

Leaving Certificate 2022 – Access to Deferred Examinations due to Public Health Advice - Covid-19

Addendum to SEC Circular 34/22 - Leaving Certificate: Extension of the RACE Scheme to provide Deferred Examinations.

1) Background

Under an extension to the scheme of reasonable accommodations at the certificate examinations (RACE Scheme), deferred Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied examinations are being made available to candidates who experience a serious accident, injury, illness, or close family bereavement and, as a result, are unable to take their examinations in the main sitting.

This document, which provides details of the arrangements which are being made for Leaving Certificate candidates with symptoms of Covid-19, should be read in conjunction with **SEC Circular S34/22, Leaving Certificate: Extension of the RACE Scheme to provide Deferred Examinations**, as this note deals primarily with an additional and temporary extension of the scheme in 2022 to include absences necessitated by Covid-19. The circular includes principles and requirements for providing deferred examinations along with practical details of the arrangements for the deferred examinations including how school authorities can make an application for a candidate to access the deferred examinations.

The nature of the serious medical conditions which will allow candidates to access the deferred examinations have been informed by research into international best practice in other jurisdictions with similar examinations systems to Ireland.

To maintain robust examinations and certification procedures and standards, the threshold for access to the deferred Leaving Certificate examinations has been set at an appropriate level and will provide for candidates who experience a close family bereavement at the time of the examinations or for those who have a serious accident, injury or illness issue which renders them unable to take their examinations in the main sitting.

The threshold for evidence has also been set at an appropriate level and evidence of the candidate's condition will be required from a medical consultant or from a hospital. Candidates will be allowed to defer some or all of their examinations depending on the timing, nature and severity of their condition. The medical evidence will have to support both evidence of the condition and the degree to which it impacts on their ability to attend for their examinations.

2) Other Arrangements to Support Candidates Taking Examinations as Scheduled

All candidates are required to take their examinations as scheduled unless they are eligible for the deferred examinations in accordance with the procedures set out here or are eligible due to bereavement or serious accident, injury or illness as provided for in **SEC Circular 34/22**.

The longstanding arrangements provided under the RACE scheme to support candidates in taking their examinations as scheduled will continue to be available to candidates experiencing less serious illness

and medical conditions at the time of the examinations who will be ineligible for access to the deferred examinations.

These include arranging for examination sittings in atypical venues such as in hospitals or at another location or another school; granting of breaks or rest periods having regard to the physical, medical or emotional condition of the candidate; access to food, drink and medicine; amendments to the published timetable provided the examinations is taken on the same date.

3) Covid-19 and the 2022 Leaving Certificate

The overall nature of this extension to the RACE scheme aims to provide access to deferred examinations only in the most serious cases. In addition to the criteria for eligibility set out in **SEC Circular S34/2022**, there is a temporary need for the 2022 Leaving Certificate, in line with public health policy, to ensure that candidates with Covid-19 or with symptoms of Covid-19, also have access to a deferred sitting of the examinations.

This Covid-19 related provision is entirely separate to the conditions of eligibility which apply on grounds of bereavement or serious accident, injury or illness and is grounded in prevailing public health advice.

4) Remaining at home from examinations due to COVID-19

The latest public health advice to the general public on symptoms of COVID-19 is available [here](#).

Leaving Certificate candidates who only have nasal symptoms, such as a runny nose or a sneeze, but otherwise feel well **should** attend for their examinations. This is in line with current HSE advice on attending school which has been in place since February 2022-
<https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/covid19/preventing-the-spread/child-returning-to-school-or-childcare/>.

If a candidate is absent for an examination(s) as they are experiencing symptoms of Covid-19, they will be allowed to access the examinations for which they are absent in the deferred sitting. They will be subject to a mandatory period of absence from the examinations. In implementing this absence period, the SEC is taking a risk-based approach to managing Covid-19 in the examinations which is broadly in line with public health advice, limiting the Covid-19 risks, and providing some certainty about the duration of absences for candidates, schools and centres.

The mandatory absence period starts on the first day on which symptoms occur (day zero) and will require the candidate to be absent from the examinations for the following 7-day period (including weekends); so, **8 days in total**. This means that a candidate will be unable to sit any examination paper they were due to take on the day the symptoms occurs and any that they were due to take in the following 7 days (i.e. 8 days in total).

Example A – A candidate reports to their school on Wednesday 8 June that they have symptoms of Covid-19. The candidate will be absent for all of their examinations from Wednesday 8 June until Wednesday 15 June inclusive. Provided they have no symptoms, they may return to complete their remaining examinations from Thursday 16 June onwards. Candidates will sit all examinations that they have missed in the deferred examinations series. In the example above, they will be sitting any

examinations for which they were absent between Thursday 30 June and Wednesday 6 July including Saturday 2 July.

Example B – A candidate reports to their school on the morning of Friday 10 June that they have symptoms of Covid-19. The candidate will be absent for all examinations for which they are scheduled on Friday 10 June and until Friday 17 June inclusive. Provided they have no symptoms, they may return to complete their remaining examinations from Monday 20 June onwards. The candidate will sit any examinations for which they were absent in the deferred examinations series.

If the candidate in the above example did not experience symptoms on 10 June until after they had completed their examinations on that day, their symptoms still developed on that date and this will be the first day on which the absence period will still start.

The full absence period will be strictly applied and candidates are required to not attend for their examinations until this period has elapsed and to additionally follow public health advice.

Candidates who continue to have symptoms after the end of this absence period will be subject to a further absence period of seven days. Candidates should continue to follow all public health advice. Candidates must contact the school to report the last day of their first absence period if they continue to have symptoms.

5) Covid-19 Related Absence Application Process

The application process is as set out in Section 9 **SEC Circular S34/22** and applies to both school attending candidates and external candidates sitting examinations in the school as set out in the governing circular S34/22.

Applications for support arrangements under the RACE Scheme are school - based and applications for access to the deferred examinations due to Covid-19 are no different. School authorities have a critical role in the application process in confirming their support for the application as made and safeguarding the integrity of the examinations.

The SEC will not accept applications directly from candidates or parents/guardians.¹

The first examinations of the main sitting are on Wednesday 8 June; the examinations scheduled on this date will, in the deferred sitting, take place on Thursday 30 June. There is a very short time period for the application, decision-making, and appeals processes for the deferred examinations to occur. For this reason, all deadlines will be strictly applied.

Schools must put in place arrangements for candidates (including external candidates) or parents/guardians to inform the school at the earliest opportunity if the candidate will be absent from an examination. In any event, this report must be made to the school authority no later than the first day on which the candidate is experiencing symptoms of Covid-19.

Candidates or their parent/guardian must immediately contact the school to report that the candidate is experiencing symptoms of Covid-19 and will be absent from examinations. The report to the school must include the date on which the candidate first experienced symptoms as this is the date from which the absence period, as set out in section 4 above, will be counted.

¹ Other than in the case of a small group of external candidates who are sitting their examinations at one of two Dublin venues and are not affiliated to any school.

On foot of such reports, school authorities should make an application for the candidate to access the deferred examinations to the SEC through the online application system selecting the Covid-19 ground.

This application must be made on or before the first date on which the candidate is absent from an examination.

Candidates whose absence from an examination session is;

- a) **not reported by the candidate, parent/guardian to the school on or before the date of the absence**
- OR**
- b) **not reported by the school authority to the SEC on or before the date of the absence**

will, irrespective of the reason, be deemed ineligible for access to the deferred examinations.

The application from the school to the SEC will require confirmation of the date on which symptoms were first reported to the school. The absence period, as set out at section 4 above, will be counted from that date.

The application process will require confirmation from the candidate, and their parent/guardian, of their understanding of the terms on which the application is made. A Declaration Form is provided for this purpose which must be uploaded by the school authority to the system. The school authority will have 4 working days to complete the application by providing the Declaration Form.

Under no circumstances will candidates will be readmitted to examinations in the main examinations sitting before the full absence period has concluded.

Applications for a further 7 day extension to the first absence period, for candidates who continue to experience symptoms of Covid-19, should be made by email through the RACE Section to deferredexaminations@examinations.ie no later than the date on which the candidate has been due to return to sit their remaining examinations.

6) Examinations Integrity

The SEC has an absolute duty to protect the integrity of the examinations. In all cases, the SEC must be satisfied as to the validity of the application and will reserve the right to seek independent proof of the absence.

The SEC reserves the right to consider and determine whether a Breach of Examinations Regulations has occurred if a candidate claims relief under this provision and is found to have made a false claim. A person aiding a candidate to claim a relief under this provision may be guilty of an offence under Section 52 of the Education Act 1998.

7) Limitations

In making an application to access the deferred examinations for any of the specified reasons, school authorities, as well as candidates and parents/guardians, should note the following limitations which apply;

There is **no further contingency for the deferred examinations series**. If a candidate is considered eligible for the deferred examinations and remains, or becomes, unwell at the time of the deferred examinations, or experiences a bereavement, or misses their examinations for any other reason

(including Covid-19), their next opportunity to sit the Leaving Certificate will be in June 2023. No alternative arrangements will be provided.

The **scheduling of Leaving Certificate examinations on the first five days** (Thursday 30 June to Tuesday 5 July inclusive including Saturday 2 July) of the deferred examinations **is fixed** as on the provisional timetable. The **remaining examinations are provisionally timetabled** on dates from Wednesday 6 July until Saturday 16 July including Saturday 9 and Saturday 16 July. In the case of Leaving Certificate Applied the first day of the timetable (Thursday 30 June) **is fixed** and the **remaining examinations are provisionally timetabled** on dates from Friday 01 July until Thursday 07 July including Saturday 02 July. Timetables will be finalised based on demand arising during the main examination.

Candidates must be available to take the deferred examinations over the period noting that the **provisional timetables are subject to change. Examinations will be held on all weekdays and all Saturdays** in the period of the deferred examinations.

The **deferred examinations will be held at a number of regional locations (typically one school per county)** and candidates should opt to sit any deferred examinations in the host school location closest to them. **Venues may be subject to consolidation** depending on the number of candidates ultimately sitting the deferred examinations. **Candidates must be aware that their selected host school is subject to change.**

Attendance at the deferred examinations is likely to involve travel to another location for the duration of each deferred examination they are due to sit. **Candidates taking the deferred examinations will be responsible for their own transportation and accommodation expenses and must be able to make their own arrangements for attending the deferred sitting.**

No alternative dates, locations or arrangements will be provided at the request of candidates.

Candidates will only be admitted to the deferred examinations on instruction from the SEC.

8) Enquiries

Enquiries on this addendum to **SEC Circular S34/22** can be made to Deferred Examinations Section by email to deferredexaminations@examinations.ie or by phone to 090 -644 2783.

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