

## **Statement from the Dyslexia Association of Ireland on the new criteria for Irish Exemptions announced today.**

The Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI) welcomes the changes made to the Irish exemption criteria announced today by Minister Joe McHugh. The DAI have been lobbying for change to the exemption criteria for many years and believe that the changes announced today, if implemented properly, will help to create a more equitable and fairer educational system for children with dyslexia.

In particular, the DAI welcomes the following changes:

1. Exemptions will now be based on identified needs and not necessarily on a particular diagnosis (e.g. Dyslexia). We welcome the fact that a psychological report will no longer be required, neither will any measure of IQ or cognitive ability. We have been asking for this change for many years. It is in line with the overwhelming evidence that dyslexia is not meaningfully linked with IQ. This change also supports equity of access, as we know that access to a formal diagnosis is often linked to financial means.
2. The creation of an appeals board to deal with cases that could not be resolved at school level is a welcome step. This board will be made up of relevant experts; DAI would welcome the opportunity to provide some of its experts on dyslexia to this group, if requested to do so by the Department of Education & Skills.
3. The first draft of the proposed new circular suggested that exemptions would only be available from 3<sup>rd</sup> class onwards for students with learning difficulties. While we would prefer if there was no class or age related threshold, we welcome the fact that it has been brought back to 2<sup>nd</sup> class.
4. A child will now need to have a standardised score at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile in word reading OR reading comprehension OR spelling. This is a marked change and the broadening of this criteria is one that DAI have been strongly advocating for over several years. This is a more evidence based, fairer and more appropriate means of deciding who would benefit from an Irish exemption.

DAI CEO Rosie Bissett commented “Today’s announcement is something that we have been waiting for for a very long time. The old Irish exemption criteria was not fit for purpose and we look forward to the implementation of new criteria which we have been very involved in advocating for.”

Bissett continued “We would like to thank all of our members, parents and teachers who took the time to take part in this consultation. I know that many of them have waited a long time to be consulted on Irish exemptions and so when they were asked to do so they did not hold back. An Irish exemption can make a huge positive impact to a young person’s life and we look forward to supporting parents, students and teachers through the coming months in understanding these changes once the Circular has been released with the full details.”

Amy Smyth, Information and Advocacy Coordinator with the DAI commented “This is a big day for children with dyslexia, their parents and the DAI. We have long been advocating that the old criteria was not fit for purpose. We welcome that many of our recommendations have now been taken on board. This will hopefully create a much fairer system.”

Bissett concluded “This is a more holistic approach to accessing Irish exemption and we hope that it eliminates the false perception that children with dyslexia are somehow accessing supports that they are not entitled to or are faking their very real and very serious difficulties. We are hoping that this is a start of a shift in the narrative around persons with invisible disabilities in Ireland.”

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