



Quality Customer Service Action Plan 2014-2016



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

Foreword

We are pleased to publish the Quality Customer Service Action Plan for the State Examinations Commission.

The operation of the examinations and assessment system is a fundamental public service and the significance of the state examinations in the lives of candidates, and their families, cannot be underestimated. School authorities, examination candidates, parents and teachers all expect high standards in the administration and delivery of examinations and assessments.

One of the key elements of the modernisation programme for the public service is the achievement of an excellent service for the public through the implementation of the Quality Customer Service (QCS) initiative. The Commission's QCS programme has been developed in consultation with customers and in partnership with staff and reflects the 12 Principles of Quality Customer Service for the public service.

This is our third Action Plan, and taken together with our Customer Charter, forms the heart of our QCS programme. Our Customer Charter sets out the standards of service that customers can expect in their dealings with us. In this Action Plan we have articulated the steps we will take to achieve and exceed the stated standards and the measures that we will introduce in order to improve and enhance our services.

I would like to thank all our customers and staff who co-operated with the consultation process and whose views have shaped our Quality Customer Service Action Plan and Customer Charter.

Richard Langford

Chairman

Aidan Farrell

Chief Executive officer

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Introduction

This is the third Quality Customer Service Action Plan of the State Examinations Commission (SEC). It sets out the steps we will take over the next three years to meet our commitments under each of the Government's twelve Quality Customer Service (QCS) Principles. For comparative purposes we have retained a largely similar format in this report to that of previous years. It provides a clear and effective linkage to our Statement of Strategy 2014-2016, which lays out our high-level goals. The Action Plan also sets out the functions of our organisation and the services we provide to our customers. Planned progress under each of the QCS principles is accompanied by specific objectives and targets. Performance indicators are included so that achievement of the objectives and targets can be monitored and assessed during the term of the plan. Future annual reports will carry a report on the achievement of the plan.

The publication of this plan demonstrates our ongoing commitment to providing high standards of service to all our customers. It has been drawn up following consultation with our customers. We will continue to use the consultation process to gauge future customer needs. We will link our Action Plan to the staff Performance Management and Development System. This will help to make QCS a central focus at all levels of the organisation.

About Us

The State Examinations Commission (SEC) was established by statutory order in March 2003. It immediately took over from the Department of Education and Skills responsibility for operating the state certificate examinations. Our key business activity is assessing and certifying the second-level examinations of the State. In carrying out this role, we cooperate closely with a number of education partners, especially the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). The SEC is committed to providing, in cooperation with all the education partners, an examinations and assessment system that is efficient, fair and accessible, and to ensuring that the system is operated in an environment of openness, transparency and accountability.

The SEC is responsible for operating all aspects of the established Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and Junior Certificate Examinations, including all written, oral, aural, practical and project work. Around two million individual examination components are examined each year.

Our main functions are to:

- ✓ organise the holding of examinations
- ✓ ensure the preparation of examination papers and other examination materials
- ✓ determine procedures in the places where examinations are conducted, including the supervision of examinations
- ✓ make arrangements for the marking of work presented for examination

- ✓ issue the results of examinations
- ✓ determine procedures to enable the results of examinations to be reviewed and appealed, at the request of candidates
- ✓ charge and collect fees for examinations and apply such monies to the carrying out of our functions
- ✓ designate places where examinations may be held

The five-member commission oversees a permanent executive of 154 staff, led by a chief executive officer, at its headquarters in Athlone and in centres throughout the country.

Our Mission Statement

The mission of the State Examinations Commission is “to provide a high-quality state examinations and assessment system incorporating the highest standards of openness, fairness and accountability”.

Values and Goals of the SEC

During the period of this Action Plan, we will seek to adopt an agreed set of collective values. This will allow us to increase our effectiveness and give us a framework for all our activities. We are committed to embracing the following values:

- INTEGRITY:** encompassing the values of honesty, trustworthiness, impartiality, mutual respect, consistency, openness, fairness and transparency.
- EXCELLENCE:** striving for the best, continually seeking to improve and leading the way in the field in which we operate.
- PARTNERSHIP:** a way of working that involves consulting with both internal and external stakeholders, seeking honest feedback and acting cooperatively towards shared objectives.
- ACCOUNTABILITY:** our responsibility to our stakeholders to provide an excellent product, with the highest levels of service, which provides value for money to the community.
- ADAPTABILITY:** being able to respond efficiently and effectively to change brought about by internal and external forces, adopting a progressive approach to how we carry out our business functions and being open to new methods and suggestions for improvement.

We have also identified the following high-level organisational goals for the next three years:

1. To maintain and enhance the credibility of the Irish state examinations by providing a high-quality examinations and assessment system and continually focusing on **quality assurance and performance excellence**.
2. To underpin **equity and fairness** within the examinations system in order to enable all candidates to display their achievements.
3. To develop a **capable, adaptable and efficient organisation**.
4. To demonstrate **responsiveness and accountability**, with the highest standards of customer service to all our stakeholders.

Our Customers

We recognise that, while we deal with a diverse range of customers, the examination candidate lies at the heart of our activities and as such constitutes the primary reason for our existence.

Providing a high standard of customer service is an essential element in maintaining confidence in the state examinations system. We want to develop a culture that welcomes and facilitates customer feedback and a service that is tailored to the needs of both internal and external customers.

For this reason, we carried out a consultation of customers before undertaking this action plan. Our consultation took the form of a customer satisfaction survey of the service we provide to our schools. The views of our customers were quite positive. It is felt that the SEC delivered on its commitments in the Customer Charter. The State Examinations Commission came under the remit of the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in May 2014. This has also been reflected in the information that we provide in our Customer Charter. The charter contains specific time-bound targets in a variety of areas including telephone communications, email and written communications, provision of information, and equality and diversity. (The charter is included as Appendix 2 of this document)

Recognising that our staff are our internal customers, we consulted them before developing the Customer Charter and Action Plan. Our organisation is characterised by the ongoing loyalty, commitment and hard work of all its staff. It is important that we meet their needs with high standards of timeliness, courtesy and consultation. The quality of service that can be delivered by us is greatly determined by the extent to which we give our staff all necessary support.

We recognise several distinct groups of customers:

Candidates and their families

This group includes:

- ✓ Leaving Certificate candidates
- ✓ Junior Certificate candidates
- ✓ Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) candidates
- ✓ Candidates from Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and analogous schemes
- ✓ External candidates
- ✓ Trade and professional candidates
- ✓ Former candidates

These candidates represent our core customer base. We recognise that they have a disparate range of requirements. In addition to this core group, we have a wide range of customers who seek a service from us. We also recognise that parents have a role in the examination process.

Schools

Here we include all the staff that work in schools and are directly involved in organising the examinations at school level. Customers in this category include school principals, examination secretaries, examination aides, Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) coordinators, Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) and analogous scheme coordinators, organising superintendents and teachers.

Our Staff

We believe that our members of staff are entitled to receive the support necessary to deliver quality customer service. This includes providing a high-quality service to our examination superintendents, drafters, setters, translators and examiners who are employed on a seasonal basis each year and are central to the examination process.

Suppliers

Since our organisation could not run efficiently without the input of our suppliers, we recognise the need to provide them with a quality service.

Customer Service Improvements

Improved customer service is a constant goal for us. In recent years we have launched a number of initiatives aimed at improving our service. These include:

- ✓ Our online and telephone results service allows examination candidates access to their examination results from abroad. Candidates can apply online to appeal a result, while external candidates can apply through the website to enter for their examination.
- ✓ We have developed a new format for the provisional statement of examination results. Every Leaving Certificate candidate has the opportunity to see his/her marked script after the issue of results and before the deadline for appeals.
- ✓ Candidates whose first language is not English or Irish are allowed to use bilingual translation dictionaries in certain examinations.
- ✓ We have developed a SMS and email service to communicate with our schools and contract staff.
- ✓ We have redeveloped our website (www.examinations.ie) to include such matter as the archive of examination material which makes available the marking schemes, past examination papers, Chief Examiners reports and details of syllabus changes.
- ✓ We have developed a Customer Charter.

Consultation

To inform the development of our QCS Charter and Action Plan, we initiated an extensive programme of customer consultation in 2012. As already outlined, we used a variety of methods to capture the views of our customers. The feedback was invaluable in shaping our approach to quality customer service. It has also provided information that can be used by other sections of the organisation. We intend to continue consulting our customers, both to measure our progress and to investigate areas where we can improve.

Customer Feedback

We value the comments of our customers, whether positive or negative. We recognise that these comments are an essential element in our quality-service agenda. Written comments may be addressed to our Customer Services Manager (at the address printed below). We also have a customer feedback form on our website at www.examinations.ie.

Dealing with Customer Complaints

We aim to deliver a high standard of service to all our customers. However, if customers are unhappy with the quality of service received, we would ask that they bring this to our attention. All complaints will be dealt with promptly, fairly and impartially. Where an error has occurred, we will acknowledge and correct this as soon as possible. Our goal is to resolve complaints at the first point of contact. If this cannot be done, customers have the right to have the matter reconsidered by a local manager.

If it is not possible to resolve the complaint with the staff member or manager with whom a customer has been dealing, the complaint can be addressed to the Customer Services Officer:

Customer Services Manager,
State Examinations Commission,
Cornamaddy,
Athlone,
Co. Westmeath,
N37 TP65.

Telephone: 090 6442770

Email: customerservice.manager@examinations.ie

Customers have a right to make their complaint directly to the Office of the Ombudsman or if they are dissatisfied with the result or manner in which a complaint is handled by The State Examinations Commission, the matter can be raised with the Ombudsman. The contact details for the Ombudsman are:

Address 18 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin 2
Telephone 01 6395600
Email ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie

In accordance with the QCS principles, we distinguish clearly between

- ✓ complaints that relate to the quality of the service provided
- ✓ appeals that relate to dissatisfaction concerning a particular decision made by an officer of the SEC

We have a formal appeals system for examination results and decisions relating to reasonable accommodation.

Appeal Procedures

The nature of the examinations process means that we have two distinct formal appeal procedures: one is used to appeal an examination result, the other to appeal a decision concerning reasonable accommodation.

Appeal of a Leaving Certificate result

If a candidate is unhappy with a result in a particular subject, he or she may appeal the result. In such a case, the script is sent to an appeal examiner for re-marking. The appeal examiner is different from the one who originally marked the work.

If the candidate wishes to appeal further, he or she can appeal to the Independent Appeals Scrutineer who will check that all appeal processes were carried out properly. Independent appeals scrutineers

are independent of the SEC. A scrutineer has the power to request all documentation in relation to an appeal, to establish that procedures were properly carried out.

In order to make an application to an appeals scrutineer, a candidate may opt to view a re-marked script and, following such viewing, may make observations on any matter in the script as part of the application process.

The Secretariat to the Scrutineers, in preparing to submit the candidate's application for consideration by the scrutineers, will first seek clarification from the SEC on any matters raised by the candidate with the scrutineers in relation to the script. This will be done so that the scrutineers can fully consider the application. All appeals are considered in light of the published principles.

Finally, a candidate can raise with the Ombudsman any matter relating to the administration of the appeal process.

Appeal of a decision concerning reasonable accommodation

In cases where a school, parent or candidate is dissatisfied with any aspect of the SEC's decision concerning an application for a reasonable accommodation, they can appeal to an independent appeals forum. All members of the appeals group are drawn from outside the SEC.

The remit of the appeals group covers appeals against all elements of a decision taken by the SEC, including any proposed inclusion of an explanatory note on the certificate. All appeals are considered in light of the principles set out by the Expert Advisory Group.

Principles of Quality Customer Service

One of the fundamental themes in delivering better government is the achievement of excellence in service for customers. Our Customer Action Plan is an essential tool that outlines our response to specific objectives concerning delivery of services, as specified in the Principles of Quality Customer Service approved by the Government.

The Principles of Quality Customer Service require organisations to:

Quality service standards

- ✓ publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service that customers can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery

Equality/ diversity

- ✓ ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by equality legislation (on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community)
- ✓ identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services

Physical access

- ✓ provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards, and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs

Information

- ✓ provide information that is clear, timely and accurate; is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs
- ✓ ensure that the potential offered by information technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public-service websites follows the guidelines on web publication
- ✓ continue the drive to simplify rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures

Timeliness and courtesy

- ✓ deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer
- ✓ give contact names in all communications, to ensure ease of ongoing transactions

Complaints

- ✓ maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided

Appeals

- ✓ maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services

Consultation and evaluation

- ✓ provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services
- ✓ ensure effective evaluation of service delivery

Choice

- ✓ provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery, including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times
- ✓ use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery

Official languages equality

- ✓ provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually, and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages

Better coordination

- ✓ foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services

Internal customers

- ✓ ensure that staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to issues of service delivery

Implementing the Principles of Quality Customer Service

Over the lifespan of this Action Plan, we will implement the 12 principles of Quality Customer Service. This chapter outlines the actions we will take on each principle. We will take these actions to help improve customer service over the span of the plan.

Quality service standards

Principle: Publish a statement that outlines the nature and quality of service that customers can expect, and display it prominently at the point of service delivery

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will make our recently published Customer Charter widely available to our customers. In addition to posting it to schools we will display it on our website and in our offices.
- ✓ We will measure our performance against the standards outlined in this document and in our Customer Charter. We will report on this performance in our annual report.
- ✓ We will offer training to all our staff in the area of Quality Customer Service.
- ✓ We will communicate our Customer Action Plan and service-delivery standards to all our staff.

Performance indicators

- ✓ Our annual report carries a section outlining our performance against the standards set out in our Quality Customer Service documents.
- ✓ Our Customer Charter and Action Plan are displayed on our website and in our offices.
- ✓ Training in Quality Customer Service is provided for staff.

Equality/diversity

Principle: Ensure the rights to equal treatment established by equality legislation, and accommodate diversity, so as to contribute to equality for the groups covered by the equality legislation (on the grounds of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community)

Identify and work to eliminate barriers to access to services for people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and for those facing geographic barriers to services

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will remain committed to providing a service that complies fully with equality legislation.
- ✓ We will continue to provide a range of services to those with special needs, including:
- ✓ provision of reasonable accommodation for examination candidates
- ✓ provision of special examination centres
- ✓ We will seek, as far as possible, to make our information available in formats that meet the requirements of customers with special needs
- ✓ We will provide training for our customer-service staff to familiarise them with the latest equality and diversity legislation, and seek to ensure that the organisation has an ethos of equality, diversity and non-discrimination
- ✓ We will provide staff with the latest guidelines on harassment, sexual harassment and bullying, and on our policy concerning equality and diversity
- ✓ We will ensure that our recruitment complies with the Employment Equality Act 2004
- ✓ We will continue to support family-friendly working arrangements

Performance indicators:

- ✓ We provide relevant staff with adequate training on equality and diversity issues
- ✓ We issue staff with a reminder about the guidelines concerning bullying and harassment
- ✓ We issue staff with updated guidelines on family-friendly working arrangements
- ✓ We carry out all recruitment in line with the Equality Act
- ✓ We apply the Reasonable Accommodation Scheme

Physical access

Principle: Provide clean, accessible public offices that ensure privacy; comply with occupational and safety standards and, as part of this, facilitate access for people with disabilities and others with specific needs

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will continue to provide, and improve where necessary, access to our buildings for people with a disability
- ✓ We will maintain existing accommodation to a standard acceptable to those who use it
- ✓ We will maintain a high standard at our reception area for receiving our customers
- ✓ We will continuously monitor our health and safety statement

Performance indicators

- ✓ We identify any necessary improvements for access to our building in Athlone
- ✓ We carry out a review of health and safety procedures, including a risk assessment
- ✓ We keep the reception area clean and accessible

Information

Principle: Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely and accurate, is available at all points of contact, and meets the requirements of people with specific needs

Ensure that the potential offered by information technology is fully availed of and that the information available on public-service websites follows the guidelines on web publication

Continue the drive to simplify rules, regulations, forms, information leaflets and procedures

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will ensure the timely publication of all our publications.
- ✓ We will abide by our commitments in our Customer Charter concerning written communications.
- ✓ We will monitor our website to ensure that it continues to make available a wide range of material of relevance and interest to the public and that it meets legislative requirements.
- ✓ We will monitor our best-practice protocol for telephone-answering technique.
- ✓ We will supply up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information in a courteous manner and use simple, clear language so that it is easily understood.
- ✓ We will provide full contact details on all email and written correspondence.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We provide training and refresher training in telephone techniques for all front-line staff.
- ✓ We produce a telephone-protocol manual for the use of all staff.
- ✓ We keep our website up to date and take any necessary initiatives.
- ✓ We continue to review the website to seek to ensure it meets standards for people with disabilities.
- ✓ We provide contact details on all email and written correspondence.

Timeliness and courtesy

Principle: Deliver quality services with courtesy, sensitivity and the minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between provider and customer

Give contact names in all communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will build on a previous finding by our external customer research which showed that our staff are courteous and helpful.
- ✓ We will expect that the same courtesy is extended to our staff.
- ✓ We will answer telephone calls promptly, aiming to answer 90 per cent of calls within 30 seconds.
- ✓ We will show all customers courtesy at all times and meet the standards of timeliness set out in this Action Plan and in our Customer Charter. If we cannot meet a specified standard for timeliness, we will explain the background and reasons.
- ✓ We will promote QCS standards within the SEC and ensure that our staff continue to attach a high importance to timeliness and courtesy in all dealings with our customers.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We provide customer-service training to all staff.
- ✓ We observe the codes of practice for dealing with correspondence, telephone calls and personal callers to the commission.
- ✓ We measure call-answering levels on an ongoing basis and report the results in our annual report.

Complaints

Principle: Maintain a well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will publicise our complaints procedure as widely as possible.
- ✓ We will raise the awareness of our staff about the main causes of complaints.
- ✓ We will deal with complaints promptly, impartially and in confidence. Where an error has occurred, we will acknowledge and correct this as soon as possible.
- ✓ We will prepare management reports on the complaints received so that we can improve our service.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We have established a formal complaints procedure.
- ✓ We train staff in dealing with complaints.
- ✓ We compile management reports on complaints and summarise them in the annual report.

Appeals

Principle: Maintain a formalised, well-publicised, accessible, transparent and simple-to-use system of appeal/review for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions in relation to services.

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will provide and distribute a detailed appeals booklet to all schools and candidates.
- ✓ We will publish on our website details of our appeals system.
- ✓ We will report, in our annual report, on the incidence of appeals.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We publish our appeals booklets for each year and distribute them to schools and candidates.
- ✓ We post on our website details of our appeals process.
- ✓ We include in our annual report a report on appeals.

Consultation and evaluation

Principle: Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services

Ensure meaningful evaluation of service delivery

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will use our management committees, annual business-planning cycle, performance-management reviews, annual conference and other appropriate methods to promote feedback from staff about our services and how they might be improved.
- ✓ We will continue to provide an on-line feedback facility on our website.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We will act on feedback from our customers.
- ✓ We include in our annual report a report on the results of our survey.

Choice

Principle: Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery, including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times. Use available and emerging technologies to ensure maximum access and choice, and quality of delivery

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will seek, in designing and delivering our services, to give our customers as much choice as possible.
- ✓ We will further improve the quality of our website and broaden its content.
- ✓ We will increase our service-delivery options where feasible by using new technology to provide greater flexibility.
- ✓ We will make information available electronically through our website and by email.
- ✓ We will seek to increase the extent to which forms may be completed online.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We add new areas to our website.
- ✓ We publish our direct dial number.
- ✓ We give contact details on our website.
- ✓ We provide video and teleconferencing facilities.

Official languages equality

Principle: Provide quality services through Irish and/or bilingually and inform customers of their right to choose to be dealt with through one or other of the official languages

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will promote the improved delivery of our services through the Irish language by meeting our requirements under the Official Languages Act 2003. We will make every effort to accommodate customers who telephone or visit the SEC and who wish to conduct their business in Irish.
- ✓ We will answer in Irish correspondence received in Irish.
- ✓ We will encourage staff to avail of opportunities to use and improve their level of Irish, and will make specific training available.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We reply in Irish to correspondence received in Irish.
- ✓ We publish our information booklets in Irish as well as English.
- ✓ We publish our annual report in Irish as well as English.
- ✓ We make training in the Irish language available to all staff.

Better coordination

Principle: Foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of public services

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will cooperate with all developments with the new PPS number and Public Services card. We will promote the use of the PPS number and Public Services Card as a means of accessing public services.
- ✓ We will participate in the wide range of interdepartmental committees and networks that assist us in achieving our objectives.
- ✓ We will review our relationship with other departments through our business-planning process.
- ✓ We will pursue common business objectives with other departments, particularly those involving the innovative use of information technology.

Performance indicators

- ✓ We are represented on interdepartmental committees.
- ✓ Our business-planning procedures make reference to other departments.

Internal customers

Principle: Ensure staff are recognised as internal customers and that they are properly supported and consulted with regard to service-delivery issues

Over the course of this plan:

- ✓ We will continue to address through our partnership committees issues affecting the welfare and performance of staff.
- ✓ We will seek, through our management meetings and the annual business-planning cycle, contributions from staff on the changing needs of the organisation and its environment.
- ✓ We will continue to make available to staff the proceedings of our partnership committee, and other papers relating to human resources and issues concerning management of change.
- ✓ We will ensure that a comprehensive programme of training and development is provided for our staff.
- ✓ We will support a range of family-friendly working options for our staff.
- ✓ We will seek to improve communication within the commission. We will continue the process of staff consultation and start to publish a staff magazine.

Performance indicators

- ✓ Regular partnership meetings are held.
- ✓ A staff feedback system is put in place.
- ✓ Partnership meeting reports are made available to all staff.
- ✓ A staff magazine is published.
- ✓ An induction procedure is put in place for all new staff.

Appendix 1: Customer Charter



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

Customer Charter

The mission of the State Examinations Commission is “to provide a high-quality state examinations and assessment system incorporating the highest standards of openness, fairness and accountability”.

The commission has a wide range of customers, including examination candidates and their parents, school principals, teachers, school authorities, government departments and offices, representative bodies, and many other national and international organisations. We are committed to providing a quality service to all our customers in every aspect of our operation. This charter sets out the standards of service we aim to provide to our customers.

Our service commitments

Telephone service

- ✓ We will provide a telephone service through our main Athlone number, 090-6442700, from 9.15am to 5.30pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays. These hours will be extended to cover morning, evening and weekend times over the period of the written examinations in June.
- ✓ We will answer your call promptly. Our aim is to answer 90 per cent of calls within 30 seconds.
- ✓ We will identify ourselves and/or our area of work and will be courteous and helpful in our dealings with you.
- ✓ If we cannot answer your enquiry immediately, we will take your contact details and let you know when you can expect to hear from us.
- ✓ If we need to transfer your call to a colleague, we will explain why. We will give you that person’s name and number and ensure that your call is properly transferred.

Email correspondence

- ✓ We aim to answer 95 per cent of all correspondence within 10 working days.
- ✓ We will acknowledge correspondence, including emails, within 3 working days where an immediate comprehensive reply is not possible.
- ✓ If it is not possible to give a comprehensive reply within 10 working days, we will send you an interim reply, explaining why not, and indicating when you can expect a full response.
- ✓ In certain circumstances, for example on receipt of comments and observations on particular examinations, the commission may use its website to provide general information.
- ✓ We will include in all correspondence the relevant contact name, telephone number and email address.

Written correspondence

- ✓ We aim to answer 90 per cent of all correspondence within 15 working days.
- ✓ We will acknowledge correspondence, including emails, within five working days where an immediate comprehensive reply is not possible.
- ✓ If it is not possible to give a comprehensive reply within 15 working days, we will send you an interim reply, explaining why not, and indicating when you can expect a full response.
- ✓ In certain circumstances, for example on receipt of comments and observations on particular examinations, the commission may use its website to provide general information.
- ✓ We will include in all correspondence the relevant contact name, telephone number and email address.
- ✓ We will use clear, simple language in our correspondence with you, as well as in our application forms and information leaflets.

Providing information

- ✓ We will provide you with clear, timely, accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information on our policies, schemes and services.
- ✓ We will make this information readily available through a variety of methods.
- ✓ We will do our best to simplify rules, regulations and procedures.
- ✓ We will maintain our website, www.examinations.ie, as a comprehensive source of information about all aspects of the examinations service and will continue to provide a range of on-line services through the website.
- ✓ We will keep our website up-to-date, user-friendly and accessible to our customers.

Services through Irish

- ✓ We will operate measures to comply with our obligations under the Official Languages Act, 2003.
- ✓ We will continue to provide candidates with the choice of taking their examinations through Irish or English.
- ✓ We will publish key documents, including our annual report, in both Irish and English.

Equality and diversity

- ✓ We are committed to providing a service to you that upholds your rights to equal treatment, as established by equality legislation.
- ✓ We will deal with you in a fair and open manner.
- ✓ We will seek to make our information available in formats that meet your requirements if you have special needs.
- ✓ If you have particular requirements regarding access to our offices, please telephone in advance of your visit and a member of staff will meet and assist you in every way possible.

Privacy

We will respect your privacy and will use your personal information only for State Examinations Commission purposes, as permitted by law.

Appeals

Formal appeal processes operate as follows:

- Appeals against provisional examinations results including access to a committee of independent Appeals Scrutineers
- Appeals against decisions of the SEC in relation to applications for Reasonable Accommodations to an independent Appeal Committee.

Details of how to access these appellate processes are provided at the time that decisions are issued by the SEC.

Customer Service Complaints

We aim to deliver a high standard of service to all our customers. However, if you are unhappy with the quality of service you have received, please bring it to our attention. If you cannot resolve a matter with the staff member or manager with whom you have been dealing, you can contact the Customer Service Manager (see details below), who will review the matter. All complaints will be dealt with promptly, fairly and impartially.

Customer Service Manager,
State Examinations Commission,
Cornamaddy,
Athlone,
Co. Westmeath
N37 TP65.

Telephone: 090 - 644 2770
Fax: 090 - 644 2896
Email: customerservice.manager@examinations.ie

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint or the way it was handled, you may pursue the matter further with the Ombudsman, or in the case of children under 18 years of age, with the Ombudsman for Children. Contact details are as follows:

Office of the Ombudsman,
18 Lower Leeson Street,
Dublin 2.
Phone: (01) 639 5600 or Lo-call 1890 22 30 30
Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.ie

Office of the Ombudsman for Children,
Millennium House,
52-56 Great Strand Street,
Dublin 1.
Phone: (01) 8656800 Free-phone 1800 20 20 40
Email: oco@oco.ie

Help us to help you

You can help us to provide you with a high-quality customer service if you:

- ✓ have information relevant to your enquiry available when you contact us
- ✓ treat our staff and other customers with courtesy and respect
- ✓ complete and return any customer-survey questionnaire that we send you
- ✓ make comments or suggestions about the service you receive

We welcome your feedback, whether positive or negative. If you would like to comment or make a suggestion, please contact the Customer Service Manager (see details above) or use the contact form on our website.

Monitoring our performance

We will evaluate our performance in line with the standards described in this Customer Charter and will report in our annual report on our compliance with these standards. Copies of the annual report may be obtained directly from the commission or from our website, www.examinations.ie.

Contact details

Postal address: State Examinations Commission, Cornamaddy,
Athlone,
Co. Westmeath,
N37 TP65.

Main phone number: 090-644 2700

Main fax number: 090-644 2744

Website: www.examinations.ie

Email: info@examinations.ie

Full contact details for individual sections in the Commission are available in Appendix 2 of this Publication or in our contact directory on our website www.examinations.ie or in the green pages of the Eircom phone book.

Appendix 2: Contact Details

Below is a brief description of each section within our organisation, including contact details.

The Candidate Entries Section

- ✓ manages the receipt and validation of entries for the certificate examinations
- ✓ organises the supply of examination material to examination superintendents
- ✓ manages the collation, collection and distribution of examination scripts to examiners for marking
- ✓ manages the despatch of scripts to candidates for viewing
- ✓ provides an appeal process for Junior and Leaving Certificate candidates

Contact Details:

Email: entries@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2702, (090) 644 2703, (090) 644 2706

Fax: (090) 644 2709

The Superintendents and Centres Section

- ✓ deals with recruiting and assigning the 4,500 people required each year to superintend the certificate examination
- ✓ organises the viewing of Leaving Certificate examination scripts in examination centres after the issue of results in August
- ✓ arranges examination centres and ensures that all candidates are assigned an appropriate examination centre
- ✓ arranges suitable venues for distributing question-paper boxes to superintendents
- ✓ confirms with schools that arrangements have been made for the safekeeping of boxes of question papers during the examinations

Contact Details:

Email: user.super@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2791, (090) 644 2792, (090) 644 2793

Fax: (090) 644 2794

The Statements and Certification Section

- ✓ arranges the preparation and issue of certified statements of examination results

The services of the section are primarily used by past candidates who require their results for third-level entry or employment. The section can access the results of all second-level examinations since 1979.

Contact Details:

Email: statements@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2810, (090) 644 2808

Fax: (090) 644 2811

The Orals Section

- ✓ plans, administers, organises and implements the oral examinations in Irish, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Japanese.

Contact Details:

Email: orals@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2741, (090) 644 2742

Fax: (090) 644 2753

The Practicals Section

- ✓ assists in planning, administering, organising and implementing the practical examinations, including those in Music, Engineering, Construction Studies, Home Economics, Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Science, Metalwork, Art and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).

Contact Details:

Email: practicals@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2749, (090) 644 2750

Fax: (090) 644 2753

The Examiners Section

- ✓ recruits the 4,000 qualified examiners required each year to mark the written certificate examinations
- ✓ arranges the dates and venues for the marking conferences, held in advance of the marking process each summer
- ✓ supports and oversees the administration of certain technical and professional examinations

Contact Details:

Email: examiners@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2734, (090) 644 2735

Fax: (090) 644 2740

The Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) Section

- ✓ ensures that all students comply with all LCA assessments and tasks
- ✓ is responsible for all aspects of LCA assessment

The LCA is a two-year Leaving Certificate available to students who wish to follow a programme of practical orientation.

Contact Details:

Email: lca@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2725, (090) 644 2726

Fax: (090) 644 2740

The Reasonable Accommodations Section

- ✓ operates the scheme of reasonable accommodations to assist candidates with special needs at the certificate examinations

The term 'special needs' applies to candidates who have physical, medical and/or learning difficulties. Applications for reasonable accommodations are considered within published framework of principles.

Schools, parents or candidates who are dissatisfied with any aspect of the commission's decision in relation to an application for reasonable accommodations have access to an independent appeals forum. All members of the appeals group are drawn from outside the commission.

Contact Details:

Email: sec.specialneeds@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2781, (090) 644 2783

Fax: (090) 644 2744

The Financial Section

- ✓ is responsible for processing all payments to examiners and superintendents
- ✓ looks after the collection of examination fees, the payment of staff salaries and suppliers, and the preparation of estimates and monthly returns for the Finance Branch and the Public Accounts Committee

Contact Details:

Email: financial@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2802, (090) 644 2799

Fax: (090) 644 2807

The Press Office

- ✓ deals with customer services
- ✓ provides the press office
- ✓ maintains our website
- ✓ deals with Freedom of Information requests, Ombudsman cases and ministerial representations
- ✓ deals with general information and statistical requests
- ✓ is responsible for all customer-service issues, including complaints

Contact Details:

Email: sec.pressoffice@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2770, (090) 644 2851

Additional Contacts:**Customer Service Enquiries:**

Email: customerservice.manager@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2851, (090) 644 2770

Official Languages Act Enquiries:

Email: acht.teangacha@examinations.ie

Phone: (090) 644 2770, (090) 644 2851

Appendix 3: Consultation with Customers

The SEC sought the views of its customers and key stakeholders in order to better understand their needs and ensure that policies and services reflect and respond to these needs. The customers and stakeholders consulted included school principals, teachers, school secretaries and the staff of the SEC. The consultation process comprised:

- ✓ a customer satisfaction survey and partnership committee consultation

Customer Survey

In September 2012 a telephone survey on the quality of service provided by the SEC to schools was completed with 80 schools.

Key customer survey findings

The survey asked respondents to indicate their main reasons for making contact with the SEC the method they used to make contact, and to rate the quality of the service received.

Reasons for contacting the SEC:

Almost half of respondents contacted the SEC to make an enquiry or to request information. A quarter of the respondents made contact to enter/enquiry for a reasonable accommodation. Nine per cent of respondents indicated that they had contacted the SEC to query examination results.

Methods used to contact the SEC:

The method most used by respondents to contact the organisation was by telephone. Overall satisfaction with the telephone service was at 90%. Almost 92.5% of those who contacted the SEC by telephone received a quick response from the section that they wanted to contact. 2.5% were dissatisfied with the response time that they got from our switchboard and 2.5% were dissatisfied with the response time that they received from the section.

The next most frequently used methods of contact were by email at 5% and post 1%. Respondents who made contact in writing, whether by letter or email, were generally satisfied with the timeliness and clarity of the response received. Less than five per cent of respondents indicated that they had not received a timely reply; which is an improvement of 3% from our last survey.

Level of service received

Respondents were asked to rate the overall service that as received from the SEC on a scale of 1 to 10. 97.5% of respondents gave the SEC a rating of between 6 and 10. 42.5% of respondents rated the SEC 9 out of 10.

Commitment to reporting against Service standards

The SEC is committed to continue reporting, in future annual reports, against the standards set in its Customer Charter. Clarity and consistency are crucial aspects of reporting that enable customers and observers to compare issues over time



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

Cor na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí.
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 TP65.

Telephone: 090-644 2700
Fax: 090-644 2744
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