

From the SEC (State Exam Commission) 15-1-21

Dear Principal,

Please see for your attention some important information from the SEC in light of the recently announced period of school closure until 31 January 2021. This situation will be kept under review in light of the Covid-19 situation.

1. Coursework

You will be aware that prior to the Christmas break, the SEC published important information (Circular S64/20) 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 in the arrangements for completion and authentication of coursework owing to Covid related absences of either individual candidates or of the class teacher impacting on full class groups. The arrangements in the circular due to interruptions to learning related to COVID, up to Christmas, still stand and will remain in place once schools reopen. 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 February.

In light of the recent school closure the following should be noted by reference to Circular S64/20:

In relation to Category 1 coursework, which can be completed by candidates at home, subject to appropriate oversight, it is in schools' and candidates' best interests to seek to make progress with the completion of this work over the period of the school closure. While the SEC will allow some additional time for the completion of this work generally by candidates, which will be reflected in the formal completion dates, the SEC believes that it should not be necessary to extend the completion dates to fully take account of the closure period, and indeed it would not be in candidates' best interests, in terms of managing their time for completing the course, to seek to push out these dates many of which do not arise until late March/April.

The coursework completion dates for all Category 2 coursework, which requires attendance at school for completion, will be extended to take account of the period of the school closure. Details of the extended completion dates in individual subjects will issue from the SEC in due course but schools and candidates should be reassured that this additional time will be provided.

In particular, students due to complete their Design and Communication Graphics coursework by the 15th January should be notified that this date will be extended to take account of the time period between the school closure and the completion date; that is, all students will have an additional 8 days to complete their DCG coursework from the date on which schools reopen.

The SEC had already advised schools that the submission date for Physical Education – Physical Activity Project and the Leaving Certificate Economics coursework, both of which had completion dates in late December 2020, would be extended to mid-January to allow time for the finalisation of the digital system (SEC Schools Portal) to allow schools to upload this digital coursework to the SEC. The Schools Portal will be ready to accept this coursework from the 8 - 12 February inclusive.

As noted in circular 64/20, schools will continue to have flexibility in relation to coursework completion, including by reference to any extended dates, based on local circumstances.

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

2. RACE Applications

The closing date for the submission of Junior Cycle RACE applications is 22 January. To enable school authorities to complete the application process including any necessary testing with students, this date is being extended to Friday 26 February. Queries related to RACE Applications should be directed to race@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2781.

3. Leaving Certificate Applied February Tasks.

The SEC had provided schools with a provisional start date for the assessment of the LCA Tasks of Monday 1 February. The arrangements for the optimum timing of these assessments to take account of the period of school closure is currently under review by the SEC. Further information will be provided to schools in due course. Meanwhile, the SEC will be issuing schools with the turnaround documents for completion to facilitate arrangements for the assessment of the tasks in due course. Teachers should continue to support their students in the completion of these tasks while engaging in remote learning. Queries related to LCA should be directed to lca@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2725.

4. Entries 2021

Following the collection of data from schools via the Department of Education through the October returns process, the SEC would, under normal arrangements, provide schools at this time of year with individual Leaving Certificate entry forms (E7 forms) for completion by students. As part of its digital strategy, for the 2021 examinations, the SEC will be asking candidates to confirm their own entry data online through the Candidate Self Service Portal. It is intended that the portal will open for this purpose in mid-February. Candidates will be asked to create their own account and will need their examination number in this process. The SEC will shortly be issuing schools with a matrix of Leaving Certificate candidate entries displaying the 2021 examination numbers and will be seeking the assistance of schools in providing these number to candidates. It is intended that the examination number matrix will be in schools next week. Schools will be asked to confirm the entry data submitted by candidates through a turnaround process in due course. The Junior Cycle entries process will operate as normal through the E8 entry form process and these forms will issue in February. Queries related to Entries should be directed to entries@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 644 2702.

5. Planning for examinations

Planning for the 2021 examinations is underway by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and the Department of Education with this work being assisted by an advisory group of key stakeholders including representatives of students, parents, teachers, school leadership and management bodies, the SEC, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the Higher Education Authority and the Department of Education, including the National Educational Psychological Service. The advisory group has been considering the possible arrangements for completion of the various components of the 2021 examinations in the context of the challenges presented by Covid-19. The advisory group will consider all of the various issues arising in relation to the holding of the 2021 examinations, including public health considerations and appropriate contingency measures. As this work is continuing, the SEC is not yet in a position to issue the detailed timetables and schedules of key dates for the forthcoming examinations.

Further information on all of these matters will issue in due course.

State Examinations Commission
January 2021