Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission
Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.N37TP65

S07/21

IMPORTANT INFORMATION IN RELATION TO THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS 2021

TO THE BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT/AUTHORITIES OF POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND OTHER ENTITIES RECOGNISED BY THE SEC TO HOLD THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

The purpose of this circular is to provide an update in relation to the arrangements for the delivery of the Leaving Certificate examinations following the announcement by the Government on Wednesday 17th February. Details of this announcement have been set out in the Department of Education's *Letter to Schools* dated 24 February and the recently published *Guide to State Examinations and Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 available* here The Government announcement included that the Junior Cycle examinations will not run in 2021. Schools will be provided with guidance by the Department of Education on continuing to engage Junior Cycle students in online learning and assessment during the period of school closure and through in-person learning upon return to school.

The purpose of this circular is to provide further information under the following headings for the 2021 Leaving Certificate examinations;

1. Coursework Completion dates (Circular S64/20 and SEC email of 14 January relates)
2. Orals, Practicals and Music Practical Performance Test
3. Timetables 2021
4. Candidate Entries and Candidate Self Service Portal
5. Establishment of Examination Centres
6. Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations
7. Recruitment of Contract Staff

In common with all organisations, the SEC has had to make many changes to its normal work practices in order to be able to work safely in compliance with public health requirements. For the 2021 examinations, and in an effort to reduce the physical handling of materials, other than when absolutely necessary, the SEC will be making far greater use of digital communication with schools and students. While there will be some essential documentation that will issue to schools by post, schools can expect to receive most information by email and to arrange for the local printing of any linked or accompanying documents. The SEC very much appreciates the assistance of schools in this regard.

Note on Support for Schools
The SEC provides financial support for schools in the administration of the annual Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations. Under the current scheme, 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. The Examination Aide days are to be used for both the written examinations and the related assessment components. In the context of the 2021 examinations and the system of accredited grades, and the very significant level of change required of schools, the SEC and the Department of Education are reviewing the supports necessary to support school management in the organisation and administration of both processes this year. There will be engagement on this with the management representatives in the coming days. In the meantime, schools may use the supports available within the existing scheme to commence the planning of the orals and to support the review of accommodation referred to at section 5 below.

Note on Leaving Certificate Applied
The arrangements for the optimum timing of all LCA assessments to take account of the period of school closure is currently under review by the SEC and will be included in an LCA Guide which is being finalised and will be issued to schools in the coming days.

The passwords for the capture of modules and credits for Session 1 and Session 3 and the Practical Performance Assignment Briefs issued to LCA Coordinators this week.

1. Coursework Completion Dates

The following information updates and replaces information about extensions in previously issued individual subject circulars for the 2021 Examinations.

Prior to the Christmas break, the SEC published important information (Circular S64/20) available here in relation to exceptional arrangements for the completion and authentication of coursework for Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle candidates in 2021 owing to COVID 19. The purpose of the circular was to assist and support schools and candidates in relation to the completion of coursework by providing as much flexibility as possible for students and schools, while maintaining the integrity and fairness of the assessment process. The circular set out flexibility owing to Covid related absences of either individual candidates or of the class teacher impacting on full class groups. The SEC issued a further communication to schools on 14 January 2021, available here which set out certain scenarios in relation to dates for coursework completion having regard to an extended period of school closure.

The SEC committed to provide some additional time for the completion of Category 1 coursework; which is capable of being completed by candidates at home, subject to appropriate oversight.
In relation to Category 2 coursework, which requires attendance at school for completion, the commitment was to extend the completion deadline to take account of the period of the school closure.

The table below sets out the revised completion dates for Leaving Certificate practical coursework to take account of the period of school closure from 6 January to 26 February 2021 inclusive. Details are also provided of the arrangements for the submission* and/or marking of this work.

Coursework Leaving Certificate 2021	Category	Completion Date	Submission/Marking arrangements
Home Economics	1	Completed	Already submitted and marked.
LCVP Portfolio of Coursework	1	March 12	To facilitate timely marking of this subject, return by post to SEC immediately following the completion date of March 12
Economics#	1	March 15	Retained in school. Printed and returned to SEC together with the written script in June.
Design and Communication Graphics	2	March 19	Return by post to the SEC during week ending 26 March.
Physical Education – Physical Activity Project	2	March 22	Projects returned to SEC via School Portal during week beginning April 12.
History	1	April 23	Retained in school. Returned to SEC together with the written script in June
Geography	1	April 23	Retained in school. Returned to SEC together with the written script in June
Religious Education	1	April 23	Retained in school. Returned to SEC together with the written script in June
Agricultural Science#	1	April 23	Retained in school. Printed and returned to SEC together with the written script in June
Engineering (project)	2	May 7	Retained in schools for marking
Politics and Society#	1	May 7	Retained in school. Printed and returned to SEC together with the written script in June
Art	2	May 20	Retained in schools for marking
Technology	2	May 27	Retained in schools for marking
Computer Science	2	May 27	Projects returned to SEC via the School Portal immediately following the completion date of May 27
Construction Studies (project)	2	May 28	Retained in schools for marking
Home Economics (Textile Studies Elective)	2	May 28	Retained in schools for marking

*The SEC will issue further guidance to schools on the requirements for each subject prior to the closing date(s) for submission.

Practical coursework in these subjects must be returned in hard copy together with the written script and not through the School Portal as previously notified.

Covid Related Interruptions to Learning (Not related to closure of Schools Buildings).

The arrangements in Circular S64/20 due to interruptions to learning related to COVID 19 still stand and will remain in place now that schools have reopened. School authorities continue to have

flexibility in this regard. There is no change to the exceptional provision made for exemptions from coursework for students under the Adapted Education Provision and applications can be made to the SEC for these noting that this application date is being extended to 26 March 2021.

Queries related to practical coursework should be directed by email to practicals@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2867.

2. Orals, Practical Skills Tests and Music

Oral Examinations

Oral examinations in Gaeilge and the Modern Foreign Languages will be arranged by schools during the Easter period and shortly after, outside of tuition time and subject to public health advice. Tests should be undertaken in school by a teacher of the school wherever possible. There will also be flexibility to source a teacher locally, should the need arise. The tests will be conducted by the locally appointed teacher, recorded and returned to the SEC for marking.

Following the closure of the portal and the validation of the data, the SEC will provide schools with details of candidates who indicate that they will be sitting the examinations in subjects with oral components. However, the timing of the availability of this data is such that schools should engage with their own students about their intentions in order to plan for the oral tests.

To facilitate the orderly conduct of the marking, the tests must be held between 26 March and 15 April. Noting that the SEC will not be involved in the delivery of the tests in schools, or in the identification of teachers for this work, guidance on the conduct of these tests will be provided by the SEC no later than 15 March.

Practical Performance Test in Music

The Practical Performance Test in Music is planned to take place in the second week of the Easter holiday. The tests will be conducted by examiners appointed by the SEC. Running the tests outside of the school term means that there will be fewer personnel and students in the school and more space will be available for ensuring physical distancing between the candidate and the examiner. Further details on the arrangements for the tests will be provided as soon as possible, based on the public health advice.

Components Not Proceeding on Public Health Grounds.

It will not be possible to proceed with the day-practical examinations in Construction Studies and Engineering given public health considerations. Candidates who sit the examinations in these subjects will be resulted on the written and practical coursework components with the marks for the practical skills tests reallocated to the practical coursework.

It will not be possible to proceed with the Performance Assessment in Physical Education, given public health considerations. Candidates who sit the examinations in this subject will be resulted on the written and physical activity project components with the marks for the performance assessment reallocated to the physical activity project.

3. Timetables 2021

The timetables for the written Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied examinations in June have been published and are available here. Schools are asked to arrange for local printing and

display of the timetables in schools. The SEC will provide printed timetables to examination superintendents for display in examination centres in due course.

The following tests will take place in May with the exact date yet to be announced;
LCVP Links Modules written examination; LC Computer Science final examination and LCA Information Technology (Specialism) examination.

4. Candidate Entries 2021 and Candidate Self Service Portal

For 2021, the SEC has, as part of its digital strategy, introduced a facility to allow school-based Leaving Certificate candidates to confirm their subject and level entry details replacing the E7 individual candidate entry forms. The Candidate Self Service Portal (CSSP) will open for this purpose on Wednesday 10 March at 12 noon and will remain open until 6 pm on Tuesday 16 March. For candidates attending recognised schools, the portal will be pre-populated with the data entered by schools through the PPOD October returns process. This means that only those subjects which candidates have been studying in schools will be displayed on the portal. In line with the normal E7 process, candidates will be able to add any subjects that they are studying outside of school or withdraw from subjects. Candidates will also be able to indicate whether they want to take the examinations, or to receive SEC Accredited Grades, or both.

External candidates, those who entered for the examinations directly with the SEC prior to the closing date of 12 February 2021, will be asked to confirm their levels, based on the information already provided by them to the SEC, through the Candidate Portal and to make their selection of examinations, Accredited Grades or both on a subject-by-subject basis.

Further details concerning arrangements for students attending recognised schools but studying subjects out of school and students studying entirely outside of schools will be available shortly. It should be noted that in both cases, for reasons of equity and fairness these students will need to be able to provide substantial evidence of their learning to be eligible for consideration for Accredited Grades.

<u>Selection of Levels</u>
It is extremely important at this stage that schools engage with candidates regarding their selection of their level in each subject. We know from the data that we have received from the October returns process that the numbers of candidates at Higher Level in most subjects exceeds what we would typically expect to see at this time. In Mathematics and Irish, the numbers entered for Foundation Level are significantly lower than would be expected. Candidates should be advised by their teachers to select the level at which they are currently studying each subject. SEC will use this information for planning purposes. We will also provide this information to schools through a turnaround document for review.

Candidates will have a further opportunity at the end of April/early May to confirm their levels in each subject. At that time, candidates can also withdraw their intention to take the written examination but they will not be able to indicate their intention to sit examinations after the 16 March 2021.

The level selected by candidates at the end of April/early May will be an absolutely final decision when it comes to the level – Higher, Ordinary or Foundation – in which they will receive their accredited grade in each subject. As teachers will then be in the estimation process, candidates (or schools) will not be permitted to change levels for the purpose of the accredited grades process after that time.

Candidates opting to sit the examinations will be permitted to change their levels in respect of the written examinations on the day of the examination, as they are in a normal year.

Candidate Numbers and Matrix

Before using the Candidate Portal for the first time, candidates will be asked to create their own account and will need their examination number for this process. A matrix of Leaving Certificate candidate entries, showing the subject and level selections for each candidate, has issued to schools this week together with a set of self-adhesive labels, showing each **Candidate's Name, Date of Birth and Examination Number.** When you receive this mailing, you are asked to;

- Distribute the labels to each candidate
- Use the level selection on the matrix to consider whether the candidate is entered at the correct level and engage with candidates as required
- Check whether any candidate in the school in not on the matrix or whether any candidate appears on the matrix who has left the school. Such changes must be notified by email to entries@examinations.ie **no later than Monday 8 March 2021.**

To access the portal candidates will need their Personal Identification Number as part of the verification process. For most candidates this will be the first four digits of their PPSN. As not all candidates have a PPSN recorded, we will be contacting some schools by email later this week in relation to any candidates for whom we do not have a PPSN. Schools will be asked to provide the PPSN details so that we can arrange for the candidates to have access to the portal when it opens.

Queries related to Entries should be directed to entries@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2702.

5. Establishment of Examination Centres

With Covid 19 regulations in force, revised arrangements for Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied (Year 2) examination centres are required in schools in order that candidates can take their examinations safely. The normal Leaving Certificate centre assignment arrangements are no longer appropriate and we are now asking schools to review their accommodation in line with the following rubrics and supply us with details of the rooms that will be used as examination centres and the number of candidates that can be assigned to each room. We will then use this information in order to assign candidates to these centres. The SEC will be providing more details to schools in due course about the safe conduct of the examinations in compliance with the public health requirements. For now, we critically require the centre information to be provided **no later than Friday 12 March 2021.**

We are asking schools to assess their physical space in order to complete the Centre Accommodation Form (Form Cen 1) which is provided at the Appendix and which can also be downloaded here Please complete the form by ensuring that you assign the centres based on the total cohort of Leaving Certificate candidates entered for the examinations (i.e. the entire Leaving Certificate class in your school). The SEC will review the final assignments based on confirmation of examination attendance provided through the candidate portal but for now please provide details of the maximum number of candidates that could attend.

In considering the suitability of the accommodation to be used as examination centres and the number of candidates that can be assigned to each centre, you must have regard to the following;

1. Rooms may only be used as centres provided that they can and will be adequately ventilated.
2. Schools will need to undertake their own risk assessments in relation to rooms without windows which can open to assess the suitability of the ventilation arrangements. This includes internal rooms; including those with skylights.
3. In assessing the suitability of rooms and in the context of ensuring that all rooms are appropriately ventilated, schools will have to have regard to the impact of likely environmental noise (e.g. grass-cutting, traffic and building noise, etc.) at the time that the examinations are being held.
4. As centres will not be consolidated as in other years, the room must be available for the duration of the examinations in the school.
5. Schools are asked to consider, as far as practicable, maintaining each centre as a pod for the duration of the examinations in each centre; that is, the candidates in the centre from the first day of the examinations stay in that group until the last day and avoid interaction with other groups.
6. Where it is not practicable for pod cohesion to be maintained for the duration of examinations in a centre, (e.g. space constraints; availability of personnel; mixed levels in a centre (which will impact on the aural test for candidates taking Foundation Level Irish) sound quality for the aural tests, etc.) schools will be asked to develop controlled arrangements to provide for these situations similar to the arrangements which apply in schools when students have to move to rooms with specialised facilities or equipment.
7. 2m physical distance; for each candidate there must be clearance of at least 2m between them and the next candidate (front, back, and side to side) and from the superintendent's station. In a standard 49m^2 classroom, the maximum density is 10 candidates plus the superintendent.
8. Multiple centres may be located in school gyms, and other large areas (e.g. gyms, libraries, central areas, etc.) subject to the distancing rule at 2 above and an overall centre density rule of no more than 50% of the numbers possible in that room if applying 2m distance per candidate. For example, in a gym of 594m^2 a maximum of 72 candidates and superintendents in no more than three centres of 23 candidates and one superintendent in each centre. The centres must be separated from each other by a valley of at least 4 metres.
9. Please consider your overall accommodation requirements for both main and special examination centres before nominating the rooms you will use as main centres. Note; all candidates must be assigned to a main examination centre.

These arrangements are likely to mean using a lot more of the school footprint to host the written examinations in June in order to ensure that students have sufficient space. Every effort should be made to use the accommodation in the school by using rooms as efficiently and as safely as possible. The use of accommodation outside of the school should be avoided as this gives rise to security concerns due to the movement of examination papers. It can also have consequences for the orderly and timely delivery of the examinations in the school. The SEC will not provide funding for the hire of halls or additional space.

<u>In completing the CEN 1 form please:</u>

1. Complete the school name and roll number on each form used.

2. State the maximum capacity of each room by reference to the rubrics set out above in points 7 and 8.
3. Include the name/number of the room – we do not require the measurements but you are asked to confirm that each room to be used as a centre meets the safe distance requirements and can accommodate the number of candidates assigned to it.
4. Indicate whether the room will be used as a Leaving Certificate or a Leaving Certificate Applied (Year 2) centre opposite the accommodation details.
5. Furnish details of any VTOS candidates due to take examinations in your school
6. Indicate any requirements for all-Irish centres and provide list of candidate numbers for these centres. (We need this to appoint Irish speaking superintendents.)

Please complete as many forms as are required to detail the accommodation requirements for the total Leaving Certificate cohort in the school. Completed and signed forms should be scanned and returned by email to centres@examinations.ie **on or before 12 March 2021**. Please include the school roll number in the subject line and the School Name, Roll number and the Contact Person for accommodation issues in the body of the email.

All schools are required to complete and return the centre details on or before the 12 March. Candidates will be assigned to centres on the basis of the information provided. Any delays in returning this form or the provision of inaccurate information can lead to accommodation problems for the Leaving Certificate candidates in your school. We appreciate that this is a tight timeframe but this is necessary in order to conduct the process of assigning candidates to centres to ensure the orderly conduct of the examinations.

Any queries on examination accommodation arrangements can be directed to centres@examinations.ie or by phone to 090-644 2793 or 644 2788.

Custody of the Examination Paper Boxes

The SEC is aware that a small number of schools have relied on the local Garda Station to ensure the safe custody of the examination paper boxes for the period of the examinations. Due to Covid these arrangements may not be possible this year. We will contact these schools in due course to review alternative arrangements.

6. RACE Scheme

The Leaving Certificate late RACE application form (RA3) for the 2021 examinations is available on our website www.examinations.ie. The closing date for the late application process is 9 April 2021. The late application process requires the school to explain why a late application is being made.

School authorities should take particular care to ensure that requests for special examination centres are not made on foot of *concerns* about Covid. The objective of the SEC and school authorities is to ensure that all candidates are able to take their examinations safely. We can achieve this by establishing examination centres in line with the public health guidance and by taking all necessary precautions.

The SEC continues to process applications that were made by the original pre-December closing date. Most decisions have now issued but some have been returned to schools for completion and/or further information. Any forms returned to schools must be returned to the SEC at the

earliest opportunity and in any event before 9 April 2021. Any forms received after this date will be rejected.

After the late application closing date, the only applications that will be accepted are those relating to true emergencies, i.e. injuries or similar emergencies arising close to or during the period of the written examinations (e.g. broken bone or medical emergency).

Candidates unable to take their examinations

Some students may be at very high-risk from COVID-19; some students may be required to self-isolate and/or restrict their movements for all or part of the period of the examinations; or they may have a bereavement or other medically certified illness which prevents them from sitting the examinations. Unlike in 2019, when there was an alternative sitting of the examinations for candidates who were bereaved, there will be one sitting of the 2021 Leaving Certificate. Any candidate unable to take their examinations as scheduled, for any of these reasons, will receive Accredited Grades (whether or not they have opted for Accredited Grades).

Junior Cycle RACE Applications

The Government has announced that the Junior Cycle examinations will not be run in 2021.

The original closing date for Junior Cycle RACE applications is being extended until 9 April. Schools should continue to submit Junior Cycle applications noting that the SEC will not be issuing decisions on these applications within the current school year. The SEC will process all Junior Cycle RACE applications submitted before 9 April 2021 at a later date. Decisions on Junior Cycle applications, when issued, will advise of the arrangements that can be put in place for Leaving Certificate noting that this will be subject to a reactivation application in due course.

School authorities may, based on the application made to the SEC, choose to provide the accommodations sought to the candidate in any school-based assessment noting that this does not confer any expectation that the same accommodations will be sanctioned by the SEC. However, providing accommodations which are based on a candidate's normal way of working in the classroom should avoid any issues in this regard.

Bilingual Dictionaries

The arrangements for the provision of Bilingual Dictionaries is set out in Circular S02/21. This circular and application form D21 is available here

Queries related to the RACE Scheme (as detailed above) should be directed to race@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2781.

7. Recruitment of Examiners and Superintendents

For the orderly, efficient, and timely conduct of the marking of the certificate examinations, the SEC will be absolutely reliant on teachers applying for contract positions with the SEC this year.

Examiners

During week commencing 1 March 2021, the State Examinations Commission will be rolling out the recruitment of examiners to mark;

- Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied written examinations
- Leaving Certificate Oral test recordings

- Leaving Certificate practical coursework

and to conduct the practical performance test in Leaving Certificate Music

The SEC will be offering examiner appointments to those who were appointed for 2020 and to those who have satisfactorily undertaken the role most recently. New applications will also be invited.

The most essential requirement for examiners is subject competence and personnel appointed to mark the state examinations must be appropriately qualified. Examiners will be selected on the basis of their academic qualifications, their teaching experience and their examination experience. They are primarily recruited from a pool of experienced serving and retired teachers. The main criterion for suitability is the capacity to mark examinations work with maximum accuracy and efficiency. Examiners receive detailed training and instruction in order to fulfil their role and a support network is available throughout the marking process.

Superintending

In a change to the normal arrangements which apply, the SEC will, for 2021, be contacting all applicants for superintending positions for the 2020 examinations. For this year, the SEC will be asking the 2020 applicants whether they wish to have their application carried forward for consideration for the 2021 examinations. While priority in appointment will be given to those who applied in 2020 there may be an opportunity for new superintendent applications to be made to the SEC. All 2020 applicants will receive an initial email this week.

Details of recruitment activities for the 2021 Leaving Certificate will be notified to schools and updated in the Recruitment Section of the SEC's website.

We greatly appreciate the co-operation and assistance of school authorities in ensuring appropriate actions are taken on foot of this circular and that the information is brought to the attention of school management, teachers, students and parents at the earliest opportunity.

1. Queries related to practical coursework should be directed by email to practicals@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2867.
2. Queries related to Entries should be directed to entries@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2702.
3. Completed and signed forms Cen1 Accommodation form should be scanned and returned by email to centres@examinations.ie Any queries on examination accommodation arrangements can be directed to centres@examinations.ie or by phone to 090-644 2793 or 644 2788.
4. Queries related to the RACE Scheme should be directed to race@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2781.

Contact details for other areas of the SEC are available in the Contacts Section on www.examinations.ie.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Andrea Feeney
Chief Executive Officer
March 2021

Appendix

CEN 1

School Name: _____

Roll Number: _____

Please refer to the guidelines in Section 5 of Circular S07/21 before completing this form.

Number of Candidates

Leaving Cert._____ LCA YR2 _____

Total of the above_____(This should be the total cohort of candidates entered for the Leaving Certificate Examinations for 2021).

Number of candidates assigned to special centres _____

Note; You must consider candidates assigned to special centres in the main centre(s) as well.

Centre Location Room/Hall Name or Number	LC Please Tick	LCA YR2 Please Tick	Maximum Capacity

Please complete and return this form and return to centres@examinations.ie before 12th March 2021.

Signature: Date:

Role within the school: Contact Number:

Tel: +353 90 6442766 Fax: +353 90 6442794 Email: centres@examinations.ie