
Leaving Certificate 2020: Information and Resources

Introduction

The purpose of this page is to provide as much clarity as possible on the decisions made about the 2020 Leaving Certificate , Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) examinations.

Key decisions

The decision has been taken to postpone Leaving Certificate 2020 and to offer students a system of Calculated Grades.

Calculated grades will be offered to students completing Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) or Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) in 2020. The calculated grades process will apply for the Link Modules of the LCVP. LCA students will be provided with calculated grades for subjects, tasks and vocational specialisms due to be completed in 2020.

[You can read the full guide to calculated grades for Leaving Certificate students 2020 here.](#)

Information for Leaving Cert Students

You will have heard about the Government decision in relation to the 2020 Leaving Certificate.

In order to help answer some of the questions we have provided this guide to help explain why we have reached this decision, what it means for students, parents and teachers and how it will happen.

Our primary focus at all times has been what is in the best interests of students and those involved in running the exams. Fairness and equity is at the heart of this decision.

These are unprecedented times and we are having to take decisions like never before.

This guide will be updated from time to time so please check back.

1. What has been announced and why?

The 2020 Leaving Certificate written examinations previously scheduled to start on 29 July have been postponed. Students will now be offered Calculated Grades. They will also have the opportunity to sit the exams at a later stage when it is safer to do so.

After detailed consideration, it is the Department's firm assessment that running the exams poses too great a risk to students, their families and those involved in running them.

The logistics of holding the exams, with all the precautions that would have to be put in place to prevent the risk of further infection, would mean that they would not be held under normal conditions.

2. Is there going to be a Leaving Certificate 2020?

Yes. All students will be given the option to receive a State Certificate of Calculated Grades in each subject. It will have the same status as Leaving Certificates awarded to students in previous years.

Students will also have the opportunity to sit the conventional Leaving Certificate examination if they wish at the earliest safe and practical time.

3. Why were the exams not moved online or changed to allow people to sit shorter papers?

Many different scenarios have been considered over a number of weeks, each with their flaws and faults.

There is no perfect solution to this unprecedented challenge.

Online exams; shortened papers; fewer examinations – none of these options would have been as fair an assessment as the Calculated Grades model. They would also have been markedly different from previous Leaving Certificate examinations and from what students and their teachers are familiar with and have been preparing for in terms of structure, format and content, over the past two years.

Changes like those would have called into question the validity of the state examinations this year.

4. How will the system of Calculated Grades work?

Calculated Grades will be generated using a systematic statistical model. It will combine estimates of a student's expected performance with the school's statistical profiles of achievement in a subject and level, in line with national performance standards over time.

The first source of data will be provided by the subject teacher. It will then be aligned in the school, with teachers consulting on the results before the principal reviews the process applied to assure the fair treatment of students. The school then sends the data to the Department of Education and Skills.

A more detailed document [A Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate students 2020](#) will explain further how the system will work.

There will be strong oversight and control and a number of inherent quality assurance measures to ensure students receive as fair a result as possible.

5. How will the calculated grades approach work for the Leaving Cert Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)?

LCA students have already completed a lot of their assessments. These results are already held by the students. Calculated grades will be used for outstanding assessments, including subjects, vocational specialisms and tasks due to be completed in the current LCA session.

Students will be provided with a calculated grade for the LCVP Link Modules.

6. What information will schools be asked to provide for each student?

Teachers will be asked to provide an estimated percentage mark for each student for each subject. Students will also be put in a rank order in their class.

Teachers are being asked to use draw on existing records and available evidence, to provide a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the most likely percentage mark that each student would have achieved if they had sat their examinations and completed coursework under normal conditions.

Teachers will NOT be simply passing on results from mock examinations or other tests.

Schools will then align this data before it is passed on to the Department of Education and Skills.

7. What evidence will teachers use to support their judgements?

Teachers will use a number of records of a student's performance and progress; for example, classwork and homework; class assessments; examinations in school, at Christmas or summer, mock exams and also coursework.

A guidance document will be available for teachers.

8. Can I appeal the outcome?

Yes. The appeal will involve checks on school-entered data, correct transfer of that data to the Department, and a review that it was correctly received and processed by the Department. If a student remains dissatisfied at the end of this process they can seek verification of the Department's processes by independent appeal scrutineers.

Under the Calculated Grades system, the percentage mark provided by the teacher cannot be reviewed.

All students will retain the option to sit a Leaving Certificate examination at a later stage when it is safe and practicable to do so.

9. Will students be able to see a record of the percentage mark that the school has given?

Yes. Students will have access to the school-based data in the event that they appeal.

In the detailed guidance that we are providing to schools and teachers we will be making it very clear that schools should not disclose the estimated marks or rank orders to students or to their parents/guardians.

10. Will teachers be using Junior Cycle results?

No. Junior Cycle results are not being used at an individual student level. They are only being used at a group level as part of the process of standardising across schools.

11. What if there is a conflict of interest, e.g. a teacher who teaches a relative or a friend's son or daughter?

If a teacher has a real or perceived conflict of interest with a student in their class they must declare this to school principal.

There will be additional oversight by a nominated teacher and a deputy principal in such cases.

12. What actually happens in the statistical standardisation process?

After the estimated percentage marks are received from all schools, the Department will analyse them and carry out a process of standardisation.

We will compare the school's profile of achievement at Leaving Certificate over the past three years to the national standards, to build up a picture of school performance. We will also review the performance of this year's group of students against their overall performance at Junior Cycle.

This then allows us to check whether the estimated percentage marks in each subject from the school are reasonable, in light of performance in that subject in recent years. Therefore, the alignment of marks upwards or downwards will be based on more than one single piece of information.

13. How will the system ensure that student's individual achievements are fairly rewarded?

The calculated grade system depends on the differences between students being accurately reflected in the school-based data. For example, if there is a student in a class group who performs better than the other students in the class group then this difference should be reflected in the estimated percentage marks assigned by the school.

However, we will also carry out other checks to identify any cases where there might be something unusual about an individual's estimated mark. We will follow up on these cases to check whether there is a good reason and give the school a chance to change the estimated mark if necessary.

14. Will marks or rank order change in the standardisation process?

We expect that some estimated marks may change, to at least some degree. Although some will change more than others depending on the quality of the data we receive from schools.

The ranking ordering of students by the school in their class grouping will be retained in the process, so students will keep their position relative to each other.

After this standardisation and all follow-on checks have been completed, the estimated mark supplied by the school is transformed into calculated mark. We then use this to generate a calculated grade.

15. Isn't the calculated grades model inherently unfair?

No. It is the fairest way possible to tackle the effects that lack of schooling and other problems caused by Covid-19 can be ameliorated for ALL candidates.

Students have had a very broken schooling experience - some have had access to schooling through online learning, others haven't.

An exam held under current health restrictions would be greatly different to the examination that students expected and SEC has advised it would not be reliable or fair to students.

The model uses the best information we have about students' achievements by asking teachers to review several pieces of information about their work over the last two years. Teachers have to keep a record of the evidence that they used to come to the estimated mark and ranking.

Several checks are built in at school level:

- teachers must share their rankings and students' estimated marks with their fellow teachers before they are provided to the principal
- principal oversees the process and submits the rankings and marks to the Department AND can refer any marks or rankings back to the relevant group of teachers for re-consideration, if needed
- National standardisation ensures that students are treated equitably across the country
- An appeals process is available involving several checks and of course, if they prefer, candidates will be able to take the examination when it is safe to do so.

16. Does national standardisation mean that if I attend a school where students traditionally have higher performance levels, my mark is likely to be moved up by the Department? And if I attend a school where performance tends to be lower, my mark may be moved down?

No, the standardisation process does not favour any type of student or school.

The most important information about each student is the estimated marks and ranking that the school provides to the Department. The standardisation process just serves to make sure that your school has been not been too harsh or too lenient when giving estimated scores to the Department.

When the estimated marks from your school are standardised, if you are a particularly strong candidate in your class – irrespective of the school you attend – then you will still emerge as

a particularly strong candidate, and your calculated score will be as close to what you would have achieved in the examinations as it is possible to calculate.

Whether or not the marks in any subject from your school get moved up or down depends on the accuracy with which your teachers and school have made their estimates, not on the kind of school you are in. For example, we expect it to be quite common that the estimated marks in one subject from a school will need to be moved up and the marks in another subject from the same school will need to be moved down.

The most important information about each student is the marks and ranking that the school provides to the Department. Standardisation uses two further sources of information to adjust your school's estimated marks if there is evidence that your school has been too harsh or too lenient. The way these two sources of information are used is interconnected.

- The first of the two further sources of information is the Junior Certificate marks of you and all of your fellow students in the class of 2020 taking a particular subject in your school, and the second is about the general pattern of results in the subject from Leaving Certificate classes in your school over a number of years.
- This information will all be assembled and will be used to predict the level of achievement that you as a group would have been expected to reach in that subject if you had sat the Leaving Certificate examination in the normal way. This means that if your class is a particularly "strong class", the expected level of achievement of your class would reflect that fact and so the standardisation process will take full account of it. If the school's estimated marks reflect this properly, then we will not need to move them up or down.
- Research and statistics allow us to understand the extent to which groups of students in a school have results that are similar from one year to the next. They also allow us to take account of the fact that individuals within those groups can have levels of achievement that can vary quite a lot.
- The information about you and your classmates is combined with the information about the school's previous results and previous groups to allow statisticians to check that the marks and rankings for each subject in your school and all other schools are reasonable. This means that all candidates across the country are treated fairly.

The statistical process we are using will not impose any predetermined score on any individual in the class or school. No matter how good you are and no matter what your school is like, if your school gives us an accurate estimate of your expected performance and gives accurate estimates for the rest of your class too, then you will all be treated fairly.

17. What about students with reasonable accommodations? How will this be taken into account?

Where any reasonable accommodation has been approved by the SEC for any student, such as a reader or scribe, schools will be asked to base their estimate of the student's likely performance on the assumption that this accommodation would have been available.

18. What about students who don't attend or who are taking extra subjects outside school?

While these scenarios are the exception rather than the rule every effort will be made to calculate a grade, provided there is sufficient evidence available.

In the case of students taking a subject outside school, the guidance provides details of how schools should proceed if school management authorities are confident that there is sufficient evidence of the student's achievement to make an objective judgement.

For students in receipt of home tuition with an association to the school, the guidance will provide information for school authorities to engage with the home tutor in arriving at a decision. Whether a valid estimate of performance can be provided will depend on whether the home tutor is a registered teacher and where the school is satisfied with the evidence used to support the judgment.

19. I am repeating one subject outside of school because I want to satisfy a minimum entry requirement for a college place. How will I do that with the calculated grades model?

If you are studying one or more subjects outside of a recognised school, the Department will be flexible in accepting estimated marks and rankings from other schools or colleges, and

will look at this issue on a case-by-case basis. In general, we can say that, provided we can receive an estimated mark and ranking from a teacher in a way that is fair to all candidates, we will seek to provide a calculated grade. You will be able to use this calculated grade in the same way as a Leaving Certificate grade to satisfy minimum entry requirements.

20. I sat my Leaving Certificate in 2019 but am repeating Irish because I want to fulfil the minimum entry requirement for entry to a primary teacher education programme. How will I do that with the calculated grades model?

If you are studying one or more subjects outside of a recognised school, the Department will be flexible in accepting estimated marks and rankings from other schools or colleges, and will look at this issue on a case-by-case basis. In general, we can say that, provided we can receive an estimated mark and ranking from a teacher in a way that is fair to all candidates, we will seek to provide a calculated grade. You will be able to use this calculated grade in the same way as a Leaving Certificate grade to satisfy minimum entry requirements.

21. Can I appeal the Calculated Grades?

Yes. Due to the nature of the model, the professional judgment of the teacher or the school will not form part of the appeals process.

Students unhappy with the calculated grade they receive will have access to a three-stage appeals process.

Stage 1: Checks will be undertaken to ensure that the process was completed correctly by the school and that the intended information was recorded correctly by the school and that the information was transferred correctly into the data collection system. There will also be a review to ensure that the review that the data was correctly received and processed in the calculated grade model.

Stage 2: Students can then seek a review by Independent Appeal Scrutineers.

Stage 3: Following this review, there will also be an opportunity to sit the written examinations later in the year when it is safe and practicable to do so.

In addition, there will be oversight by an independent international expert unconnected with the design of the calculated grades model to provide overall validation on the model, including the operation of the appeals system.

22. What if I apply to sit the exams, but then am unable to do so. Will I get a second chance at sitting them?

Unfortunately it is intended that there will be one sitting of the 2020 Leaving Certificate Examination for the 2020 examinations.

23. When will the grades be issued?

The plan is that calculated grades will be provided to candidates as close as possible to the normal results day.

24. Will the grades be the same as in other years?

Yes. Students will receive a provisional statement of results with grades in the same format as every other year.

Subsequently students will receive a formal final certificate confirming the grades.

25. What about the CAO process – how will it be affected by this change?

Students' calculated grades will be transferred directly to the CAO, in the same way that examination results usually are. The CAO timelines will run as close as possible to normal to allow for students to take up offers and to transition to third level, further education or work etc.

26. Does the same apply for people looking to study in the UK or Europe?

The Department has been in contact with counterparts in the UK and across the EU to explain the position regarding the Leaving Certificate. Other countries are being asked for as much flexibility as possible for our students. These contacts will continue over the coming weeks. This is also a common challenge in the UK and across the EU.

27. When will third level courses start?

While we can't be specific about that yet, it will be late September or early October. Third level institutions are in constant contact with the Department on a range of issues in relation to enrolments and courses for the 2020/2021 academic year.

28. When will the results of the appeals issue? Will it be possible to start college this year using the appeal results?

Work is ongoing with the higher education sector to integrate the timing of the first stage of the appeals process with the start date for college entry.

Students who receive an upgraded CAO place following Stage 1 of the appeals process may be able to take up their place in the 2020/2021 academic year.

Students who are successful at the Independent Appeal Scrutineer stage, and who receive an improved CAO offer at that stage, will receive a deferred offer to start their course in the 2021/22 academic year.

Students who opt to sit the Leaving Certificate examinations later in the year and who receive an improved CAO offer on foot of these results will also receive a deferred college offer to start their course in the 2021/22 academic year. If a candidate who has started first year of a course becomes entitled to a higher CAO offer and chooses to accept same in the following academic year, attendance for the first year on the new course would remain eligible for free fees and SUSI funding as appropriate.

29. Can I mix my 2020 exam grades and Calculated Grades in different subjects to get points for access to higher education?

Yes. In these exceptional circumstances, all of the results issued on foot of the examinations this year, calculated grades; appeals and the later written examination will be considered the results of the 2020 Leaving Certificate.

30. What are the detailed arrangements for the Leaving Certificate exams to be held later this year?

The SEC will set about putting the detailed arrangements for these examinations in place, guided of course by health advice.

31. What about the Leaving Certificate fee?

Where students opt to sit the conventional Leaving Certificate examination later in the year the examination fee will be waived. Anyone who has paid already will be refunded.
