



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

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To the management authorities of the *Project Maths* initial schools

Dear Principal,

Please find enclosed sample papers for the 2011 Junior Certificate examination in Phase 1 of *Project Maths*. Phase 1 involves strands 1 and 2 of the revised syllabus. At Higher and Ordinary levels, this affects only Paper 2. Candidates at these two levels will sit the same Paper 1 as candidates in all other schools, and therefore the enclosed sample papers at these two levels are for Paper 2 only. As with the previous syllabus, each paper carries 300 marks, giving a total of 600 marks for the examination.

At Foundation-level, candidates take only one paper. The enclosed sample paper at this level therefore covers the complete course, encompassing both the material from Strands 1 and 2 of the new course and the remaining material from the older course. This single paper also carries 300 marks, which in this case is the total for the examination.

We would like to draw your attention to the following:

Questions of varying types, lengths and levels of difficulty

The sample papers have been prepared to consist of questions of varying types, lengths and levels of difficulty. The papers have a straightforward structure, in that there is no choice – candidates answer all questions. In examinations in which there is a choice between questions, fairness demands that those questions be of similar length and level of difficulty. Without this constraint, a greater variety of questions can be used, improving the examination's capacity to assess candidates at various levels of achievement and in various ways. The questions on these sample papers are deliberately intended to be of differing levels of difficulty. It is the combined effect of the questions as a whole, rather than the isolated effect of any individual question, that facilitates accurate assessment across the full range of achievement levels that exist in the cohort of candidates taking the examination.

You may also note that some of the questions are divided into parts and others are not. The principle followed is that the question structure should reflect its content: if two or more tasks are related to each other or linked to the same concept, context or stimulus, then they may be presented as parts of a single question; if they are unrelated, they stand alone as individual questions.

A consequence of this examination structure is that the exact number of questions on each paper may vary somewhat from year to year.

This examination structure has been chosen so as to support the aims of *Project Maths*. It is hoped that, in preparing for the examination, teachers and candidates will focus on the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus, without giving undue attention to perceived historical patterns of questioning.

Guidance on timing

As the questions are of differing lengths and difficulties, they will not necessarily carry equal marks. It is therefore desirable to ensure that candidates are properly guided as to how best to use their time in the examination. This is achieved in a number of ways. The first type of guidance consists of making sure that the phrasing of questions makes expectations clear. The second form of guidance arises from the fact that the examination papers are in the format of a combined question-and-answer booklet. As a consequence, the amount of space provided for the solution or answer gives an indication to candidates regarding how much work might be required. Candidates can, of course, use extra paper if they so wish, and likewise, may not require the full amount of space provided in order to satisfactorily answer the question concerned.

The third form of guidance is the most direct. Alongside each question, a suggested maximum time allocation will be stated. As is the case on the enclosed papers, the total of the suggested maximum times for the questions will be a little less than the total time for the examination, to allow some time for initial reading and review by candidates. Whereas in other contexts candidates may have to infer the time to be spent on each question from the mark allocations, in the context of this particular developmental project, it is regarded as preferable to give the time recommendation directly rather than indirectly. Candidates should find this helpful in managing their time.

Teachers and candidates may assume that the time allocations for the various questions give a reasonable indication as to how the marks will be allocated to the questions when the marking scheme is finalised. However, it should be noted that some tasks may be straightforward but time-consuming, while some other tasks that test deeper understanding may nonetheless take less time. Accordingly, the mark allocations will not necessarily be in direct proportion to the maximum time suggested. While recognising that different candidates have different skills, the time suggestions will reflect the expert judgment of those responsible for the examination as to how a typical candidate can gain maximum benefit from the time available.

Review

As with all other aspects of *Project Maths*, the experiences of the initial schools will be taken into account before final decisions are made regarding the national rollout to all other schools. On the basis of the SEC's experience in managing this assessment, and in consultation with the DES and the NCCA, adjustments may be made to the examination arrangements after 2011.

Please bring the above information and the enclosed documents to the attention of the teachers and students concerned.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this circular, you should contact the State Examinations Commission, Athlone. Telephone (090) 6442759

Majella Smyth
Higher Executive Officer
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