

3.8 Personal Reflection Task

The Personal Reflection Task differs significantly from the other tasks in its nature and purpose. Its assessment arrangements are accordingly different.

The assessment of the Personal Reflection Task is based on two reflective statements that the candidate submits – a *Year 1 statement* at the end of Year 1 of the programme and a *Year 2 statement* at the end of Year 2. The two statements are then collated by the SEC and marked together, out of a total of 200 marks, by a single examiner. The Year 1 statement accounts for 80 marks (40%) and the Year 2 statement accounts for the remaining 120 marks (60%).

The full specification for this task is given on pages 55 to 59 of the *Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, and the marking scheme is available on the SEC website.

3.8.1 Statistics on Performance

Year	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	Total	Mean credit
2009	5.5	18.0	27.9	24.0	12.1	5.1	1.8	1.6	2.0	1.8	0.2	3131	7.2
2010	7.5	27.4	31.6	17.5	6.4	2.2	1.5	1.8	3.0	1.0	0.1	3289	7.6
2011	4.7	13.7	23.7	24.3	13.8	8.0	3.3	2.1	3.6	2.2	0.5	3091	6.8
2012	6.5	18.6	26.8	20.5	11.7	5.3	2.9	1.6	4.1	1.5	0.4	3159	7.1
2013	5.9	18.5	30.6	22.4	9.1	4.0	2.3	1.7	3.7	1.6	0.3	2744	7.3
2014	4.8	16.9	26.7	21.8	12.9	5.9	3.4	2.0	3.8	1.4	0.4	2894	7.0

Table 3.17 Percentage of candidates awarded each number of credits, Personal Reflection Task, 2009 to 2014.

The shape of the distribution is a little unusual in that each year there is a small bulge at 2 credits where one might expect the distribution to be tailing off. This is accounted for by the fact that, each year, there are a number of candidates who present a Year 1 statement but no Year 2 statement; the modal score for such candidates is 2 credits.

3.8.2 Observations of the Chief Examiner

Candidates' statements are assessed in a manner that takes account of the following criteria: foci of reflection, ability to reflect and media of reflection. The structure of the marking scheme is informed by these criteria but is organised to reflect the structure specified for the Personal Reflection Task on pages 56 and 57 of the *Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*. The comments below should be considered in conjunction with the marking scheme and the task specification.

Foci of Reflection

Year 1 focus/foci

The majority of candidates were awarded full marks for identifying two concrete learning experiences related to their engagement with the programme as the foci of reflection. These foci included work experience, tasks, subjects, enterprise, trips, guest speakers, among other things.

Year 2 focus/foci

The majority of candidates were again awarded full marks for identifying two *vocational* aspects related to their engagement with the programme as the foci of reflection. Acceptable foci included work experience, vocational specialisms, open days, or career exhibitions at educational institutes, interview practice, enterprise, career guidance, guest speakers from training programmes. Some candidates did not give a focus or foci with a vocational link, as required.

Personalisation

Candidates were required to personalise the descriptions in their Year 1 and Year 2 statements with several meaningful 'I' statements. Most of the 'I' statements were factual descriptions but some also referred to feelings (e.g. *'I was very nervous about going on work experience...'*, *'I was proud of how I dealt with the injured child...'* and *'I was really annoyed at how much detergent the others in the class wasted...'*). Statements that included references to a candidate's fears, ambitions, pleasure, frustration, and so on, were awarded more personalisation marks than those that were factual accounts of events with no reflection on how the experience was meaningful to the candidate on an emotional level. Some descriptions of group activities that used a lot of 'we' or 'the class' statements often failed to emphasise sufficiently the candidate's individual involvement or contribution to the activity and usually omitted any reference to feelings.

Ability to Reflect

Year 1 starting point

Each reflective statement is required to describe the initial position or starting point of reflection. Candidates frequently gave reasons for choosing Leaving Certificate Applied (e.g. *'I knew LCA would involve work experience and I thought the Leaving Cert course would be really hard...'*) as their starting position and good statements also recalled and reviewed or described how their past experiences influenced their decision or launched their starting position, (e.g. *'My teachers thought the LCA would suit me better because it was more practical and I knew I often became bored sitting in class listening to the teacher and wasn't great at study...'*).

Year 2 starting point

Candidates generally reviewed some past experiences and often included mini-starting positions throughout their statement. Some gave their starting position as their reasons for choosing to do Leaving Certificate Applied, rather than reviewing their Year 1 experiences and thereby establishing a fresh starting position at the beginning of Year 2. Many starting positions lacked depth and often included vague references to foci.

Year 1 description of focus/foci

The candidates were required to describe in some depth the learning experiences related to their chosen foci and make some analysis about how these affected them, changed their way of thinking, or reinforced their way of thinking. Most candidates gave good general descriptions of fact (e.g. *'On work experience placement helping in a nursing home I had to help feed some of the old people whose hands were too shaky to feed themselves...'*) but fewer gave analysis (e.g. *'I thought I'd like working in the nursing home helping old people the same age as my Nan and granddad but I got really sad dealing with sickness all the time and some of them were very cranky...'*) and fewer still reached conclusions (*'and therefore I definitely won't be looking for a job with old people when I leave school...'*). Some candidates described one experience in reasonable detail and the others insufficiently.

Year 2 description of focus/foci

Candidates were required to describe in depth the learning experiences related to their chosen **vocational** focus or foci and make some analysis about how these affected them, what was learned from these experiences, how these experiences changed their way of thinking or reinforced their way of thinking, with particular emphasis on decisions about a future career. Some good general descriptions were given, most gave some analysis, but few reached clear conclusions. (e.g. *At first I hated the idea of the mock interviews especially because they were to be videotaped and played back. But when the teacher only played my videotape to me on my own, I relaxed a bit and could see the point of doing them because they might help me get a job..*'). Where a focus or learning experience had no vocational dimension, its description was awarded no marks.

Summary of present position

Few candidates were awarded full marks for their summary of their present position based on an analysis of their key learning experiences. Few candidates drew at least two conclusions about self (e.g., *“after doing work experience in the co-op shop I now know how to get along well with others in the workplace because I understand work mates are not friends and I have to sometimes bite my tongue for the sake of getting the job done...”* or *‘When the teacher played back the video of my second mock interview I could see that I had improved because I was sitting up straighter and my voice was clear and steady. Now I have more confidence for any interview.’*) Candidates needed to make connections between their experiences and themselves, their strengths, weaknesses or future career. Where the conclusions about self were supported by ‘because’ statements, this assisted candidates in being awarded more marks.

Outline of Future Position

Year 1 future position

A short-term plan based on the described learning experiences must be presented. Some candidates found it difficult to make a future plan beyond Year 2 of Leaving Certificate Applied and referred to working harder, improving attendance, and “getting a distinction”. Some plans were vague or aspirational in nature (e.g. *I would like to work with horses....* or *I hope that I’ll get a job there after leaving school...*).

Year 2 future position

Candidates are required to outline a specific future career plan based on their key learning experiences, which should give some detail, such as: the name of a future training course or apprenticeship, its duration, the associated entry requirements, how to apply, the associated qualification or award, whether full-time or part-time, and so on. Sufficient detail about further education courses was generally provided by the candidates, but where apprenticeships were mentioned, often the required detail about the duration, the qualification or award and how to apply was lacking. Some candidates referred to the economic situation as an obstacle preventing them from making a specific career plan. An excellent future position might include an alternative plan should the first one not succeed. Aspirations (e.g. *‘I want to have my own business...’*), unless supported with a concrete, practical, detailed plan were not considered to constitute a future plan. Where plans did not follow on from the foci, marks were lost unless reasons were given.

Media of Reflection

Effectiveness of communication

Most candidates made effective use of word processors and spell checkers to present statements varying from good to excellent. Literacy standards varied but most candidates presented work with minimal spelling, capitalisation and grammatical errors, and, where such errors did occur, they generally did not interfere with the legibility of the statements. However, some candidates showed poor fluency of expression, their statements containing many spelling and grammatical errors, and their ideas being sometimes unclear. Some hand-written statements were difficult to read and the layout of hand-written statements, in terms of paragraphing and headings was generally less impressive than those that were word-processed. Some candidates used a template or a prescribed question/answer format to make their statements: since such formats do not encourage the personal reflective process, these candidates generally did not score well.

The vast majority of presentations were written statements of approximately one A4 typed page in length and a small number of audio presentations was also submitted. No supportive illustrative materials, such as drawings or photographs, were presented.

Organisation of thought

Excellent statements were structured with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Excellent statements were devoid of repetition and the ideas were presented in a logical sequence. Full marks were not awarded to any statement that omitted any of the key elements of reflection. Where all key elements were present, the mark depended on the depth of engagement with the reflective process. As might be expected, an increased maturity and improved focus on learning was displayed in the Year 2 statement of many candidates compared to their Year 1 statement.

3.8.3 Recommendations to teachers and students

- Teachers should help students appreciate the value of reflection as a necessary life skill.
- Teachers should encourage students to draft and redraft their statements.
- An integrated approach to the preparation of the Personal Reflective Statements involving the Leaving Certificate Applied teaching team and the guidance department is recommended.
- To help students take ownership of their own statements and encourage *personal* reflection, teachers should not issue a template or list of questions as a rigid framework for the reflective statements.
- Exemplar statements should only be used as a teaching aid, if at all. Some candidates had clearly been overly influenced by such exemplars.
- Some students might find it useful to use a photograph or an illustration to support their reflections.

3.8.4 Recommendations to schools and centres

- Year 1 statements are held in store in the SEC after submission until the Year 2 statements of the same candidates are submitted a year later. Where possible, both statements of the same candidate are marked by the same Examiner. Discrepancies arise between the two sets of statements due to candidates leaving the Leaving Certificate Applied course without submitting any Year 2 statement, or transferring to another school. The ongoing cooperation of schools and centres in resolving the large number of discrepancies that arise is appreciated and it is hoped that this will continue.
- A large number of statements that are not labelled with the candidate's number and school or centre number are encountered every year. It is difficult and time-consuming to identify them and to pair Year 1 and Year 2 statements of the same candidate if one or both are not labelled correctly. Schools and centres are requested to ensure each statement carries the number of the candidate and the roll number of the school or centre.