



Teachers' Union of Ireland

Leaving Certificate 2021

Guidance for members

Government Decision

A lot of questions have arisen as a consequence of Government's decision on 17th February in relation to the State Examinations. However, to date, the clarity required by teachers and schools regarding implementation of this decision has not been provided by the Department or the State Examinations Commission (SEC).

Department's letter – 24th February

As recently as 24th February, a letter issued by the Department to school Principals failed to provide clarity and instead created uncertainty that has led to some schools misinterpreting the process.

Complete the Curriculum/Syllabus

The TUI's advice, at this point, is to continue, insofar as possible, to complete the curriculum/syllabus in each subject, including projects and coursework, where applicable. The conventional Leaving Certificate Examinations will run this year in accordance with public health advice, and we have an obligation to our students to help them prepare for those examinations.

Junior Cycle

Advice on Junior Cycle will also issue to schools shortly. Teachers must wait for the official guidelines to issue and must not, at this stage, commence planning for any alternatives. Teachers of junior cycle students should also continue to complete the curriculum.

The TUI, in order to assist members, in relation to the weeks and months ahead is initially providing the guidance set out below.

This Guidance will be updated as more information becomes available – correct as at 9am on 25th February 2021

Conventional Leaving Certificate & SEC-Accredited Grades

*Every student will be offered and will be entitled to avail of **either or both** of the following*

- (a) sitting and receiving grades in the established Leaving Certificate examinations including, where applicable, her/his performance in the completion of additional assessment components (coursework, orals, etc.) associated with particular subjects. The additional assessment component/s will be externally marked by the SEC*

- (b) receiving a State Examinations Commission Accredited Grade (to be called an SEC-Accredited Grade) in each subject, based on the school's estimate of the student's likely performance in the conventional examinations (had COVID-19 not interrupted teaching and learning in schools) involving and subject to a national standardisation*

process. In a subject with additional assessment components two estimates will be provided – one reflecting the proportion of the overall mark assigned to the written examination and the other reflecting the proportion of the overall mark assigned to the additional assessment component. In the process of arriving at the SEC-Accredited Grade these two estimates will be combined.

Can a student sit the written exam in some subjects and opt to receive an SEC-Accredited Grades in others?

Yes. The decision is made on a subject by subject basis.

Can a student sit the exams in all subjects and also opt to receive SEC-Accredited Grades in all subjects?

Yes. Students who opt for both will have their better grade (conventional Leaving Certificate grade or SEC-Accredited Grade) in each subject reflected in their results.

Results that a student will receive

If a student opts to sit the Leaving Certificate examinations (inclusive of SEC marked additional assessment components) and not to receive any SEC-Accredited Grades, then s/he will receive Leaving Certificate results/grades in the usual manner.

If a student opts only to receive SEC-Accredited Grades and not to sit any Leaving Certificate examinations (inclusive of SEC marked additional assessment components), then s/he will receive SEC-Accredited Grades.

If a student opts to sit the Leaving Certificate examination (inclusive of SEC marked additional assessment components) in one or more subjects and also to receive SEC-Accredited Grades in one or more subjects, then s/he will receive the best combination of the Leaving Certificate grades and SEC-Accredited Grades achieved.

In the Leaving Certificate results that issue to students, there will be no distinction drawn between a grade that derives from the Leaving Certificate Examinations process and a grade that derives from the SEC-Accredited Grades process.

The (combined) results, consisting of the best from both processes, will issue at the same time in August and no reference will be made to the particular process that produced the grade in a subject.

At a later stage, the students will be given access to the breakdown: for conventional Leaving Certificate Examinations, the written paper and, where applicable to a given subject, the oral the practical or project; and for the SEC-Accredited Grade, the school's estimated mark and the SEC-Accredited Grade. This information will be made available to the student for a limited period on an electronic portal, before the window for appeals opens

So, a student will be able to appeal the grades?

Yes. Students will be allowed to appeal their conventional Leaving Certificate Examination Grades in the normal way.

In relation to SEC-Accredited Grades, the appeal will consist of a process review focused on identifying possible errors in the transmission and processing of student data.

The first step in an appeal will be the appeal of the higher mark award.

Will students still have to pay fees to sit the Examinations?

No. There will be no fees for the 2021 Leaving Certificate examinations or for SEC-Accredited Grades.

Leaving Certificate - conventional

The Leaving Certificate Examinations

Will consist of:

a) the written examinations, which will:

- *commence on 9th June and will operate in accordance with the normal timetable that has been published on the SEC website Leaving Certificate Established Timetable:
<https://www.examinations.ie/misc-doc/EN-EX-46337197.pdf> Leaving Cert Applied Timetable:
<https://www.examinations.ie/misc-doc/EN-EX-97312473.pdf>*
- *be conducted, subject to public health advice, and will provide, as far as possible, access to the examinations for very high-risk students*

and

b) the additional assessment components – in relevant subjects - marked by the SEC

For those students who wish to avail of the conventional Leaving Certificate (i.e. sit the written examination in a subject), additional assessment components such as orals, practical performance tests and coursework will run, subject to public health advice. Because of public health advice, schools are being asked to source teachers locally to administer some of the tests.

Some additional assessment components in certain subjects will not run for public health reasons – the day Practical Examinations (in Engineering and Construction Studies) are a case in point.

*It is important to note that teachers will **not** be required to assess their own students for any element of the traditional Leaving Certificate option.*

Should schools schedule mock examinations upon the return to schools from 1st March?

No.

If a school seeks to put in place a plan to mirror the extent and duration of the state examined Leaving Certificate exams, this

would clearly compromise the health and safety of the school community.

Plans such as these should be flagged with the Lead Worker Representative and, if the matter remains unresolved, members are advised to follow TUI's advice on the reporting of such matters to the relevant authorities i.e. HSA.

It is worth noting that schools have not yet received the public health advice that the SEC received in relation to the holding of the written examinations in June. It is based on that advice, for example, that led to

- the cancellation of the Junior Cycle examinations
- the cancellation of some additional assessment components (day practical exams, PE Performance Assessment and
- led to modifications in the holding of Music Practicals

SEC-Accredited Grade

What is a State Examination Commission-Accredited Grade - termed an SEC-Accredited Grade?

An SEC-Accredited Grade is a grade generated by the SEC following the combination of school information (i.e. the school's estimated percentage mark) about a student's

expected performance in an examination and national data available from the State Examinations Commission in relation to the performance of students in examinations over a period of time (two/three years).

A school's estimated percentage marks for a student will be provided to the SEC and become SEC-Accredited (percentage) marks following the standardisation process conducted by the SEC. The SEC-Accredited percentage marks are then converted into SEC-Accredited Grades, expressed in the normal manner – H1, H2 etc.

In the case of LCA students, the estimated marks provided by the school are likely firstly to be converted into credits by the SEC before being converted into SEC-Accredited Grades, expressed in the normal manner – Distinction, Merit etc.

Will SEC-Accredited Grades be given for all three of the Leaving Certificate Programmes?

Yes. SEC-Accredited Grades must be given in respect of:

- Established Leaving Certificate subjects
- Leaving Certificate Applied – subjects and vocational

specialisms (year 1 and 2, where relevant)

- *Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme – Link Modules*

Does a student have to accept SEC-Accredited Grades?

No.

*Although SEC-Accredited Grades will be generated for every student and every student is entitled to SEC-Accredited Grades, a student, using a portal provided by the SEC/DES, will have to **opt-in, to receive** her/his SEC-Accredited Grades. The portal is due to open on 8th March.*

Therefore, although it is highly unlikely, a student could opt not to receive her/his SEC-Accredited Grades. Whether a student opts to receive the SEC-Accredited Grades or not is the decision of the student. The school has no role whatsoever in relation to this decision.

One of my students has advised the school that s/he doesn't want an SEC-Accredited Grade. What do I do?

You must continue to teach and deliver the curriculum (including elements relevant to the additional assessment components, if any) for your subject on the assumption that all students will sit the conventional Leaving Certificate Exam in June.

Irrespective of whether or not they opt to receive the SEC-Accredited Grade, you are also required to provide an estimated percentage mark for all students in your class/es. Following the in-school alignment process, this becomes the school's estimated percentage mark and is transmitted to the SEC for conversion, following a national standardisation process, into an SEC-Accredited Grade

Subject Levels

When and how will students confirm their subjects and subject levels?

Students will, through the portal, confirm their subjects and levels - as well as opting for the Leaving Certificate examination and/or to receive SEC-Accredited grades.

We do not know, as yet, when this information will be provided to schools.

Students will still be allowed to change levels on the day of the Leaving Certificate examination, if they chose to do so. The student will receive the better result in a subject from the established Leaving Certificate process and the SEC-Accredited Grades Process.

Subjects with more than one assessment component

My subject has more than one assessment component (Project, Oral, Coursework). Do I continue to encourage students, including those who opt only to receive an SEC-Accredited Grade, to complete this component?

Yes. The TUI's strong position is that all teachers should ensure, insofar as possible, that all students complete projects, orals and coursework.

Students should complete additional assessment components as they will:

- *be marked by the SEC and count towards their overall mark in the subject should they decide to sit the conventional Leaving Certificate examination in June and*
- *provide teachers with reliable and relevant information to feed into the estimation of percentage marks as part of the SEC-Accredited Grades Process.*

Moreover, these assessment components relate to skills and aptitudes that are central to the particular subject.

Key to a teacher's appropriate professional autonomy is retention of her/his capacity to determine how and in what order to engage with and teach with the syllabus. That capacity is not removed or constrained by a decision of some students not to opt for the established Leaving Certificate examinations.

As a language teacher, am I required to conduct/facilitate the Oral exams for my own students?

No. *You are not required to do so.*

It is entirely voluntary and does not form any part of your contract as a teacher.

As part of the arrangements decided by government, each school is being required to source teachers to facilitate the Orals. These may be teachers from the school or other teachers. The very strong advice of the TUI is that if a teacher voluntarily undertakes this work, s/he should not be asked to and should not facilitate orals for students in a class s/he teaches.

Facilitating Orals will be additional work, paid for by the SEC/DES under a separate contract.

*The teacher facilitating orals will **not** mark/assess the students' performance.*

The Orals will be recorded (by the facilitator) and forwarded by the school to the SEC for marking by SEC appointed examiners – again by way of a separate contract and paid separately.

Will schools get further information on how and when the Orals will take place?

Yes. In the meantime, schools should not proceed to schedule the Orals. Advice will also issue on the scheduling of Orals and it is important that a student would not have to sit an Oral in multiple languages on the same or consecutive days.

Will schools get further information on how and when Music practical exams will take place?

The Music Practical will take place the first week of the Easter Break. The exact scheduling of Music Practicals will be determined by the SEC Examiner appointed to assess the Practical. Further information will issue that based on public health advice.

Timeframe for Completing Estimated Mark

When am I expected to undertake the work that leads to an SEC-Accredited Grade?

- **Phase one:** Phase one of the process, which includes the preliminary estimation by teachers of percentage marks and commencement of the ensuing subject alignment process, will take place during the period 14th May to 28th May.
- During this phase, the teachers may individually prepare for subject alignment meetings including reviewing records of work and available information, and commence the subject alignment process, without impacting on tuition time.
- **Phase two:** Phase two of the subject alignment process will take place in the week beginning 31st May 2021. During this phase, schools will finalise the alignment process and prepare the school's estimated percentage marks for transmission to the SEC by 4th June.

Progression to Third Level

Will my students who wish to progress to Third Level in 2021 be able to do so?

For the purposes of entry to third level for the 2021/22 academic year, students will be allowed to avail of the best combination of their SEC-Accredited Grades and their Leaving Certificate examination grades.

The results will issue according to a timeline that is congruent with the CAO and other relevant third level entry processes.

Precedent

Will this form of assessment (SEC-Accredited Grades) be used as a precedent?

No. The DES has acknowledged the great work being done by teachers to maintain teaching and learning during this unprecedented time of a national health emergency and has confirmed, in writing, to the unions that a precedent will not be established.

The TUI will ensure that this assurance is honoured, that the

terms and conditions of teachers are protected and that there is a return to the state certified, externally assessed Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate examinations at the earliest possible juncture.

Junior Cycle

The Junior Certificate examinations have been cancelled and will not proceed this year. This decision was taken by Government upon advice provided by the health authorities.

Discussions are ongoing with the Department in relation to what students will receive to replace the SEC certified examinations. Until those discussions conclude, no teacher and/or school management should devise locally devised approaches or reporting templates.

This document will be updated on a regular basis so please continue to check the website (www.tui.ie), TUI's social media and the TUI App following initial publication

