



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí, N37 TP65.
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 TP65.

SEC Circular **S14/26**

Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE Scheme)

Interim additional time arrangements at the 2026 State Examinations

TO THE BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT/AUTHORITIES OF SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS AND CHIEF EXECUTIVES OF ETBS AND MANAGEMENT OF OTHER CENTRES OF EDUCATION PROVIDING STATE CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS IN 2026

In issuing the *RACE Instructions for Schools 2026* last October, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) referred to its ongoing work on the Review of the RACE Scheme and its intention to introduce pilot arrangements for an expanded scheme of additional time for the 2026 certificate examinations for certain candidates already eligible for the RACE Scheme. The SEC committed to announcing further details of the arrangements for an expanded scheme of additional time later. The purpose of this circular is to;

- a) Advise you of the interim additional time arrangements of **10 minutes per written examination paper for certain candidates already eligible for RACE accommodations** for the 2026 State examinations
- b) Provide details of the eligibility for these interim additional time arrangements from among those candidates already eligible for RACE and details of exceptions.
- c) Outline the supports available to schools to facilitate the delivery of additional time at the 2026 State examinations.

This is a major milestone in the provision of additional time under the RACE Scheme. It represents the first significant change to additional time arrangements in over 20 years and will see some 30,000 candidates with special educational needs now eligible for additional time in all of their written examinations.

Existing additional time arrangements of 10 minutes per hour for candidates using a scribe and 15 minutes per hour for blind/vision impaired candidates will continue to be provided for eligible candidates. Candidates eligible for additional time of either 10 minutes per hour or 15 minutes per hour, will not have a further 10 minutes per written examination paper.

There is no need for school authorities to do anything on foot of this circular other than to communicate this information to school staff, candidates and parents/guardians. There is no need to update existing RACE applications as the SEC will identify eligible candidates from among those already eligible for RACE access and support arrangements.

a) **Interim Additional Time Arrangements 2026**

The SEC has been continuing to review the RACE Scheme, with a commitment to deliver enhancements to examinations access and support arrangements which might improve the examinations experience and better meet the particular needs of eligible candidates. The SEC has been guided by principles to underpin the approach to introducing additional time arrangements to better meet the needs of candidates with special educational needs, while also preserving equity and fairness in the examinations for all candidates. The guiding principles have sought to;

- Manage the tension between the two key principles of the RACE Scheme of, on the one hand, attempting to provide access for candidates with special educational needs to demonstrate their level of attainment, while on the other, attempting to ensure that the principle of inter-candidate equity is not compromised in the measures taken to provide access. In so doing, to seek to treat all candidates as fairly as possible.
- Not undermine the foundations of the existing RACE scheme which is needs-based and does not require a diagnosis of any condition to confer eligibility.
- Be considerate of the needs of candidates with all forms of special educational needs and not just those with learning difficulties.
- Maintain all existing arrangements which exist in lieu of additional time (e.g. the spelling and grammar waiver and additional time for all candidates in Leaving Certificate Irish, English, History, and Geography).
- Not require a separate application process or place an additional administrative burden on schools.
- Address feasibility issues given that in 2025, 36,000 candidates (26% of all candidates taking examinations) required some form of access and support arrangement under the RACE Scheme due to their special educational needs.

Time is of concern to all candidates taking examinations. The **interim arrangement of 10 minutes per written examination paper for certain candidates already eligible for certain accommodations**, seeks to balance, on the one hand, access for candidates with special educational needs and, on the other, equity and fairness for all candidates undertaking their examinations. This scheme is broad in scope, both in terms of numbers of candidates coming within the scope of the arrangements and the range of subjects in which additional time will be available.

Evaluation of 2026 Interim Additional Time Arrangements .

The interim arrangements followed extensive consideration by the SEC and its Board of Commissioners on a range of possible options to address what is an extremely complex issue in the context of an ongoing review of the RACE Scheme and the arrangements which currently exist within the Irish system of reasonable accommodations in lieu of additional time.

Work is continuing on the comprehensive system-wide review of the RACE Scheme which seeks to address the relevant issues and take account of best practice internationally. The SEC has commissioned research into national and international policies on a range of issues including additional time. The research will assess the impact of additional time in the examinations and the measures in the RACE Scheme and in the examinations which exist in lieu of time. Consultation with stakeholders is also an extremely important aspect of the review and this is underway and will include focus groups, stakeholder meetings and events.

Informed by the evidence coming through the research into reasonable accommodations, and the evaluation of the 2026 interim arrangements, the SEC will consider further opportunities to develop these arrangements from 2027 onwards. The evaluation of the interim arrangements will require

engagement with candidates, school authorities, special centre superintendents, and stakeholders. Details of the evaluation process will issue later.

b) Details, Eligibility, Exceptions and Notification to Schools

This interim additional time arrangement will be available to all candidates already eligible for reasonable accommodations in the written examinations featuring a direct intervention (e.g. word processor, reading assistance, spelling and grammar waiver, etc) and not in receipt of additional time under the existing provisions of the scheme.

Additional time at a rate of **10 minutes per written examination paper** will be available in all Junior Cycle, Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied examinations.

The majority of accommodations provided in the written examinations will now confer eligibility for additional time of 10 minutes per examination paper as follows:

- Word processor: tablet/laptop
- Recording device
- Shared reader
- Individual reader
- Exam reading pen
- Personal CD player
- ISL Interpreter
- Papers in alternative formats
- Other assistive technology
- Spelling, grammar and punctuation waiver
- Subject exemption (LCA only)

The additional time measure will be in addition to any other access and support arrangements being provided to the candidate. For example, a candidate with a spelling and grammar waiver which applies in their language subjects will have an additional 10 minutes to complete their language examination papers **and** in all of their other examinations. The measure applies at the level of the examination paper so two-paper examinations will have 10 minutes additional time in both paper 1 and in paper 2.

Exceptions

There are a small number of exceptions.

1. Under this arrangement, and given that additional time is associated with the range of existing accommodations under the RACE scheme, candidates granted accommodations arranged by the school (i.e. rest breaks) or those whose only need is for a special examination centre* will not be eligible for additional time. The needs of candidates with this accommodation, which can be appropriate for those with medical, sensory, behavioural and mental health conditions, will continue to be served through the provision of rest breaks.
2. Candidates who have a colour identifier only (with or without a special examination centre).
3. Candidates whose accommodations relate to the non-written examinations.
4. Ten minutes additional time will apply in the written paper in the modern foreign language and music examinations but not also in the aural component of that examination.
5. Candidates eligible for additional time of either 10 minutes per hour or 15 minutes per hour, will not have a further 10 minutes per examination paper.

*Where a school identifies a candidate in receipt of reasonable accommodations but who does not qualify for additional time due to exception 1 listed above, and the school determines that this candidate may have an identified need for additional support due to cognitive processing difficulties, schools may apply to the SEC for 10 minutes additional time per examination paper through the complex case application process.

Decisions on Eligibility

There is no need for school authorities to apply for these interim additional time arrangements. The SEC will identify those who are eligible from within the existing RACE applications. Candidates who have applied during the initial application process will continue to receive decisions letters on their RACE applications for 2026. Once these initial decision letters have been processed and delivered, the SEC will issue updated letters to include additional time for eligible candidates to school authorities as soon as possible.

In making any late applications, there is also no need to apply for additional time as it is the nature of the candidate's other accommodations which confers eligibility.

c) Implementation of the 2026 Interim Additional Time Arrangements

Operation of Interim Additional Time Arrangements in Schools

As noted, the SEC is identifying the eligible candidates in your school and this will be communicated to each school in the coming weeks. The SEC will issue individual letters for each eligible candidate as well as a school report to indicate the complete list of candidates in your school who will be eligible for additional time in the written examinations.

Many of the candidates identified as being eligible for additional time are already due to sit their examinations in special examination centres. Others may be due to sit their examinations in main examination centres. For the orderly running of the examinations and to avoid disruption in the written examinations, all candidates granted additional time under the interim arrangements will need to be accommodated in special examination centres. The optimal administration of these arrangements for candidates in your school will depend on the needs of candidates in the school. Details of the resources which will be provided to support schools is set out later.

As candidates eligible for additional time must be facilitated to sit their examinations in special centres to minimise disruption, it may be necessary to establish further special examination centres in some schools. A detailed protocol on the administration of special centre arrangements and additional time is being developed by the SEC but the following is envisaged:

- Candidates being accommodated in existing shared special examination centres.
- Establishment of a shared special examination centre for all candidates being provided with 10 minutes additional time per examination paper within revised capacity limits.
- Reconfiguration of main examinations centres.

Conscious of minimising the administrative burden on schools, the SEC is arranging to assign candidates within the main centres in a way that will complement the creation of special centres.

Implementation Supports for Schools

The SEC provides financial support for recognised post-primary schools in the administration of the annual Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations. In the case of Education and Training Boards, this also includes further Education Settings such as VTOS and Youthreach where examinations are taking place. School authorities have discretion to engage an Examinations Aide for a period of 15

days each year to assist the principal during the state examinations or to fully substitute for the principal if they are unavailable for any reason. Additional days are also available to schools based on the number of examination candidates and the duration of the timetable in that school. A scheme of Examination Aide days also applies to the oral examinations.

The SEC will provide up to **two additional Examination Aide days** for recognised post-primary schools and other recognised exchequer funded centres of education to provide for administration work associated with the interim additional time arrangements. These additional days are available to all schools and should be used for the administration of special examination centres in the school.

Examination settings (e.g. private colleges) not funded by the Exchequer through the Department of Education and Youth continue to be responsible for their own costs involved in the planning and administration of the State Examinations.

In addition, the SEC will review the arrangements in individual schools and intends to appoint a RACE Superintendent in schools with very large numbers of special examination centres to be managed, acknowledging that the interim additional time arrangement may increase this further. Capacity to create this role will be considered in the first instance within the overall number of main centres in the school and may require some reconfiguration of centres. The primary role of the SEC appointed RACE Superintendent will be to ensure the effective management and delivery of the examinations in special centres. Acting under the direction of the SEC, they will have a specific role in the administration of all aspects of the examinations in special centres during the written examinations, working with the school authority, other SEC Superintendents, and the Special Centre Superintendents.

Further Information

On foot of this circular, please expect further information from the SEC in the coming weeks as follows;

- Replacement RACE decision letters and school report.
- A detailed protocol on the administration of special centre arrangements and additional time.
- Formal communication regarding additional resources: examinations aide days, additional special centres, SEC appointed RACE superintendent.
- Information for Candidates, Parents/Guardians.

Please bring this circular to the attention of special educational needs teachers, special needs coordinators, teachers, other school staff, candidates with reasonable accommodations and their parents/guardians. Separate guidance for candidates and parents/guardians will issue from the SEC.

For enquiries on the information presented in this circular please contact the Reasonable Accommodations section of the SEC by email to race@examinations.ie or phone 090 644 2401/2408/2786.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters and for your continued co-operation and support in the administration and delivery of the RACE Scheme.

Richard Dolan,
Director of Operations
State Examinations Commission
January 2026