as a fair means of making decisions about students' educational achievements. It is essential that fairness to all candidates, and the perception of that fairness, be maintained in the administration of the examination.

The Junior Certificate Examination is obviously of less importance than the Leaving Certificate Examination for most students, though it is often regarded as a useful experience in preparation for the Leaving Certificate. Our discussion of special arrangements is framed for the most part by a consideration of the Leaving Certificate, and it should not be assumed that regulations should be applied with the same rigour to both certificate examinations. We do not consider how regulations might be applied differently at the two levels, taking the view that modification of the Junior Certificate for all students would be a more appropriate strategy than attempting to develop a subset of the regulations designed with Leaving Certificate candidates in mind. If the Junior Certificate Examination is developed so that there is less emphasis on terminal papers and greater consideration is given to school-based assessment, the potential to deal with special cases should be greatly enhanced.^{1[1]}

It is recognised that in certain circumstances an examination may not adequately represent the achievements that it purports to measure. This is a particular problem when the scope of an examination is fairly limited, as is the case in the Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations. Although there is provision for other kinds of assessment (e.g., oral and practical competencies), these 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 experience difficulty, or may even find it impossible, to communicate what they know in this situation. This is, perhaps, most obvious in the case of a physical disability, such as a visual or hearing impairment, but specific learning disabilities are also recognised as giving rise to difficulties.

^{1[1]} See Department of Education and Science (n.d.). The Junior Certificate: Issues for discussion. Dublin: Author.

The normal routine of examination administration, dedicated to the maintenance of universalistic standards (i.e, a system based on generally applicable rules and principles), when faced with particularistic considerations (i.e, concern with elements, which have a particular rather than a universal application, or to which no general standard is applicable), inevitably gives rise to conflict. The former involves the application of bureaucratic principles so that all candidates are treated in the same way; the latter attempts to take account of the circumstances of individual candidates. Resolution of the conflict is likely to be complex and difficult since a concession to the universalistic could be seen to be at the expense of the particularistic, while a concession to the particularistic could be interpreted as compromising the universalistic.

In late 1998, the Minister for Education and Science requested the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations (a body he had set up in December 1997 to provide independent advice and evaluation on the operation of examinations) to prepare a discussion paper on special arrangements at the examinations for students with special needs. The paper, which was prepared in April 1999, set out current arrangements for candidates with special needs in certificate examinations in this country and also provided descriptions of regulations followed by examining bodies in Great Britain. A number of principles were proposed, which it was suggested should underlie the provision of special arrangements, and a series of issues requiring discussion was outlined.

Responses to the paper were invited from interested parties in advertisements in national newspapers on May 17, 1999. The paper was also made available on the Internet. Submissions were requested by June 30, 1999. Altogether, 210 submissions were received. These were considered by the Advisory Group, following which the present document was prepared.

The document outlines the present situation regarding special arrangements made before an examination and the situation regarding special consideration after an examination. This is followed by a summary of the main issues addressed in submissions. Principles governing the provision of special arrangements, based on the earlier document and on submissions, are then proposed. Finally, recommendations relating to modification of existing regulations are proposed.

In preparing the document, cognisance was taken of 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 with other educational needs, is stated. It follows from this statement that the administration of examinations, which form part of that provision, should be sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities.

The need for flexibility in making decisions about individual candidates was also borne in mind in arriving at the principles and recommendations set out in the paper. Flexibility is needed in light of the complexity and individual nature of candidate needs for a number of fairly obvious reasons. First, the number of disability categories is considerable, and, within each, there is substantial variability. Second, the impact of accommodations in examination administration on the validity of an examination is usually unknown for different disability categories. And third, it is important that allowance be made for future developments, both in examinations and in the availability of technology, that may serve to improve the situation for candidates with special needs.

In light of these considerations, and in recognition of the fact that decisions about individual candidates have to be made in the light of the particular needs of candidates, the present paper sets out principles and a structure under which specific arrangements can be made, rather than rules and regulations that would describe how particular individuals should be treated. 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.

THE PRESENT SITUATION FOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS IN IRELAND

Under present regulations governing the administration of state examinations, special arrangements may be made for a candidate when it is indicated in advance of the examination that the candidate has difficulties which preclude him or her from displaying the achievements which are assessed in the examination. Special consideration is sometimes sought during or after an examination on the grounds that unforeseen circumstances arose during the course of, or around the time of, the examination which interfered with a candidate's performance.

Special Arrangements Requested Before An Examination

Application for special examination arrangements on the grounds of a specific learning disability or of a physical disability is made by schools to the Department of Education and Science on prescribed forms to be completed by school authorities^{2[2]}. The form requests information on the following:

- (i) name of examinations for which special arrangements are being sought;
- (ii) whether the candidate avails in school of any special facilities for studying or communicating;
- (iii) reasons for applying for special arrangements;
- (iv) the nature of the special arrangements that are being requested;
- (v) particulars of previous Certificate examinations taken by the candidate;
- (vi) details of assessment by a guidance or remedial teacher;
- (vii) if the candidate had received remedial or special help at school;
- (viii) the candidate's attendance record;
- (ix) the candidate's general ability;
- (x) the candidate's application to studies;
- (xi) a psychologist's report if available over the past 12 months;
- (xii) three samples of a candidate's written work under examination conditions;

^{2[2]} Department of Education and Science. Examinations Branch. Special Arrangements in State Examinations. Application on the Grounds of a Specific Learning Disability. Athlone: Author, 1999; Department of Education and Science. Examinations Branch. Special Arrangements in State Examinations. Application on the Grounds of a Physical Disability. Athlone: Author, 1999.

(xiii) a report of a psychologist or medical doctor supporting the case for special arrangements.

Special arrangements on the grounds of a specific learning disability will be approved only if the Department is satisfied on the basis of evidence put forward or adduced that the candidate's ability is not below 'the average range' and that the candidate has a specific difficulty in reading or in writing that is of such a degree that he or she would be impaired in reading the questions or in writing the answers, or is such that a regular examiner would have difficulty in deciphering the candidate's handwriting. Special arrangements are not approved for students who are 'slow learners' or for students with a 'mental handicap'.

A parent/guardian is required to complete a form consenting to an interview/assessment by a psychologist from the Department of Education and Science (should the Department consider this necessary) and to the results of the interview/assessment being made available to the Department.

A closing date is specified for the submission of applications. However, it is not always possible to keep to this, and applications are received and processed up to and during the examination period.

A number of observations may be made about the operation of the scheme. First, there were about 3,200 applications in 1998. Second, the number of applications is growing (e.g., from about 2,300 in 1994). Third, there is considerable variation between schools in the operation of the scheme. Some schools produce multiple applications, others do not make any. In some cases, the reasons for this are obvious. A school which caters for students with disabilities would be expected to have an above-average application rate. However, this type of situation does not fully explain differential application rates. Finally, special arrangements for the vast majority of candidates involve no more than ensuring that every possible effort is made to decipher their answers and mark them reliably in accordance with the marking scheme, however difficult it may be to read their work because of misspellings, bad handwriting, poor grammar, etc. When the degree of impairment is severe, further arrangements (including the provision of a person who will read the questions or write the answers, or the use of a tape recorder, typewriter, or word processor) may be made.

There is provision for a range of special arrangements.

(i) Time (allowance of 10 minutes extra time per hour where a scribe or mechanical aid is used or a candidate is visually impaired).

(ii) Means of Access to Questions

(a) reading an examination paper, without elaboration or explanation, to the candidate;

(b) provision of modified questions, substituting alternative questions for those which refer to visual material, such as diagrams, photographs, and maps;

(c) provision of braille translations;

(d) provision of enlarged print in the examination papers;

(e) provision of low vision aids for reading questions.

(iii) Means of Presenting Responses

(a) recording of answers on tape or word processor;

(b) dictation of answers to a scribe;

(c) sending a script to a supervising examiner when the examiner encounters difficulty in reading it.

(iv) Alternative Accommodation/Time Arrangements

(a) taking the examination in a special room in a school or in a hospital;

(b) alteration in the time at which the examination is taken (e.g., to allow attendance at the funeral of a close relative).

There is no indication on a candidate's certificate of results that special arrangements were in place for the examination.

Special Consideration During and After An Examination

Unforeseen circumstances (e.g., illness, death of a relative, accident, trauma) can arise during an examination. Examination superintendents are advised that the Department is prepared to accord candidates who become ill during the course of an examination every consideration to help them sit the examination. In exceptional circumstances, candidates may take an examination at a later time (but not on a later date) than the scheduled time.

A further situation arises when examination authorities are notified after the examination has been completed that illness or trauma seriously interfered with a candidate's performance. Several hundred items of correspondence are generated each year arising out of such situations.

There are two possible responses to situations in which unforeseen circumstances are claimed to have affected a candidate's performance. One is to espouse the universalistic position and state that examiners can only work on the basis of what a candidate has presented. This is the situation at present. The other is to attempt to address the circumstances of the particular case and re-examine the candidate's work, though this could involve departing from the marking scheme which should be applied to the work of all candidates. The latter approach is more feasible in examinations in other jurisdictions which rely less on terminal written performance. Flexibility to respond to unforeseen school or personal circumstances would improve in this country if examination procedures were less rigid.^{3[3]}

REVIEW OF SUBMISSIONS

Submissions to the Discussion Paper of the Expert Advisory Group on Certificate Examinations (April 1999) were received up to 30 June 1999. Several of the 210 submissions highlighted inadequacies in the operation of the present system. Some raised very broad issues; some referred to perceived difficulties in schools; others to the operation of the system by the Department of Education and Science. Practically all addressed issues relating to special arrangements that are decided before an examination; very few dealt with the question of special consideration during or after an examination. Submissions dealt with special arrangements for candidates with physical disabilities and for candidates with learning

^{3[3]} See Department of Education and Science (n.d.). The Junior Certificate: Issues for discussions. Dublin: Author.

disabilities. A number expressed a preference for practices in Britain (especially in Scotland), a description of which had been provided in the Discussion Paper. While these practices were considered by the Expert Group in arriving at the recommendations in this document, the fact that they operated in the context of assessment systems which differed from the Irish system in their nature and traditions had to be kept in mind.

A summary of the main points of the submissions, categorised under four headings, follows. The points are not set out in any particular order, and no indication of the frequency with which points were made is provided. This course of action was adopted, partly because the rationale and appropriateness of points seem more important than their frequency of mention, and partly because a head-count based on multiple identical submissions would have resulted in a distorted picture.

Issues With Implications for Examination Systems in General

A number of submissions considered issues in the context of increasing participation rates in education and in examinations, pointing to the need to give greater prominence to the certification (as opposed to the selection) function of examinations. The point is particularly relevant in the case of the Junior Certificate Examination.

Submissions with implications for the examination system in general related to a role for a continuous assessment component in the examination process; the need for greater use of oral examining; a modular system of examinations; repeat examinations; a modified schedule for examinations; limiting the number of subjects which some students would be required to study; and the introduction of alternative curricular and assessment procedures for some students. While all these recommendations merit serious consideration, they raise issues that go well beyond the terms of reference of the Expert Group in its review of the operation of special arrangements at examinations for students with special needs.

General Issues Relating to Special Arrangements

Several of the recommendations in submissions were of a general nature: that special arrangements be available to all candidates with special needs (not just those of ‘average ability’); that the view of ‘disability’ as a pathological condition be abandoned; that the word ‘special’ be excluded from the description of arrangements; that the problematic nature of the

use of terms such as dyslexia and Asperger Syndrome be recognised; that separate consideration be maintained for physical and learning disabilities; and that regulations and provision for the Junior Certificate Examination should differ from those for the Leaving Certificate Examination.

Recognising the difficulties in adapting general examination regulations to meet the needs of all candidates, it was pointed out that there was a danger that the scheme of special arrangements might be used as a means of making inappropriate methods of assessment seem appropriate for all candidates.

Specific Comments/Proposals Regarding the Present Scheme (Before the Examination)

Present arrangements in many schools for dealing with students with special needs were considered inadequate (especially by parents). It was stated that the identification of students was often late; that schools were not adequately resourced to deal with students with specific learning difficulties; and that schools did not always have the equipment to prepare students for examinations. More general problems identified in schools related to lack of awareness of student needs and lack of appropriate teaching and learning supports.

A series of recommendations relating to examinations were made: the need to provide clear guidelines for students, schools, and parents; the need for a standard psychological assessment form (possibly in multiple-choice format); greater school involvement in the identification and preparation of candidates; assigning responsibility for administering and overseeing arrangements to an individual in the school; assigning a major role in assessment and in preparing applications for special arrangements to a guidance counsellor/remedial teacher; a mechanism for earlier student identification, certainly no later than second year in secondary school; decisions regarding arrangements and their nature to be provided earlier by the Department of Education and Science; the need to try out various options in schools to determine the most appropriate conditions for a candidate; the provision of opportunities for students in school to practice for special arrangements; the incorporation into school examinations of special arrangements (from first year in secondary school if possible); the provision of opportunities for a student to work with a reader/assistant/scribe under examination conditions before an examination; and access by parents to relevant correspondence and reports.

Specific Comments/Proposals Regarding the Present Scheme (During and After the Examination)

Many submissions saw the provision of extra time as an important factor in alleviating problems that candidates might face in an examination. It was felt that additional time would help students who tire quickly, who are restricted in physical movement, who take longer than most students to process material, or who have difficulty in concentrating on a limited range of topics for a long period. The proposals about extra time varied from 10/15 minutes for an examination to 10/15 minutes per hour. Some suggested that the extra time be provided before an examination, others that it be used to provide rest periods during an examination. The suggestion was also made that the provision of extra time should be at the discretion of the examination centre.

Some submissions addressed the issue of expanding the range of formats for accessing questions (e.g., the distribution of examinations on tape as well as on hard copy).

Several submissions focused on the role of examiners/markers. Suggestions included the employment of special markers (with relevant experience/training); informing markers of the status of candidates and the nature of candidate difficulties; the provision of general guidelines and training for supervisors and examiners; and the provision of training/experience for markers of the scripts of candidates with special needs. It was recommended that the provision for seating candidates in a quiet area or separate room, where distraction would be minimised, should be extended.

Most, but not all, submissions were opposed to indicating on certificates that candidates had taken an examination under special arrangements.

PRINCIPLES ON WHICH THE PROVISION OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CANDIDATES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS MIGHT BE BASED

In this section, a number of principles on which the provision of arrangements for candidates with special needs might be based is presented. These are drawn from present

practice in this country, practice elsewhere⁴[4], and a consideration of submissions made in response to the Discussion Paper of April 1999.

In considering the principles, it is necessary to bear in mind the distinction between a student's achievements and his/her ability to display those achievements under examination conditions. There are cases where the nature of a subject, and consequently of an examination, preclude a student, because of a disability, from acquiring the competencies which the subject is designed to develop. For example, a student may not be physically able to produce an end product in subjects such as Construction Studies and Engineering. Since the achievement of the student, rather than the assessment of the achievement, is at issue, the case for special arrangements does not arise.

There are other cases in which many elements of the achievements in a subject are accessible to a student but some, because of a particular disability, are not. For example, the aural component in a language may not be accessible to a hearing-impaired student. In this case, the issue is again one of achievement, rather than the nature of the examination. However, it is reasonable that the student sit for an examination in the components of the subject in which achievement was possible, and that he/she be exempted from the specific and identifiable component (e.g. the aural component) in which it was not.

There are other cases again in which all aspects of a subject are accessible to a student, but the nature of the examination adversely affects the student's ability to display what he/she had achieved in the subject. In these cases, modification of the examination procedure (e.g., the provision of enlarged print on the examination paper) is permissible so long as it does not affect the integrity of the examination.

With these conditions in mind, the following principles on which the provision of arrangements for candidates with special needs might be based are proposed.

⁴[4] See Cullen, H. (1988). Special provision for pupils with learning difficulties in GCSE examinations. Support for Learning, 3, 182-183; Joint Forum for GCSE & GCE. (1998). Candidates with special assessment needs. Special arrangements and special consideration. Regulations and guidance. Cambridge: Author; Scottish Examination Board. (1996). Scottish Certificate of Education and Certificate of Sixth Year Studies Examinations. Arrangements for candidates with special educational needs. Guidance for Centres for Examinations in and after 1996. Dalkeith Midlothian: Author.

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.

APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

While these principles may seem straightforward enough, they carry within them possible sources of conflict. Furthermore, it is not always obvious how the principles might be applied in practice. In this section, we consider issues that arise from the principles in terms of candidate identification, effective and equitable provision, and the treatment and reporting of candidate performance. Recommendations in relation to each are made. It is recognised that some of the recommendations have implications for resources, which obviously would have to be considered before implementation.

Candidate Identification

The identification of candidates in need of special arrangements at examinations involves a judgment about the difficulties a candidate would experience in an examination setting, having given due consideration to the candidate's achievements and the extent to which the examination setting would prevent the candidate from demonstrating those achievements. Barriers to full participation in the examination may be physical or psychological. The former (e.g., motor, visual, auditory) are more obvious than the latter (e.g., specific reading disability, attention deficit disorder) and are probably more easily assessed.

Key components of the present regulations relating to special arrangements on the grounds of a specific learning disability are that arrangements will be granted only if the candidate's general ability is not below 'the average range' and if there is a discrepancy between that ability and achievement in at least one specified domain of achievement (e.g., reading comprehension). These conditions give rise to a number of problems. First, given the increase in participation rates in state examinations in recent years, many candidates are likely to fall below 'the average range' of ability. There is no reason why these should be excluded from consideration for special arrangements if they also have a more specific learning disability. Second, the available evidence indicates that poor readers who do not exhibit discrepancies between measures of their general ability and achievement appear to have the same kind of cognitive difficulties and achievement needs as poor readers who exhibit discrepancies⁵. Third, there are technical problems in the use of a discrepancy score between ability and achievement⁶. These arise from, among other things, regression to the mean and errors of measurement (which tend to be large when the correlation between measures is high). Fourth, even if a reliable discrepancy procedure were available, evidence of a discrepancy would not in itself mean that it was due to a particular disability. It could be that other factors (e.g., lack of motivation, failure to study) caused the discrepancy.

Recommendations on Candidate Identification

Present regulations covering the identification of candidates requiring special arrangements are in general acceptable to the Expert Advisory Group, though some modifications are suggested. In general, regulations and their implementation should be designed to ensure that all eligible candidates are facilitated; at the same time, it is important that the system should not be abused. The following recommendations, which are designed to improve the identification process and to increase the involvement of schools in the process, are made.

⁵ See Fletcher, J.M., Francis, D.J., Shaywitz, S.E., Lyon, G.R., Foorman, B.R., Stuebing, K.K., & Shaywitz, B.A. (1998). Intelligence and the discrepancy model for children with learning disabilities. Learning Disability Research and Practice, *13*, 186-203; Siegal, L.S. (1988). Evidence that IQ scores are irrelevant to the definition and analysis of reading disability. Canadian Journal of Psychology, *42*, 210-215.

⁶ See Burns, E. (1998). Test accommodations for students with disabilities. Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas; Thorndike, R.L. (1963). The concepts of over- and underachievement. New York: Teachers College Press.

- (i) The condition that a candidate's general ability be not below 'the average range' for consideration for special arrangements should be discontinued.
- (ii) Procedures should be established to increase awareness in schools of candidate needs.
- (iii) Procedures should be established in schools to ensure identification at the earliest possible point.
- (iv) Schools should have greater involvement in the identification and preparation of candidates.
- (v) The Department of Education and Science should provide guidelines regarding identification for students, schools, and parents.
- (vi) A guidance counsellor/remedial teacher, in collaboration with classroom teachers, resource teachers and occupational therapists, should have a role in assessment and in applying for special arrangements.
- (vii) A standard diagnostic and assessment process should be developed by the Department.
- (viii) The time period between applications and approval should be as short as possible.
- (ix) Parents should have access to all relevant correspondence and reports.
- (x) Provision for appeals regarding the operation of the scheme should be continued.

Effective and Equitable Provision

There are three aspects to effective and equitable provision: preparation of candidates, candidates' access to questions/tasks, and candidates' responses.

There would appear to be a lack of awareness in some schools about the needs of candidates requiring special arrangements, as well as inadequate facilities to prepare candidates for examinations. Schools need to be more proactive, not only in the identification

of special needs, but also in providing for them. Improvement in this area will not be without its difficulties and will have resource implications⁷.

In terms of access to questions/tasks in the actual examination, demand for extra time to address a variety of candidate difficulties appeared in many submissions, although provision of additional time does not always work to a candidate's advantage⁸.

The issue of extending time for some candidates raises a broader question: Is timing primarily an administrative device and are examinations designed so that the great majority of candidates can complete an examination in the allotted time, or is speed of response one of the competencies being assessed? We may assume that the former is the case. It would, however, be worthwhile obtaining data on the proportion of candidates who finish examinations under standard conditions. A similar criterion could then be applied to candidates with disabilities. However, even this position would have to take cognisance of the fact that the amount of time required to complete an examination may vary substantially by disability category. For example, individuals with visual impairments, using Braille or recorded versions of tests, seem particularly disadvantaged as far as time is concerned⁹.

The provision of extra time has the clear potential to allow a candidate to provide additional information in response to questions or to attempt additional questions. On the face of it, then, additional time could confer an unfair advantage on individual candidates. On the other hand, it can be argued that for some candidates, additional time would do no more than enable them to access the test instrument in a way available to all candidates. To ensure that extra time is restricted only to those who would achieve no advantage is well high impossible. It would require intensive screening of each individual applicant by professionals and, even then, given the variation in the nature and severity of special needs, it would be

⁷ See Woods, K. (1998). Special examination arrangements for GCSE. A study of school processes for selection within one LEA. Educational Psychology in Practice, *14*, 194-201.

⁸ See Burns, E. (1998). Test accommodation for students with disabilities. Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas; Hedderly, R. (1996). Assessing pupils with specific learning difficulties for examination special arrangements at GCSE 'A' level and degree level. Educational Psychology in Practice, *12*, 36-44; Pumfrey, P.D. & Reason, R. (1991). Specific learning difficulties (dyslexia). Challenges and responses. Windsor: NFER-Nelson.

⁹ See Burns, E. (1998). Test accommodation for students with disabilities. Springfield IL: Charles C. Thomas.

extremely difficult to decide how much time was required by a candidate and whether or not the additional time conferred an advantage in the examination.

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. As adumbrated above, evidence on the role of time in examinations under present conditions is required. While awaiting this evidence, all candidates might be given the option of availing of a limited increase in time (15 to 20 minutes). Obviously this option would not be available in all examinations. Constraints are imposed by timetables, which are complex, and, anyhow, extra time would not be required in all subjects.

Our proposal is 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. The examinations to which this proposal would apply should be determined in consultation with Chief Examiners. It is recommended that the selected subjects should be ones taken by large numbers of candidates, in which time seems to be a critical issue, and for which there is a capacity in the timetable to grant additional time. A number of subjects in the humanities which involve extensive essay writing would seem to meet these criteria. If the proposal is adopted, its implementation should be monitored, and the situation should be reviewed in light of the experience gained in the pilot.

Other factors to be considered in deciding on special provision in the case of both access and response relate to whether special provision for a particular candidate is required for all examinations or only for some; the amount of time that the Department requires to provide special conditions (e.g., alternative versions of a printed paper); whether papers currently in use are at an appropriate level of readability, bearing in mind the competencies being assessed; and whether some assessment tasks which are unsuitable for some candidates could be changed while at the same time meeting the objectives of the assessment.

Recommendations on Effective and Equitable Provision

In general, the arrangements provided by the Department of Education and Science to facilitate candidates' access to questions/tasks and their responses in the actual examination were found by the Expert Advisory Group to be satisfactory and generally similar to arrangements elsewhere. The following recommendations, several of which relate to the preparation of candidates in schools, are made.

- (i) Examination instruments should be reviewed with the purpose of making them as accessible as possible to all candidates. Readability levels and the time required for completion should be ascertained.
- (ii) Special arrangements should, insofar as it is possible, reflect the nature and complexity of the learning difficulties of each individual candidate.
- (iii) Decisions on arrangements should be provided at an earlier date than at present by the Department.
- (iv) Schools should, by trying out various options, ensure that the most appropriate conditions are recommended for a candidate.
- (v) School examinations should incorporate the special arrangements (from first year in secondary school if possible).
- (vi) Candidates should have the opportunity to practice in school for the special arrangements (e.g., in use of a typewriter, word processor).
- (vii) Schools should be encouraged to give candidates the opportunity to work with a reader/assistant/scribe under examination conditions before the examination.
- (viii) An additional 15 to 20 minutes time could be offered to all candidates in subject areas in the examination in which time constraints may be considered a problem. A pilot scheme in a small number of subjects is proposed for the 2000 Leaving Certificate Examination.
- (ix) Further decisions regarding the granting of additional time or rest periods should be made by the Department having considered the needs of an individual candidate.
- (x) Consideration should be given towards extending further the range of formats for accessing questions (e.g., tape as well as hard copy).

Treatment and Reporting of Candidate Performance

Among the questions that arise in considering the treatment and reporting of candidate performance are: Should the work of candidates conducted with special provision be processed in the same way as the products of other candidates? Or should the work be identified and scored under special arrangements? Is it appropriate for an examiner to take into consideration life circumstances of an individual, or should he/she confine him/herself to the assessment of material that is actually presented, and apply the specified marking scheme without modification? The present regulations specify that examiners are required to apply agreed marking schemes to the work that candidates (including ones with learning difficulties and/or special needs) produce in the examination.

Many submissions expressed the view that certificates should not carry an indication that special arrangements had been in place for a candidate while taking an examination. This position seems to be based on the view that annotation on a certificate always works to the disadvantage of a candidate. This, however, is not the case. A scheme in which annotation is applied to certificates can serve to expand the capacity for special arrangements. Furthermore, users of the certificate (e.g., universities) are often prepared to make special provision for candidates when they know that such provision is required.

A question regarding the appropriateness of examiners taking into consideration the life circumstances of an individual also arises when candidates, though not the subject of a particular physical or learning disability, and not availing of special arrangements, are unable, because of circumstances around the time of the examination, to take all or part of an examination, or are seriously upset while doing the examination. A number of considerations are relevant to the situation. First, it does not seem possible to produce guidelines that would anticipate all conditions or establish criteria that would successfully identify all cases that merit consideration. Second, any attempt, however well-meaning, to take account of difficulties would involve departing from agreed marking schemes. Third, criteria that would allow an examiner to estimate the extent to which circumstances affected an individual candidate or their impact on his/her examination performance would be very difficult to establish. In this context, it may be noted that the alternatives to sitting the examination for estimating a candidate's achievements that exist in other jurisdictions are not available in our external, time-bound, terminal examination system. Thus, even if candidates could be identified, there are difficulties in determining what compensation should be made. Finally,

there is always the danger of abuse when special consideration is given to candidates that had experienced illness or trauma during the course of an examination.

Recommendations on Treatment and Reporting of Candidate Performance

The following recommendations are made regarding the treatment and reporting of candidates' performance.

- (i) Assistant examiners should continue to be advised to refer to their Advising Examiner material from candidates which they have difficulty in accessing.
 - (ii) It should be noted on certificates of results if an element or elements of an examination have been omitted or the method of examining has been altered in a substantial way.
 - (iii) The range of supports which at present are provided to candidates and schools in trauma situations should be reviewed and developed to enable the Department to consider the appropriate response in individual cases, in consultation with school authorities and with full professional input.
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