

Information Note for Leaving Certificate Computer Science Candidates and Parents

Trialling of Leaving Certificate Computer Science Examination

Background

The first Leaving Certificate Computer Science examination is scheduled to take place in May 2020. The final examination component of Leaving Certificate Computer Science will be a combined practical and written examination. The practical element will be a computer-based test of your *Python* coding skills, while the paper-based part will test a wide range of what you have learned, and may also include some questions about *Python* and *Javascript*. The paper-based part will have two sections (A and B) and the computer-based part will have one section (C). The examination will comprise the following, in order:

- 1 hour 30 minutes paper-based element (Sections A and B)
- 1 hour computer-based element (Section C)

The paper-based element will take place in a standard examination centre, just like any other paper-based examination and following the regular procedures for such examinations. The computer-based element can take place in the same centre using portable electronic devices or alternatively in a computer room. Your teacher will tell you which of these two arrangements applies in your school.

A 30 minute break is scheduled between the two elements. If you are moving to another room, this allows time to get there and get set up for the start of the computer-based part. If you are staying in the same room, it allows time to power up and check the portable devices before the computer-based element begins.

In the computer-based element, you will be tested on your ability to write, compile, test, and debug program code in *Python*. The paper-based element will test a wide range of the 'learning outcomes' from the specification. (The 'specification' is the document that describes the course, and the 'learning outcomes' are the things that it says you should know and be able to do after completing the course.) Although your coding skills are mainly tested in the computer-based element, the paper-based element will include some questions related to programming in *Python* and *JavaScript*.

In October 2019, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) will be working with all of the schools offering Computer Science in order to trial the arrangements described above for the examination. The purpose of the trial is to familiarise schools with the proposed arrangements and to identify and resolve any issues that may arise with the examination.

What is Trialling?

In certain instances where a new subject specification or new examination procedures are being introduced, assessment materials are trialled in schools. In this case, the trialling process involves candidates in the 40 schools involved in Phase 1 of the introduction of Computer Science sitting the sample Leaving Certificate examination under examination conditions and having their work forwarded to us (the SEC) for review and analysis. This process serves many purposes and is an important part of how we can make sure that the real examination in May is as good as it can be and runs as smoothly as possible. It is all the more important when the examination involves a kind of assessment that is quite different from the ones that we have done before, as this one is.

Trialling allows us to test out various aspects of the sample examination papers, test the examination procedures and associated sets of instructions, test the criteria we hope to use next summer to assess your achievements, get your views and your teacher's views about the arrangements and the sample examination papers, provide information on the assessment to you, your teachers, and other interested parties, and facilitate the training of examiners in advance of the real examinations in the summer.

The trialling will help identify any problems that might arise with the examining process for the new subject and will help us to deal with these issues before you take the real examination.

When will the Trialling take place?

The trial of the assessment material will take place in all of the 40 Phase 1 Computer Science schools on Wednesday 23 October, 2019.

What if our class has not yet finished its study of the Computer Science Course?

We in the SEC are well aware that, given that we need to carry out the trial quite early in the school year, you will most likely not have completed the course by then. Schools have been asked to use their discretion in conducting the trial and can omit certain questions if you haven't covered the relevant material yet, and they might shorten the timing of the examination accordingly. Your teacher will give you details of this.

What happens after the Trialling, and will I get a result back?

After the trialling, your work will be sent back to us in the SEC. We will use it to see how well the examination has worked, to try out marking schemes and procedures that we believe are appropriate, and to train examiners. We will also analyse the feedback from the trial. We will use all of this information to refine the procedures for the actual exam in May 2020 and to help us to make the examination as faithful a test of your achievements as we can.

Because the focus of the trial is to test the examination itself and not to test your current level of achievement in Computer Science, we will not be issuing marks or grades or returning your marked work to the school. However, a digital copy of the work you do during the computer-based element will be retained in the school, and your teacher might decide that reviewing this with you would be helpful to you in your ongoing learning.

Finally,

It is important to stress that this is neither a test of candidates nor of teachers. It is a trialling of the papers themselves and the arrangements for the examination. The purpose is not to generate information about individual candidate achievements. Because you are not yet finished the course and this is the first time you have seen Computer Science examination

material from us, it would not be a fair test of your current achievements and so it should not be regarded as a “mock” examination.

Please note also that no matter how well or badly you answer the questions in this trial, it will have no effect on your final result for Computer Science. When we are marking and grading your work in the actual examination next summer, we will not in any way be using or looking back at any marks generated as part of the trialling process.

In addition to the trialling exercise itself, your opinions and those of your teacher are important to us. Because of this, your teacher will be asked to complete a questionnaire after the trialling exercise and they will seek your views before they do so. If you would prefer to give us your opinion directly, you can do so by emailing computersciencetrial@examinations.ie and including ‘student feedback’ in the subject heading.

We are grateful for your co-operation and that of your school in participating in this trial, which will help us to provide you with an examination of the highest quality next May.