

## Guidance for Members re Irish Exemption Consultation

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) has published details of a public consultation on Exemptions from the Study of Irish (<https://www.education.ie/en/Parents/Information/Irish-Exemption/>). To support our members to participate in this consultation, we have put together the key proposed changes, as well as our position on these proposed changes, and the impact they may have for students with dyslexia.

1. **Exemptions will now be based on identified needs and not on a particular diagnosis (e.g. Dyslexia). 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, and it is welcomed. 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. **Exemptions will only be available from third class. Previously there was no age/class cut off, and students with dyslexia typically applied from first class upwards.** This proposal means that students with significant dyslexia will be left struggling with learning both English and Irish for far too long. Such a randomly chosen cut-off point is not reasonable and flies in the face of the accepted benefits of early identification and intervention. We would recommend that a student should be able to get an exemption when need has been clearly established, without undue delay.
3. **Only one literacy attainment score at or below the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile will be required in either Word Reading or Reading Comprehension. Previously a Word Reading Score, and another literacy score at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile or below was required.** Any cut-off on a discrete test (one test, of one skill, on one day) is inherently flawed and will unfairly penalise some people. It is at odds with the process outlined in the rest of the evidence gathering process, which is better as it is done over time and based on a number of different measures of literacy. There continues to be no clear rationale for the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile cut-off and the significant margins of error of these scores render this approach unfair and unscientific.

If once-off scores do have to be used, then the tests allowed should be extended to include measures of Nonword Reading, Reading Speed and Spelling, reflecting the fact that students with dyslexia often struggle considerably in these areas. Assessment of only Word Reading and Reading Comprehension is far too narrow an approach, and does not reflect the full range of areas where dyslexia may impact, and would deny access to an exemptions to many children who need one.

4. **An appeals process is outlined, where any disagreement can be referred to the Board of Management of the school.** There is also a need for an independent appeals mechanism to be established by the DES to address cases which are not resolved at this local level. The only other mechanism available for appeal would be the Ombudsman for Children or legal avenues. There is also a need for the DES or an independent body to give guidance for complex cases (as identified by principals in case study schools in the associated research).

### What You Can Do...

We want you to respond to this consultation, as it is very important that the voice of people directly affected by this policy are heard and taken account of. While we do have concerns about how user-friendly the survey ([https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Irish\\_Exemption](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Irish_Exemption)) is, we nonetheless advise you to:

- Fill out Section 1 of the survey as best you can
- Complete Section 2 where there is space for more detailed comments. Feel free to use the above points as well as your own personal ideas, experiences and insights.
- In addition, you may wish to email your comments direct to the Minister for Education and Skills at [minister@education.gov.ie](mailto:minister@education.gov.ie).
- You might also chose to share your views with your own local representatives (see [www.whoismytd.com](http://www.whoismytd.com)).

The closing date for the consultation is **Friday 11<sup>th</sup> January 2019**.