

Two Pathways - One Destination



Leaving Certificate 2021
Examinations



State Examinations Commission
Accredited Grades

The two processes are completely separate - It will not be possible to mix elements of accredited grades with components of examinations.

Introduction

Leaving Certificate 2021 results will be awarded on the basis of the better of either

- Students' performance in Leaving Certificate examinations in any subject taken by them, including, where appropriate, their performance in the completion of additional components (coursework, orals, etc.)
or
- SEC Accredited Grades awarded to students in each subject based on schools' estimates of students' likely performance in the 2021 examination¹ and a national standardisation process.

Leaving Certificate – no 2nd sitting of exams!

The Government, on Wednesday 17 February 2021, confirmed that the written Leaving Certificate 2021 examinations will be held in June with related components also proceeding as far as possible subject to public health advice.

Student Portal

The SEC's Candidate Portal is expected to open in the week of 8th March – it will remain open for one week approximately.

Students choose to opt in to Examinations and/or Accredited Grade providing details on:

- Subjects
- Levels

The portal will re-open in late April/early May to enable candidates to review their choices. The final confirmed candidate details will be provided to schools in advance of the in-school process.

Indicative Dates

- May 14th - Closing date for collection of evidence of learning from 6th year student for the purpose of establishing an estimated mark.
- May 28th - Schools will close for all students to allow the final week for completion of alignment process and data entry related to SEC Accredited Grades by schools.
- June 4th - Closing date for schools to enter/return all data from the school to the SEC relating to SEC Accredited Grades.
- June 9th - Written Leaving Certificate examinations to commence in schools.

The SEC will issue revised dates for submission of Leaving Certificate course work and the scheduling/arrangements for LCA tasks and interviews in the coming days and weeks.

State Examinations

- All students may opt to take Leaving Certificate examinations, (including written examinations and related additional components in each subject as appropriate) in 2021.
- The State Examinations Commission will put in place the necessary arrangements to provide these examinations, subject to prevailing health advice.
- Students who wish to take the examinations will be able to participate in orals and coursework while those who do not will have the option of the SEC Accredited Grade.

Adjustments to the Written Examinations

- In response to the disrupted learning experienced by students during the periods of school closures in 2020 and 2021 adjustments have already been made to the assessment arrangements for post-primary students taking State certificate examinations in the 2020/21 school year.

- Details of those adjustments can be found at link here <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Curriculum-and-Syllabus/assessment-arrangements-junior-cycle-and-leaving-certificate-examinations-2021.pdf>
- These adjustments will be reflected in the written examinations.

Additional components (coursework, oral and practical examinations)

- The majority of subjects are examined through a combination of additional components and a written examination. The additional components are used to ensure that students have opportunities to demonstrate their learning across a range of practical and applied knowledge and skills.
- The examinations will be marked and graded on the basis of all components that are run.
- Details of altered arrangements for subjects with additional components (including adjusted dates for the submission of coursework and the completion of other components) will be published separately, but the general approach adopted will be as follows:

Coursework

- Coursework will be completed by students and submitted to the SEC for marking or to be marked by the SEC examiners in schools. Flexibility in the arrangements for the completion and submission of coursework was notified to schools in January 2021.
- Details of the new submission dates, which take account of the continued school closures in January and February 2021, will be available shortly.
- In making these adjustments due consideration has been given to the need to protect students' tuition time for the remainder of the school year and ensuring that public health requirements are adhered to.

Practical examinations

- Due to COVID-related restrictions it will not be possible to hold practical skills tests (day practicals) in Construction Studies or Engineering nor will it be possible for the Performance Assessment in Physical Education to proceed. In these subjects the proportion of marks normally allocated to these components will be reallocated to the project component. The proportion of the marks for the written examination will remain unchanged.
- In the case of Music, planning is being advanced for revised arrangements in respect of the conduct of the practical performance component of the examination which it is hoped can take place in the Easter period. Engagement is ongoing with public health experts and further details on this will be provided as soon as possible.

Oral examinations

- Oral examinations in Irish and modern foreign languages will take place in schools during the period from 26 March 2021 to 15 April 2021. Schools will hold the examinations at times outside of normal tuition time so that students' normal tuition is not interrupted to take the examination.
 - For example, examinations may be scheduled in periods before or after the normal school day, during the Easter vacation, or at weekends.
 - The scheduling of the examinations, within the period 26 March to 15 April, will be a matter for the management of the school, following consultation with the relevant teaching staff, but schools should seek to limit the period for the running of each language examination as far as practicable to a period of five consecutive days.
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State Examinations Commission (SEC) Accredited Grades

- All Leaving Certificate 2021 school students will be able to opt in to receive a set of SEC Accredited Grades.
- The grades will be arrived at through a process by which the teacher will use a range of available evidence to support her/his judgement-making in estimating the percentage marks to award to students, following which these estimated marks will be subjected to an in-school alignment process and later a national standardisation process.

SEC Accredited Grades will be provided:

- In addition to examinations: As far as possible, students will be provided with SEC Accredited Grades for all subjects for which they are entered in the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021, provided that adequate evidence is available on which to base an SEC Accredited Grade.
- To students who are unable to sit the examinations at the scheduled time:
 - For example, some students may be at very high-risk from COVID-19; some students may be required to self-isolate and/or restrict their movements for all or part of the period of the examinations; or they may have a bereavement or other medically certified illness which prevents them from sitting the examinations. Having the SEC Accredited Grade will enable the student to receive a grade in such cases. There will be no opportunity to sit the 2021 examinations at a later date.
- When it is not possible to take the examinations:
 - It may not be possible to run the examinations in one or more examination centres because of COVID-19 related restrictions.
 - In such cases, students will instead rely on an SEC Accredited Grade.

- Students will be required to register on the SEC’s Candidate Portal; confirm their subject and level entry details; opt for the examinations and/or to receive SEC Accredited Grades.
- The SEC’s Candidate Portal is expected to open in the week of 8 March 2021 to allow students to make their choices. Students will have approximately one week in which to do this. Details of the students’ choices will be provided to each school.
- The portal will re-open in late April/early May to enable candidates to review their choices. The final confirmed candidate details will be provided to schools in advance of the in-school process.

What is an SEC Accredited Grade?

An SEC Accredited Grade results from combining data as follows:

- A school estimation of a percentage mark to be awarded to a student in respect of her/his expected performance in an examination in that particular subject.
- Data available from the state examinations – this includes, but is not necessarily limited to, national data on past Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate/Cycle examination performance (pre-2020) of students in each subject.

What are the principles underpinning a system of SEC Accredited Grades?

Teacher professionalism: Teachers know their students and can balance a variety of factors in arriving at a professional judgement in relation to their students’ expected performance. Their underpinned by the values of Integrity, Trust, Care and Respect informs how they work in schools to ensure the best outcomes for their students.

Support for students: The offer of SEC Accredited Grades ensures that a clear alternative route to students progressing to further and higher education, or the world of work, is in place, and brings certainty to the overall process. It thus takes account of the need to support student wellbeing and satisfies the requirement for valid certification.

Objectivity: Teachers and schools will be objective in their assessment of the student’s expected performance and will take into consideration a range of evidence to support the judgements that are made. Schools and teachers will work collaboratively to ensure that no bias, conscious or unconscious, influences the decisions made in relation to a student’s expected performance.

Fairness and equity: Schools and teachers will strive to achieve fairness and equity in the way in which they apply the process at school level.

Collaboration: A collaborative approach will be used in schools to ensure that each stage of the process is completed.

Timeliness: Schools and teachers will ensure that the deadlines set for the completion of the in-school processes are met and that each stage is completed within the designated timeframe.

What are the characteristics of the assessments selected?

Outcomes of formative assessments that can be considered to include, for example:

1. Observations of students' learning and progression in lessons
2. Written formative feedback provided to students
3. Students' demonstration of knowledge and key skills in the subject, including in the context of subjects with oral or other components their engagement with these aspects

In selecting summative assessments for consideration:

1. There should be evidence of the learning and assessment completed
2. Students should have been provided with feedback in relation to the work completed including for example: narrative written feedback, marks, percentage scores, grades, or descriptors

Are additional assessments required?

- Following the return to school, teachers may set a limited number of additional assessments up to 14 May 2021.
- It is important in the period leading up to the determination of estimated percentage marks that over-assessment is avoided and that an appropriate balance is achieved between formative and summative assessment.

What types of assessment may be used during this period?

Assessment approaches used should:

1. Include ongoing formative assessment approaches mediated through typical classroom teaching and learning methodologies that check on progress and assist in identifying the next steps for progressing learning
2. Support students' understanding of the feedback provided through the provision of success criteria
3. Ensure that learning is not unduly disrupted by students preparing for tests and frequent testing
4. Be free of influence by a parent/guardian, student or any other person as to its possible contribution to the SEC Accredited Grades5
5. Avoid being influenced by perceived assessment practices of other teachers and/or other schools.

What assessments should not be used during this period?

Information from the following should not be used:

- Self or peer-assessed work for which there is no oversight or role for the teacher in assessing the work completed.
- Short written class tests of less than one class period that assess a limited aspect of learning, for example, spelling or vocabulary tests.
- Mock examinations (i.e. examinations involving full class groups sitting written examinations under conditions that mirror those of the certificate examinations) are neither required nor recommended for use as evidence for the Accredited Grades process.
- The period following the return to in-school teaching and learning should be used to maximise opportunities for teaching and learning with students.

Specific Considerations

Reasonable accommodations for students with special educational needs

- Where any reasonable accommodation has been approved for any student (such as a reader or scribe), the teacher will base the estimate of the student's likely performance on the assumption that this accommodation would have been available.
- Since accommodations are intended to reflect students' normal way of working in class, this should not require any special intervention beyond the teacher's existing understanding of how the student gets on with the relevant supports in place.

Students who are new to the class or school

- If a student has joined the class from another class in the school, the teacher will consult with the previous teacher (if possible) and get whatever relevant records they have.
- If the student has joined the class from another school, and if the length of time is such that the teacher considers he/she does not have enough evidence to make a sound judgement, he/she should consult with school management about acquiring additional information from the student's previous school.
- It may not be possible to get this, in which case the teacher will still need to make the best judgement he/she can on the information available.

Students studying individual subjects out of school and students studying entirely out of school

- The SEC Accredited Grades process will seek to make accredited grades available to as many students as possible, including students who are studying one or more subjects outside of school and those studying entirely out of school.
- For these candidates, robust evidence will have to be available on which an estimated mark may be based.
- In some cases, it may not be possible to provide estimated marks and/or SEC Accredited Grades to candidates, but every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate as many students as possible.
- Further details of the processes to enable these candidates to seek an Accredited Grade will be provided as soon as possible.

Issuing of results

- Candidates will receive the combined outcomes of their SEC Accredited Grades and their examinations (if they choose to sit examinations) at the same time.
- Where, in any subject, a student has also sat the examination, he/she will be credited with the better of the two results. The candidate's results will be transferred to the CAO to facilitate progression to higher education.
- A short time following the issue of results, candidates will have access to more detailed information about both sets of results.
- They will be able to see the estimated marks submitted by their school and the SEC Accredited Grades following the standardisation process.
- For candidates who took the certificate examinations, they will be able to see the marks awarded in the written examination, and the marks awarded in any components.
- For candidates who did not take the Leaving Certificate Examinations the estimated percentage marks submitted by the school and the SEC Accredited Grades only will be available.

This information will aid candidates who may opt to appeal a result in a subject.

Student-teacher contact and the SEC Accredited Grades

- The principal, deputy principal(s), teachers or other members of the school staff will follow the specified procedures for SEC Accredited Grades and must not under any circumstances discuss with or disclose to any student or parent or guardian of any student the estimated marks that the school is submitting.
- Conversely, parents/guardians and students must not under any circumstances contact, either formally or informally, directly or indirectly, a teacher or other member of staff at any stage to discuss, or with a view to influencing the decision-making process relating to the estimated marks to be assigned to a student in any subject or which may confer an undue

advantage to a particular student. The holding of formal sixth-year parent-teacher meetings in the period 1 March 2021 to 28 May 2021 is not advised.

- An individual parent-teacher meeting may be sought and arranged in exceptional circumstances only.
 - Teachers and school personnel, the employees of the SEC and the Department of Education must not be subjected to any type of influence, inducement (including gifts), pressure or coercion by a parent/guardian, student or any other person in relation to a student's mark either before or after it has been assigned. This includes any financial, economic or other personal interest which might be perceived to compromise the impartiality and independence of the teacher or principal in the context of the decision-making process.
 - Such contact would be inappropriate, as it could objectively be viewed as an attempt to interfere with the fairness, equality of treatment and objectivity required of teachers and schools in the assigning of estimated marks for the individual student concerned, and for the students in the school as a whole. This would in turn undermine the integrity of the SEC Accredited Grades model.
 - Where a person seeks to improperly influence the estimation process, this may lead to withholding of results or more serious consequences. This aspect is being considered further and detailed information on consequences of such behaviour will be published as soon as possible.
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