**Members Voices**

**A parent’s view: RACE 2017 – Instructions for Schools.**

Evaluation of this document with a view to establishing its ability to support students with dyspraxia.

I will use the example of my sons experience in sitting his Leaving Cert last year to think about how the changes in the RACE scheme would affect students with similar difficulties going forward.

Here is a quick synopsis of how reasonable accommodations affected my son’s Leaving Cert. Typing allowed him to express his thoughts with ease whereascompleting his ‘written’ exams by hand would have been impossible. Extra time in maths and physically produced subjects, made it possible for him to show more of what he knows, where speed of producing work by hand would have let his intelligence down. The commission succeeded in removing to a large extent the impact of his disability while at the same time not giving him any advantage in his Leaving Cert. The effect of being granted extra time can be clearly seen in the tables below.

Mock exams.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Honours physics | Answered 5 out of 8 Q’s  | 37% |
| Honours maths papers 1 & 2 | Significant parts of Q’s not attempted including 3 whole Q’s (which he believes he could have answered) | 46% |
| Honours DCG | 2 out of 4 large drawings and skipped parts of small questions to use time on higher marked questions. | 27% |
| Honours art. Puppet making.  | Half finished |  |
| Honours applied maths | 4 out of 6 questions. 1 of the 4 was misread but hadn’t time to fix it when he realized. | 30% |

Leaving cert exams.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Honours physics | Answered 7 out of 8 Q’s (by not using time to read the paper first and having no spare time to check back) \* | B3 |
| Honours maths papers 1 & 2**With extra 30min in both papers.** | Just a half question not attempted over the two papers. | B1 |
| Honours DCG**With extra 30min.** | Answered all 3 of small questions. Answered equivalent of 3 of the four large drawings.  | B3 |
| Honours art.  | Still life drawings needed more work. Art history paper finished due to typing.  | C3 |
| Honours applied maths**With extra 30min.,** | Answered parts of all 6 questions moving on at 30min per Q. (still short on time) | D1 |

Extra time was not applied for in physics because the commission advised that only a word processor or extra time could be granted in a given subject. (Subsequently 10min extra was given in English and Irish, so he typed and had extra time in these subjects.)

Adjustments made for not having enough time in physics.

The physics paper had 8 questions to be picked from 12. Enda had decided on a number of questions that he would answer before going into the exam. This was to make use of the 10 min that is recommended to read the paper to select which questions to do. He then had to choose 2 from 5 questions. He made that decision based on the first line which would indicated the topic for that question. He didn’t use time to read entire questions. He believed that he was well enough prepared across the course to take thisrisk. There are also 7 min left to go over the paper if guideline times are followed. He divided this 17 min across all questions to try to complete the paper. Roughly half of the paper is written material so typing took care of that. He answered all 5 of the required higher marked questions. He answered 2 of the 3 required experiment (lower marked) questions.His opinion is that he would have easily have answered the last question if he had more time.

Impact of being granted extra time : Enda was able to answer questions that he was intellectually capable of answering but worked too slowly to represent his knowledge in a limited time, due to having dyspraxia.

Impact of being granted the use of a word processor : Enda completed all typed papers. He achieved a B1 in English, C2 in French and B2 in pass Irish. He could not have expressed his thoughts on paper if he had written by hand.

**As my son has dyspraxia both accommodations were necessary.** A difficulty carrying out and planning his movements lead to his problems in hand writing. The same difficulties are the reason why he needs extra time to produce mechanical drawings, art and complete maths papers.

**Therefor different accommodations can be required in different subjects.**

If a student has been granted a word processor for language subjects and extra time for manually produced subjects then both of these accommodations are required in subjects which will contain typed and hand produced work (i.e. physics).

The accommodations allowed him to show a lot more of his ability and helped him gain a place on his first choice of computer science in DIT. This is a life changing outcome. The integrity of the examination was not compromised.

**Review of RACE 2017 – Instructions for Schools.**

(My comments are in brackets)

Pg**10 5.1**

Applications for the RACE scheme could be made under the grounds of 1) Learning Difficulty and 4) physical Difficulty. The criteria are stated as being the means by which a student normally studies or communicates. (This is a very logical and positive change.)

Pg11 **5.1.4. Physical Difficulty**

* Standard word processor.
* Helper in practical examinations. (Dyspraxia is not a physical disability as with a limb that can't function properly. It is a problem with needing to concentrate on actions that are automatic for other people. Extra time would be more beneficial and less complicated than having to figure out what to tell a helper to do to get a job done.)
* Use of drawing aids such as drafting machines, drawing boards, parallel motion boards and smaller drawing sheets in the subjects Technical Graphics, DCG, Construction Studies, Materials Technology or Technology. (It was suggested to my son that he avail of these drawing aids in his DCG exam but he believed that it was not what he needed. His hands are capable of drawing. He understood the technical information and knew how to draw the required answer. It would just take longer. Drawings aids would not assist him to plan and represent his thoughts on paper quicker. Maybe other students with dyspraxia would feel differently.)

Pg11 **5.3 Time in Examinations.**

Additional time is not an accommodation that can be sanctioned in its own right under the RACE scheme. Additional time may be provided in the following circumstances:

1. Candidates for whom the use of a scribe has been sanctioned – as there is a time overhead in dictation and otherwise in dealing with a scribe. (It was suggested that my son apply for a scribe for his maths exam. He felt that it would have been more difficult to communicate his thinking to a scribe and would have interrupted his flow of thought even more than trying to get it all written himself. The assumption is that his hand has difficulty writing and that a scribe could do this for him. The extra half hour in both papers helped him to nearly finish the exam for the first time in his life at the end of 14 years in school. Having an aptitude in maths he achieved a B1 in honours maths. Extra time was definitely the most suitable accommodation for him.)
2. Candidates who meet the eligibility criteria for the use of a recording device or a word processor but who are unable to make use of these aids under examination conditions. (This is the loop hole that Enda was allocated extra time through. The reasons why a student with dyspraxia needs to type are the same reasons why they would need extra time. However they may not be lucky enough to get it under this criteria. I think that it should be more straight forward so that students with dyspraxia can simply apply for extra time in certain subjects where their ability to plan and produce work in a limited time underrepresents their knowledge in a subject. Due to a lack of understanding of dyspraxia teachers may not suggest that students who have been allocated a wordprocessor can apply for extra time in subjects which can’t be typed, like maths, DCG, Art etc.)

Pg 17**6.General Principles in Assessing Eligibility for Accommodations under RACE.**

Learning supports teachers, resource teachers and other school staff working with students with special educational needs are best placed to identify students who may require accommodations to enable them to access the certificateexaminations. (In my experience these professionals are definitely the best people to understand the student’s needs. All of my son’s teachers approved of and supported his request to type written material and have extra time in DCG etc. His English teacher would have been distraught if he hadn’t been let type. It is very positive that the commission advises that supports are in place early so that their usefulness can be trailed.)

Pg 18 **All Grounds – leaving Certificate – Application to Reactivate Supports.**

The supports provided at Junior Certificate will be provided at Leaving Certificate, subject to confirmation by the school. (This is excellent news! It will alleviate the added stress in the Leaving Cert year if the necessary accommodations have been allocated for Junior Cert.)

(New subjects can be chosen for the Leaving Cert cycle. It will take time to know what accommodations will be needed. My son discovered that he was very good at DCG in TY so he chose it as a subject for his Leaving Cert. He didn’t realise that he was so much slower than his pears until the November exams. Most Drawings were completed for homework so it wasn’t evident that he was so much slower. I wouldn’t expect new applications to be a rare occurrence.)

Pg 21 **7.1 Leaving Certificate.**

Form RA1, RA2, RA3 and RA4. (I can’t find these on line. I would like to see is it easier to apply for extra time in particular, for students with dyspraxia. I assume the use of a word processor is straight forward.)

Pg 27 **8.Eligibility Criteria for Specific Accommodations.**

Standardised tests are in place for reading, spelling and writing speed. (It is understandably difficult to measure planning speed and organisation abilities to recommend extra time for students with dyspraxia. Teachers know whether exams represent the student’s ability or not. The only method I can think of for testing for this need is by trailing the allocation of extra time in school exams. If work completed after the designated time is of a good standard and makes a significant difference to the students result then they need extra time.

Pg 31 and 32 **8.1.3 use of a Word Processor**

1) Quality of Written Work.

2) Speed of Writing.

This section coversacquiring the use of a word processor for a student with dyspraxia. However it stipulates that they also need to have poor spelling/grammar. It is possible to have a difficult getting your thoughts down on paper by hand and not be a poor speller.

Pg 34

The use of a scribe is suggested where a word processor is not suitable in certain subjects e.g. maths. I have explained above in Pg11 **5.3 Time in Examinations** how this doesn’t work for students with dyspraxia. These applicants are required to meet the conditions of eligibility set out in section 8.1 of these instructions.

Pg 39 **8.4. Physical Difficulty Grounds**

The physical category includes sensory difficulties. Dysgraphia and dyspraxia are regarded as learning difficulties. (They are learning difficulties but I think they are being viewed as dyslexia here.)

**8.4.1. Writing Accommodations – Physical Difficulty.**

It appears that students with dyspraxia could apply for the use of a word processor under a physical difficulty.

There is no facility for applying for extra time under physical difficulty.

**Note on Poor Handwriting**

Poor handwriting , in and of itself is not a disability or difficulty that requires accommodations to be made in individual cases where the concern relates to difficulties that may arise in accessing the work of a candidate solely as a result of poor handwriting. (This could effect a student who has poor writing due to having dyspraxia but doesn’t have any spelling/grammar problems.)

**Scribe and drawing aids**

I have discussed the suitability of both of these above in the case of students with dyspraxia.

**Appendix A.**

Point 5 is relevant for students with dyspraxia where they have different needs in different subjects.

**Conclusion.**

It is definitely a move in the right direction that accommodations are needs based instead of disability based. The expense of acquiring OT reports is eliminated. All children with dyspraxia may not need the same supports.

The eligibility to use a word processor seems straight forward. If the candidate normally studies or communicates with a word processor then they should be eligible.

I believe that dyspraxia is not fully understood by the exam commission. It views difficulties with spelling and grammar as part of dyspraxia. This is more dyslexia which can co- exist with dyspraxia. It deals with the other aspects of dyspraxia under the physical category. While it may look like a physical disability due to the output of physical movements being hampered, it is more of a hitch in the neuroglialdelivery of information to the limbs that leads to the delay in work output. I think that extra time is very lightly an appropriate accommodation for many students with dyspraxia. They may not be easily able to acquire this under the guidelines of the new scheme. The RACE scheme is moving towards needs based eligibility which is great but understanding the reason for the need will assist in the allocation of the correct support.

The needs of a student with dyspraxia are being considered under the separate needs of dyslexia and physical difficulties. It is being regarded as dyslexia which a physical aspect.

It is very important for students to have special arrangements as soon as possible in school and for homework. This will help them to learn and express themselves and will show teachers how suitable specific supports are for individual students. They can then apply for these appropriate accommodations in exams.

These are my personal opinions on how students with dyspraxia are being catered for in the revised RACE scheme based on my experience as a parent of a child with dyspraxia.

Trish Keane.