

## Leaving Certificate 2019

### Supporting Candidates who lose a close relative at examinations time

#### *Information for Candidates, Parents/Guardians,*

Under an extension of the emergency provisions of the Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations (RACE Scheme), the State Examinations Commission (SEC) has introduced on a pilot interim basis a limited provision for supporting Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied candidates who experience the death of a close relative during the period of the written examinations. The new measure is detailed in SEC Circular S58/19. The following information is provided for the assistance of parents and candidates but noting that all decisions made will be by reference to the governing circular (S58/19).

#### ***What supports are available to Leaving Certificate candidates who suffer illness, accident or other types of trauma and adversity, immediately prior to or during the examinations?***

Whenever possible, reasonable accommodations are made for a candidate who encounters unforeseen circumstances (illness, accidents, etc.,) immediately prior to or during the examinations.

An example of the type of arrangement that we can make, is organising for a candidate to sit their examinations in hospital. Or we can arrange access to a smaller special examination centre or we can allow rest breaks during the examinations or the taking of food or medicine into the examination centre. We can also make arrangements for an earlier or later sitting of an examination if necessary, for example, to receive medical treatment.

If you experience an emergency situation such as this your school is best placed to assist you. If this happens to you please contact your school immediately.

Other than in the case of bereaved candidates, it is not possible to make arrangements for the sitting of examinations other than on the day they are due to be held.

#### ***What supports will be available for Leaving Certificate candidates who experience a bereavement immediately prior to or during the examinations?***

We are, for the first time, introducing a new measure, on a pilot basis, for Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied candidates who suffer the bereavement of a close relative during examinations time, or in the two days prior to the examinations which commence on 5th June this year. Between the day that the close relative dies and the day after the date of the funeral, a candidate can decide to defer their examinations for up to three days. The SEC will be providing an alternative Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied examination sitting in July for these candidates. The alternative examinations will take place in Athlone between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2019.

The purpose of the accommodation is to provide candidates with some time away from their examinations to prepare for and attend the funeral of their loved one without having to contend with the added pressure of their full set of examinations at the same time.

This measure is being provided under the SEC's existing Scheme of Reasonable Accommodations at the Certificate Examinations.

***Are there any rules about which three days a bereaved candidate can be absent from their examinations?***

The time period is limited from the date of death up to the day after the date of the funeral. The three days do not have to be continuous. One of the days will be the day of the funeral and bereaved candidates will have discretion in respect of the other two days within the stated time window.

A candidate may not defer their examinations and also seek an early or late sitting to allow them to attend the funeral.

The alternative timetable sees 15 days of examinations taking place in five days. Candidates are advised to consult the alternative timetable as it may not be possible to provide for all situations. For example, if a bereaved candidate seeks to be absent on two Mondays during the June examinations then they should be aware that all of the examinations on both of those days will be taking place on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> July. It would not be possible for the candidate to sit all of the missed examinations on that day.

***Who is classified as a close relative?***

For the purposes of this measure, a close relative is defined as one of the following: a father, step-father, mother, step-mother, legal guardian, brother, step-brother, half-brother, sister, step-sister, half-sister, grandfather or grandmother. The Scheme will also provide for the death of the child, spouse or civil partner of a Leaving Certificate candidate.

***Will bereaved students who sit the Leaving Certificate examination be also able to sit the examination on the deferred date?***

No. If a candidate decides to proceed with their examinations in June they will not be permitted to access the alternative sitting. The deferred examinations are alternative examinations, not repeat examinations.

However, bereaved candidates who choose to sit the examinations at the normal time (and who do not elect to defer their examinations) will continue to receive the same supports provided to candidates suffering trauma and adversity during their examinations as in previous years. These include early or late sittings of an examination in order to attend a funeral, sitting examinations in a smaller exam centre, and providing students with supervised rest breaks during their examinations.

***What do I need to do about my Leaving Certificate examinations if I do experience a bereavement of a close relative?***

You should make contact with your school or educational institution at the earliest opportunity for advice and support. The SEC has provided schools with details of the application process which will require them to confirm that you meet the eligibility criteria.

If you are an external candidate, not connected to an educational institution, you should contact the RACE Section of the SEC for assistance.

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 bereavement.

***Is there any cost for the alternative examinations?***

There is no additional examination fee for this. But candidates taking the alternative examinations in Athlone in July will be responsible for their own costs in attending the alternative examinations. They must be available at this time and able to make their own arrangements for attending the Athlone sitting. No alternative venues or timings will be provided.

***If I suffer a bereavement but I am not available in July, can alternative arrangements be made?***

No. There will be no other timings or venues made available for the alternative sitting. If you will not be available in July for the alternative examination as timetabled, then your school can put in place supports to sit your examinations in June according to the normal schedule if you are able for this. Otherwise, you will have the option of repeating your Leaving Certificate next year.

***Why is this alternative sitting not available to other candidates who experience illness or other trauma at the time of the examinations?***

In the context of the high stakes Leaving Certificate examinations, there is a tension to be managed between the need to maintain integrity and public confidence in the examinations on the one hand, and on the other the need to better provide for candidates who have found themselves in traumatic circumstances which have impacted on their participation in the examinations.

This tension gives rise to difficulties in developing fair, equitable and verifiable criteria for determining eligibility for any alternative examination. This is a complex issue and this is why the SEC will be undertaking a comprehensive review in the Autumn, which will involve detailed discussions with stakeholders e.g. school management, parents and, of course, candidates, and this will take time. However, there was a clear need to have something in place this year for candidates who experience a bereavement of a close family member at examinations time.

The SEC will continue to provide the same supports to candidates suffering trauma and adversity during their examinations as in previous years.

***Why is the time limited to three days?***

The purpose of this accommodation is to allow the bereaved candidate to have some time to prepare for and attend the funeral of their loved one without having to contend with the added pressure of their full set of examinations at the same time. So the measure is intended as a relief from the full set of examinations at what is a difficult time for the young person. The alternative examinations will take place over a week in July so that the results of the alternative examinations will be available at the same time as the results from the main examinations sitting.

***Why does this not apply at the Junior Cycle examinations?***

The measure will be available in the high stakes Leaving Certification examinations programmes only as missing examinations at this time may mean missing out on a college place or a job opportunity and having to wait a full year for the next available opportunity to sit the examinations.

The Junior Cycle examination is not high stakes. Junior Cycle candidates experiencing bereavement at examinations time will continue to be supported in taking their examinations under the existing arrangements.

***My relative died the week before the examinations commenced? Can I defer some of my examinations?***

Unfortunately, as with any scheme with eligibility criteria there will always be those who meet the criteria and those who do not. The SEC took advice on determining how far in advance of the start of the written examination the death must occur in order for the candidate to be eligible for this measure. This advice was that it should be limited to candidates experiencing a bereavement during the full period of the written examinations and in the two days immediately beforehand.

***Is it the case that candidates who experience difficulties such as illness or bereavement at examination time get special consideration in the marking?***

At the certificate examinations each candidate's work must be marked according to the common marking scheme for the subject concerned. This is to ensure equitable, consistent and fair treatment for all candidates. Examiners are confined to applying the marking scheme to the work actually produced at the examination. An examiner has no scope to deviate from the marking scheme. There may be a misconception that examiners can allow in some subjective way for the life circumstances of individual students. But this is absolutely not the case.

***What will happen to a candidate who seeks to access the alternative examinations under false pretences?***

A Breach of Examinations Regulations may be determined 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.

**If you have any queries contact: Reasonable Accommodations Section in the SEC Phone 090-644 2781  
Email: [race@examinations.ie](mailto:race@examinations.ie)**