



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021

Guide for Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks

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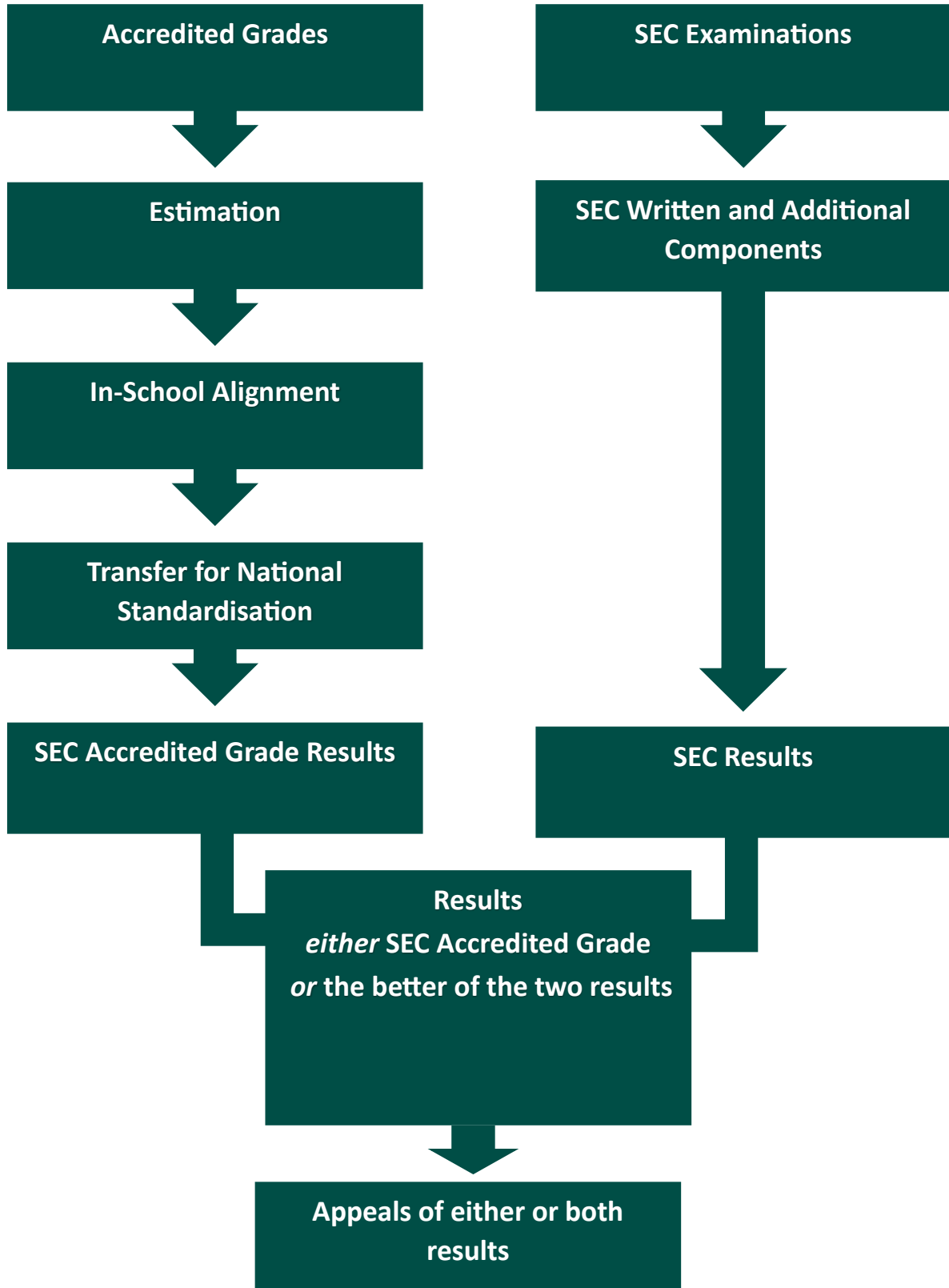
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Throughout this Guide, the term “school” includes: a recognised school or centre for education, recognised by the Minister for Education under the provisions of the Education Act, 1998, and a centre recognised by the SEC for examination purposes.

Leaving Certificate 2021

Either
Accredited Grades
and/or
Examination Result



NB: The particulars of the arrangements and processes outlined in this Guide are subject to change on technical, policy or other appropriate grounds. It is the responsibility of the reader to ensure that they have the most up-to-date version of the Guide which will be available at www.gov.ie

Further Information

The most current information on all matters relating to Leaving Certificate examinations and the Accredited Grades process will be available on an ongoing basis on gov.ie/LeavingCertificate.

The Department will also support school leaders, teachers and other school personnel, tutors, parents and students by providing a dedicated phone-line service for queries on the Accredited Grades process.

The Department can be contacted in this regard by calling the Helpline on 057-9324461 (and select option 2). The phonenumber will be open from Monday 26 April 2021 and will operate Monday to Friday, 10.00 to 17.00.

Alternatively, queries can be e-mailed to LCinfo@education.gov.ie

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Part I: Before you begin

1. Introduction

This is a guide for schools to assist them in the process of arriving at estimated percentage marks for each of their students in this year's Leaving Certificate class 2021. The processes of estimation comprise the school-based part of the system of Accredited Grades which is being offered to the 2021 cohort of Leaving Certificate students owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The estimated percentage marks provided by the school will be subject to a process of national standardisation.

This guide is for teachers, principals, and deputy principals (and corresponding positions) in schools, Further Education and Training Centres, and all other settings, including private colleges, which have students who are entered for the Leaving Certificate Examination in 2021. In the guide, 'school' should be taken to include all such settings. Throughout this guide, 'principal' should be taken to include the director of a centre or other such person in the corresponding position to a school principal. 'student' is taken to include all learners in such centres who have been entered for any Leaving Certificate Examination in 2021.

Although parts of the guide are more relevant to some personnel than others, understanding the whole process is important for everyone's understanding of their own role, so it is imperative that all involved read the entire guide. It is strongly recommended that the separate shorter documents, issued by the Department of Education, [A Guide to State Examinations and Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021](#) and [State Examinations and Accredited Grades - Arrangements for Leaving Certificate Applied 2021](#), which are available on www.gov.ie/leavingcertificate, are read before this *Guide for Schools*.

The arrangements described in this document apply to:

- Established Leaving Certificate – subjects
- Leaving Certificate Applied – subjects, tasks, Vocational Specialisms for LCA year 2 students and where relevant LCA year 1 students
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme – Link Modules

Out of school Candidates

There are two broad categories of out-of-school candidates who can apply through a school for consideration for Accredited Grades.

These are referred to in as:

- **Out-of-School Subjects.** This refers to students who are enrolled in, and studying in, a school on a full-time basis but are also studying an extra subject, or subjects, entirely outside of school. Students who are studying a subject in school but undertaking additional tuition outside of school (for example, 'grinds') are not included in this category: they can only receive an estimated mark from their subject teacher in the school.
- **Out-of-School Learners:** This refers to students who are entered for the examinations as external candidates and who are not attending for full-time tuition at any school or private college recognised by the State Examinations Commission for the purposes of holding the Leaving Certificate Examination. This category includes students who are being home-schooled.

A sub-set of out-of-school students are those studying non-curricular languages. As these students are not required to study any prescribed curriculum and are unlikely to, or may not, have any consistent records or evidence of their learning.

The [Guide to Accredited grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 for \(a\) Out-of-school Subjects, and \(b\) Out-of-School Learners](#) should be read in conjunction with this guide.

Finally, it should be noted that special arrangements have been put in place to enable students entered for non-curricular languages to receive Accredited Grades. Details of these arrangements are available in the [Guide for Schools and Students on implementing the Accredited Grades Process for Out-of-School-Subjects and Out-of-School Learners](#).

2. What is an SEC Accredited Grade?

An Accredited Grade is a grade that can be provided to a student in respect of a subject following the combination of a school estimated percentage mark for a student's expected performance in the Leaving Certificate examination and national data available in relation to the performance of students in examinations over a period.

Accredited Grades therefore take cognisance of the likely performance in all aspects of an examination including, where relevant, oral, practical and coursework components and tasks, as well as the written examination.

An Accredited Grade results from combining data as follows:

- A school's estimate of a percentage mark to be awarded to a student in respect of their expected performance in an examination in a 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 of students in each subject.

The combination of these data sets through a process of national standardisation will determine the grade to be awarded to each student in each subject, thereby resulting in an Accredited Grade being awarded.

The Education (Leaving Certificate 2021) (Accredited Grades) Bill, 2021 has been published and this Bill once enacted will allow the SEC to administer the Accredited Grades Scheme for Leaving Certificate 2021. However, until the Bill has been enacted the planning for, and early stages of, the implementation of the system of Accredited Grades will be managed by the Department of Education.

3. How will an SEC Accredited Grade be arrived at?

There are **two main phases** in the process of arriving at an Accredited Grade:

- A school-based phase
- A national standardisation phase.

School Based Phase

In providing the estimated percentage marks, there will be **four main school-based steps**:

- The teacher's estimation of student percentage marks in a subject; given the modified assessment arrangements and examination papers and taking into consideration additional components, where relevant
- School alignment of marks for a subject through a subject alignment group comprising teachers in the school who are teaching the subject to Leaving Certificate students this year
- Oversight of the alignment process by the school principal

- Transmission of the marks for national standardisation.

National Standardisation Phase

Following the completion of the school-based phase, the national standardisation phase will be carried out by the SEC. The school estimated percentage marks will be combined with national data through a process called standardisation in order to generate the Accredited Grade for the students in the subject. This standardisation process will seek to mitigate the effects that can arise from different schools, despite their best efforts, applying different standards in their estimation.

After the standardisation process, the marks will be converted into Accredited Grades, which will be expressed in the same manner as currently applies to Leaving Certificate grades.

Appeals

It will be open to a candidate to appeal their result in the Leaving Certificate examination and/or their Accredited Grade.

Candidates appealing the results of an examination will follow the SEC appeals process. This will include an opportunity to view the scripts marked by SEC examiners.

In the case of candidates appealing an Accredited Grade, the appeals process will be confined to checking whether or not there were errors in the transmission and/or receipt of student data.

4. Role of the school

In the context of the school-based process:

(a) The **role of the class teacher** is to provide marks that reflect:

- A **single estimate of the percentage mark** in the subject that each candidate is likely to achieve if they sit the Leaving Certificate examination in 2021 (reflecting the changes to the examinations in 2021 and taking into account the students' likely performance in all examination components – such as coursework, oral examinations, practical examinations, project work performance tests, etc.)
- **Individual performance:** Teachers will ensure that no two students in the same class are placed on the same estimated percentage mark. Percentage marks may include up to two decimal places i.e. 83.22%, 83.35%, etc.
- The teacher then participates in a **subject alignment** process and completes the necessary forms associated with that process.

(b) The role of the **principal** is to provide:

- Oversight of the in-school alignment process
- With the assistance of the Leaving Certificate Aide, the finalised data set, no later than Thursday **3 June 2021**.

In relation to out-of-school subjects and out-of-school learners, the specific role of schools and the personnel involved is described in further detail in section 4 of the [Guide for Schools and Students on implementing the Accredited Grades Process for Out-of-School-Subjects and Out-of-School Learners](#).

4.1 Key Dates

Key Dates

Confirmation of levels:

- Students will confirm their subject levels when the Candidate Self-Service Portal (CSSP) reopens between 27 and 30 April.

Completion of *any* additional assessments, *if required*:

- Assessments must be completed by 14 May 2021.

Subject Alignment Process:

- Phase One: **Friday 14 May to Friday 28 May 2021**. During this phase, teachers may individually prepare for subject alignment meetings, including reviewing records of student work and available information, and may commence the subject alignment process but without impacting on tuition time.
- Phase Two: **Monday 31 May to Thursday 3 June 2021**. During this phase, schools will finalise the alignment process and transmit the school's estimated percentage marks no later than Thursday **3 June 2021**.

5. Important information to remember before you start

5.1 Including all students in the school

To facilitate their timely progression from post-primary schooling, students are being provided with an option to undertake the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021 (including written examinations and related components in each subject as appropriate), receive SEC Accredited Grades on a subject-by-subject basis, or both. Irrespective of whether any individual student ultimately decides to sit all or none of their subjects, and irrespective of whether they have opted to receive accredited grades in any of their subjects, **an estimated percentage mark must be generated for all subjects for each individual student**. This is an important requirement for the operation of the SEC Accredited Grades process.

If a student is a registered student of the school, no matter how infrequent or irregular their attendance; they are **not** an out of school learner and should not be dealt with through the procedures for out of school subjects and out of school learner.

All registered students must be provided with estimated marks for all of the subjects they are studying with the school following these in-school procedures, this includes students of the school in receipt of home tuition and those at very high risk to COVID -19 who have adapted education provision.

Note: Out-of-School Learners and Out-of-School Subjects

In the case of

- Students who are enrolled in a recognised second-level school or in a recognised centre for education, and are studying an additional subject or subjects entirely outside of school. Students who are studying a subject in a school but availing of extra tuition outside of school are not included in this category; they can only get an estimated percentage mark from their full-time teacher, and
- Students who are out-of-school learners

schools/centres will implement the relevant processes for such students and provide oversight of the submission of estimated marks on their behalf, where possible.

5.2 Level of entry

Students following the Established Leaving Certificate will be asked to confirm their level of entry for each subject via the Candidate Self-Service Portal (CSSP) when it reopens on Tuesday 27 April to Friday 30 April. After the portal closes, it will no longer be possible for either students or schools to change these levels as it will be too near to the start of the in-school process that applies to Accredited Grades. Once the portal process has completed, the SEC will confirm levels of entry back to the school, and the principal/deputy principal will relay this to the teachers involved.

Given that teachers are not to discuss the estimated marks with their students, no teacher should seek any information on levels from students or their parents or guardians.

When estimating marks for students, teachers will have regard to the level (higher, ordinary or foundation) at which a student has been studying the subject and the learning completed by the student, up to 14 May, but teachers must give an estimated mark at the level selected by the student on the student portal and provided to the school by the SEC.

5.3 Accompanying forms

The following forms are provided to assist with the Accredited Grades process in schools and are referred to later in the guide where their use arises. For ease of reference, they are included in the guide, but they will be provided as standalone documents that can be completed by hand or digitally (subject to subsequent printing out and signature at the time of completion and on or before the Thursday 3 June).

- Form A: Estimated Percentage Mark**
- Form B: Class Estimated Marks Verification**
- Form OOS8: Leaving Certificate 2021: School provision of an estimated mark for Out-of-School Subjects and Out-of-School Learners**
- Form OOS9: Leaving Certificate 2021: Out of school learners and out of school subjects: Subject entry for which the school cannot provide an estimated mark.**

Part II: Estimating Marks

PART II

6. Professional judgement

The cornerstone of the SEC Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 is a reliance on the professional judgement of teachers, including principals and deputy principals, in providing **the best possible estimate of how each student is likely to perform in the adjusted examinations that have been put in place for 2021, and based on the level of achievement that the student has been demonstrating**. The changes made to the examinations, for both written and other components, can be viewed as reflecting and recognising disruption of normal teaching and learning patterns and some associated loss of learning time, while acknowledging that teachers have made very significant efforts to provide for continuity in learning through remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know that schools have a large amount of information on the learning achievements of their students, but the context and circumstances in which this data is collected can vary from school to school. Most schools use a range of tests, for example, but these tests can vary in their content, structure, style and purpose. We also know that schools collect and record such data in different ways. That is why teachers' professional judgement is vital in coming to an accurate estimate of the likely achievement of each student.

Teacher professional judgement facilitates incorporating a range of available evidence of the likely performance of students, as appropriate. Teachers know their students and are able to balance a variety of evidence in arriving at a professional judgement in relation to each student's expected performance.

For these and other reasons, the professional judgements involved need to be suitably informed by relevant data, but they should not be overly constrained or dominated by such data. Statistical or algorithmic models, such as those offered by commercial companies must not be used in the process of data analysis and review and the estimation of percentage marks under any circumstances.

In the context of an out-of-school subject or an out-of-school learner, additional guidance in relation to the evidence that might be required for consideration in estimating marks can be found in section 7 of [Guide to Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 for \(a\) Out-of-School Subjects, and \(b\) Out-of-School Learners](#). Separate details are also provided in the [Guide for Schools and Students on implementing the Accredited Grades Process for Out-of-School-Subjects and Out-of-School Learners](#) for non-curricular languages.

7. The evidence that will inform the professional judgement

Teachers should use a range of evidence to support their judgement-making when estimating students' marks. It may include both formative and summative assessment activities undertaken over the two years of study for Leaving Certificate. Teachers' records of in-class assessments—for example, end-of-topic tests, periodic assessments, aural and oral assessments, presentations, project work, and/or coursework over the two years of study—may also be considered. Results from summative assessments that are typically available include, for example, end-of-term reports for fifth and sixth-year, taking into account that these may have been conducted under variable conditions, either formally in school or in an unsupervised remote environment.

Where subjects have more than one component—for example an oral examination, practical or coursework—the evidence considered in relation to the additional components should not be based solely on completed or part completed examination components but should also reflect the development of related skills and knowledge over the two years of the programme.

Teachers should reach an “on-balance” judgement in relation to a student’s expected performance and an occasional dip or peak in a student’s performance should not be treated as indicative of overall performance. All relevant data sets and, if applicable, a limited number of additional assessments conducted during the period from the return to face-to-face teaching up to 14 May 2021, should be considered in providing an estimated percentage mark.

When trying to decide whether or not a particular form of supporting evidence should be considered, teachers should ask themselves:

The following should also be considered:

- Does the evidence relate specifically to student performance and achievement?
- Is this evidence likely to improve the quality of the professional judgement made?
- If the evidence is accessible only in respect of some students and not others can it be considered in such a way as not to disadvantage either category?

- Not all forms of evidence will be grounded in records

Teachers use evidence every day when observing students at work and when planning and adjusting learning activities. Basing judgements on evidence is not the same thing as basing judgements on *records* of evidence. It is important to review all relevant available records, but it is equally important not to be overly constrained in making judgements by considering only the forms of evidence that have generated these records.

- Teachers must not allow their professional judgement to be influenced by a student’s behaviour (whether good or challenging), character, appearance, social class, ethnicity or absences from school-based summative assessments due to short-term illness, for example.
- It is important that aspects such as work habits and effort, homework, participation, attendance and punctuality are not conflated with achievement in the subject in question. When considering what evidence to use, it is very important that it is only evidence that relates to student performance that is considered.

Professional judgement may be informed by:

PART II

Records of performance over the course of study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of evidence • May vary from subject to subject • Assignments, projects, and experiments completed as part of normal learning activities • Quality of work in class activities and during periods of remote teaching and learning
Performance on class assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance on any class assessments, for example, tasks, questions, house or term examinations taken over the course of study. Evidence of learning from the periods of remote learning in 2020 and 2021 should be used • Considering the quality of each test, the level of difficulty and the purpose that it was designed to serve. This helps give a picture of the quality of the performance that goes beyond the mark • Mock examinations are neither required nor recommended for use as evidence for the accredited grades process • Assessment submitted over the period of lock-down must be considered only in the context of an awareness that students did not complete these summative examinations under exam conditions
Appropriately weight all components (written, oral, practical, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The estimated mark is a single combined mark for all components of the examination (written, oral, aural, practical, and coursework as appropriate), with each component contributing its appropriate weighting • In reaching their estimate in subjects with more than one component, teachers will have regard to the written examination and the additional components, as adjusted • The estimation will also take into consideration the appropriate weightings for all of the components
Performance on coursework components, even if not complete	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies to subjects that include a coursework component • Consider quality of engagement and quality of any work done. For example, in the context of the History research study, how well did the student engage with the gathering of evidence from a variety of relevant sources and how these resources were evaluated to support the subject of their study? • In a subject where a practical or oral component is part of the assessment, the demonstration of the student's skills, knowledge, understanding, and process over the two years of study should be considered
Reflecting on the abilities of this year's students to others previously taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did students of similar ability in previous years perform in the examination? • Records may be available from school management to assist teachers in this regard
Any other relevant information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects or activities a particular student did that enhanced their knowledge and understanding of the subject, improving likely performance • When interpreting the evidence, draw also on your knowledge and experience of the structure and demands of the adjusted examination arrangements at the level concerned

7.1 Avoiding unconscious bias

In order to remain objective, it is very important that the school's judgements should only take account of existing records and the available, valid evidence of a student's knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to the subject concerned. This evidence should inform a teacher's professional judgement about each student's likely performance in the examination. Other factors should not affect this judgement, including—but not limited to—characteristics protected under equality legislation. These include gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community. Similarly, judgements should not be influenced by a student's behaviour (whether good or challenging), character, appearance, social class, or absences from school-based summative assessments due to short-term illness, for example.

Unconscious effects on objectivity

To avoid unconscious bias, teachers are encouraged to reflect on and question whether they may have any preconceptions about each student's performance and whether their perception of the evidence might be affected by any irrelevant factors.

Teachers should be aware of:

- **Confirmation bias:** this is a tendency to search for and interpret information that aligns with one's preconceived opinions about a student. For example, if one makes a judgement about a student, one may subconsciously search for evidence to support that judgement, noticing only evidence about a student that fits with pre-existing views about them, thereby unduly affecting the student's grade.
- **Halo or masking effect:** this is a tendency to perceive one very positive thing about a student and allow the "halo glow" of that one thing colour our opinions, which may either hide or, conversely, overly accentuate, the student's actual knowledge, skills and abilities.
- **Horns effect:** this is the direct opposite of the halo or masking effect, and occurs when perception of someone is unduly influenced by one negative trait, for example challenging behaviour.
- **Primacy effects:** primacy bias error occurs when assessment is made based on information that was presented earlier, for example giving undue weight to 'first impressions' of a student.
- **Recency effects:** recency bias is the opposite to primacy bias and occurs when an assessment is overly affected by information that was presented later (more recently) rather than earlier in any given selection process; for example giving undue weight to the most recent interaction with a student or the most recent piece of work done by a student.
- **Selective bias:** this is a perceptions bias, whereby undue weight may be given to a student's performance on a particular part of the content of the specification rather than considering performance across all the material.
- **Contrast effect:** is the tendency to mentally upgrade or downgrade a student's likely performance when comparing it to a contrasting group of students; for example over- or under-estimating a student's likely performance having first considered a large number of students who are all working at a different standard.

Active consideration of the avoidance of unconscious bias—particularly that related to any of the nine grounds referred to in the Equal Status Acts—should apply during all stages of the school-based phase of the Accredited Grades process: the preliminary work of individual teachers, the work of the subject alignment group and oversight by the school principal¹.

¹[Acknowledgment: some material in section 1 above has been adapted from: Guidance for Heads of Centre, Heads of Department and teachers on objectivity in grading and ranking, Ofqual, 2020]

8. Making the preliminary judgement about marks

The fairness of the Accredited Grades process is critically dependent on getting high quality data from schools.

8.1 The school’s ‘best estimate’ of the ‘most likely’ percentage mark

Schools are asked to provide their best estimate of the overall percentage mark that each student is most likely to achieve in each subject based on the adjusted examinations and the levels of achievement that the student has demonstrated over the two years of the programme. **It is important to be conscious of and to resist the temptation to overestimate students’ likely performance.**

Clearly, it is not possible for anyone to estimate with certainty the exact percentage mark that any student will receive. This is not what is required. No matter how much or little certainty can be claimed for the judgement, there is still always a ‘most likely’ mark. It is critical to the process that the student receives the most likely mark, and not, for example, the mark that one may hope the student might get, or the mark one may think the student has a reasonable chance of getting ‘on a good day’. When considering this it might be useful to think of it in terms of the illustration in figure 1 below, in which the intensity of the shading represents the chances of a student getting a particular percentage mark.

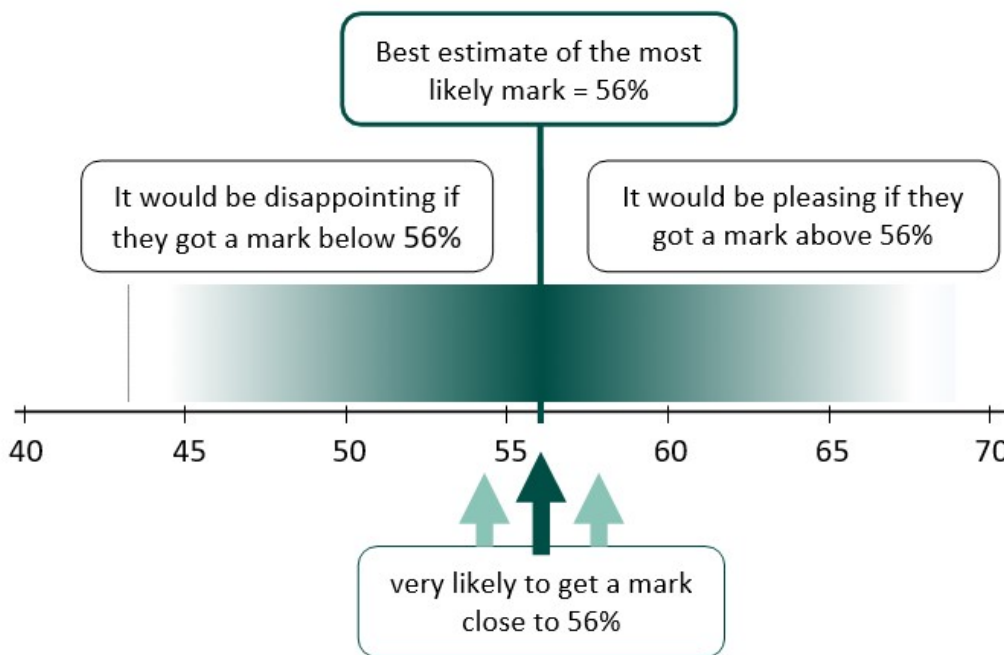


Figure 1: what it means to say that the best estimate of “the most likely mark” is 56%

It is anticipated that most estimated percentage marks will be given as whole numbers. However, if a teacher is unable to decide between two identical numbers, decimals may be used. The facility to provide estimates that use decimals is primarily intended to deal with cases where two or more students in the same class and at the same level would otherwise be placed on the same mark. In most cases, decimals will not be needed in order to distinguish adequately between the levels of achievements of different students. **Therefore, the great majority of estimates submitted will be whole numbers** (e.g., 74%), a small minority will use one decimal place (e.g., 74.5%), and the use of a second decimal place will be very rare (e.g., 74.53%).

8.2 Spacing your estimated marks appropriately

It is important when allocating the estimated percentage marks for students that teachers are mindful of the gaps between the marks. If, for example, there is one very strong student in the class, it is not enough to make sure to put that student ahead of everyone else, but equally important to ensure that the space between them and the others is a true reflection of the size of the gap. The national standardisation process that happens later might move all of these marks up or down or it might stretch or squash these gaps, but the fairest outcome for all can only be achieved if the students are placed accurately relative to each other in the first place (see figure 2).

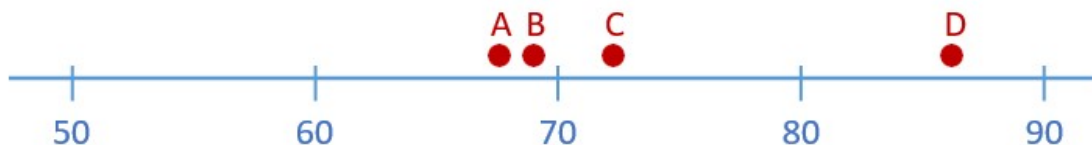


Figure 2: If student D is much better than students A, B, and C, then the gap between their estimated marks must show this.

8.3 Avoiding inappropriate clustering

Research shows that, when estimating numbers, people tend to subconsciously gravitate towards multiples of 5 and, especially, multiples of 10. Research also shows that, when estimating marks on test scores, teachers' estimates are affected by the locations of grade boundaries. It is important to try to guard against these tendencies (Figure 3).

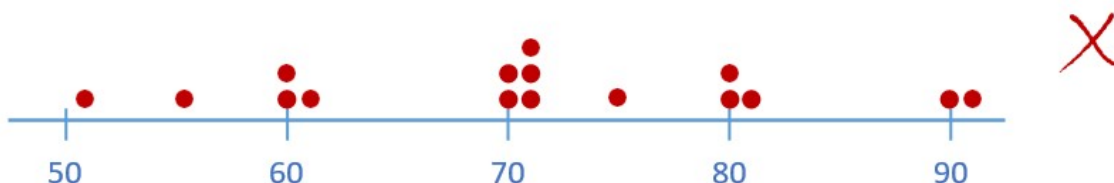


Figure 3: Clustering near grade boundaries hinders proper standardisation and leads to unfairness.

Clustering marks in this way means that the gaps between different students are no longer accurate, which means that some of the numbers no longer represent the best estimate of the most likely mark. The national standardisation process cannot properly fix this.

It is important to be aware that if estimates for some students are moved above a grade boundary, then this affects the collective accuracy of the distribution. This may cause the national standardisation process to move the estimates down a little for everyone, and this has the effect of disadvantaging other students in the class (or in another class in the school). Maximum fairness for all is achieved if the SEC gets the genuinely best estimate for each student in all cases.

Likewise, it is important to guard against the tendency to bring an estimate *down* so as to avoid having it too close to the next grade boundary. If this is done, and if the national standardisation process later moves all of these marks up a little, this student may be disadvantaged because the estimate was too far from the boundary. Again, maximum fairness for all is achieved if the genuinely best estimate in all cases is submitted.

It is important to be mindful of the tendency to move marks above boundaries when dealing with marks that are close to a particularly critical grade boundary, such as the boundary between grades 7 and 8 at Higher Level. For example, if the best estimate of the most likely mark is 28% or 29%, it is very tempting to record this as 30%. However, as described earlier, this could cause another student in your school who was correctly placed just above a boundary to fall below it in the national standardisation process.

9. Completing Form A – the estimated percentage mark

Once the available evidence for a student has been considered by a teacher, a preliminary judgement can be made of the percentage mark that the student is most likely to achieve at the level concerned (if they proceeded to take the 2021 examination, as adjusted) and Form A completed (as a draft) accordingly. The estimate is not considered final until it has been through the in-school alignment and oversight processes and, as a result of these processes, becomes the school's estimated percentage mark.

The estimated percentage mark for each student in the class should be based on the teacher's professional judgement, balancing the different sources of evidence described previously. In order for the Accredited Grades process to work, estimated marks are required for all students. The estimated mark should be for the level (Higher, Ordinary, or Foundation) that the student has confirmed on the candidate self-service portal, as confirmed to the school by the SEC, as described previously.

As explained in Section 5.1, further information relating to specific subjects for the various programmes is available later in this document.

9.1 Consistency

It is very important that there is consistency in the standard that is applied to all students. The Estimated Percentage Mark form (Form A) has been provided to support a uniform and systematic application of the process. A separate form should be completed for each individual student. The preliminary estimated percentage mark entered by the teacher on the form is not considered final until the subject alignment and oversight processes are complete, at which point it becomes the school's estimated percentage marks. It is very important that care is taken that all forms related to the process are treated in compliance with the school's data protection policy, as noted later.

While the teacher will not be providing a rank ordering of students in the class, it is nonetheless useful, having completed the Forms A for the class in draft form, to put them in either ascending or descending order of the preliminary estimated marks so as to be sure that the estimated marks being proposed have placed the students correctly relative to each other, with no two or more students placed on the same percentage mark. In circumstances like these, where judgements are being made sequentially, teachers may discover that their judgement had 'drifted' as they progressed through the group, and this may only become apparent to them when they subsequently put the students in order as a means of checking their estimates. Having done this, the teacher may decide to change the draft estimate for one or more of the students. Placing the Forms A in ascending or descending order will also make the in-school alignment process (see Section 10 below) more coherent and manageable.

Once the alignment process is complete, the forms can be rearranged again into examination number order so that Form B can be completed with the students in the correct order for data entry. Some additional information about generating the estimated percentage mark in the case of Leaving Certificate Applied is given in section 13.2.

10. The in-school alignment process

10.1 Purpose

The main purpose of the alignment process is to ensure that all teachers who are providing estimated percentage marks in respect of the same subject in the school are applying standards that are appropriate and are consistent with each other when doing so. This does not, of course, mean that the distribution of marks will or should necessarily be the same for each class.

It also has the purpose of ensuring, to the greatest extent possible, that this shared standard is aligned as closely as it can be to the national standard.



The process does **not** involve or lead to the school creating any rank-order listing of the students taking the subject in the school, within a class, or by level taken. This is a significant change to the process last year (2020).

In addition to its main purpose of ensuring alignment of standards among teachers of the same subject, the in-school alignment process may also be used as an opportunity for those involved to cross-check each other’s clerical work, to the extent that the circumstances allow. This will minimise numerical and transfer errors later in the process.

The professional judgement of the individual teachers is the most important *input* into the alignment process. However, crucially, once the alignment process is complete, the estimated percentage marks are considered to represent the collective professional judgement of all those involved, rather than solely the professional judgement of an individual teacher. Once the principal is satisfied that the oversight process has completed as described in Section 15, these marks represent the collective professional judgement of the school. The estimated mark that is submitted through the web based application is the school’s estimated mark.

10.2 Who is involved in the alignment process?

In cases where two or more teachers have classes/students taking the subject concerned for the 2021 examinations, these are the teachers who will be involved in the alignment process. Other teachers of the same subject in the school but who do not have a Leaving Certificate class in 2021 will not be involved.

In the case of a subject for which there is only one teacher with a class for the 2021 examination, the alignment process will be carried out with the deputy principal or with another teacher of the same subject in the school, who does not have a Leaving Certificate class in 2021, subject to the agreement of the school principal and those involved.

If the deputy principal is the sole teacher with an examination class for the subject in the school, then the alignment process is carried out with another teacher of the same subject in the school (if available) or with a second deputy principal, or with the principal. In cases where the alignment process is being carried out by a subject teacher and a deputy principal who does not have any expertise in the subject concerned, the alignment process serves as both a checking mechanism for the subject teacher and an opportunity for discussion and reassurance for both of them that the estimated percentage marks are reasonable in light of what is known about the group of students in the class.

10.3 Preparing for and arranging the alignment process

The alignment process in 2021 will be conducted in two phases.

Phase one: Phase one of the subject alignment process will take place during the period Friday 14 May to Friday 28 May. During this phase, the teachers may individually prepare for subject alignment meetings, including reviewing records of work and available information, and may commence the subject alignment process but without impacting on tuition time.

Phase two: Phase two of the subject alignment process will take place in the week beginning 31 May 2021. From the 31 May to 3 June, schools will finalise the alignment process and prepare the estimated percentage marks for transmission by 3 June 2021.

Before the subject alignment meetings begin, the teacher should have completed, in draft, a Form A for each student in their class, and placed all of these forms (separated by level) together. A draft Form B for each level will also be completed by the teacher. The principal/deputy principal will assist teachers with making arrangements for the subject alignment meetings to transact but they will not attend the meetings unless they have a specific function that requires their involvement as set out in Section 10.2 (above). They will provide the teachers involved with whatever available data or information they consider useful to support the process and which the teachers may not already be in possession of. Any declarations of a conflict of interest with respect to a student/students should be made at this stage.

It is recognised that, given the special circumstances, such as staff pods and physical distancing, that arise from COVID-19, schools may need to transact the alignment process in different ways. One of the key challenges is to balance the need for a practical and sensible level of caution with the need to provide a supportive environment for teachers to conduct the alignment process as a team. This will require engagement between teachers, which may be in person and/or remotely, in line with the revised COVID-19 Response Plan for the safe and sustainable reopening of schools.

Most teachers will be able to transact the process fully on paper, while others will need to share material electronically, such as those who have been identified as being at very high risk of COVID-19. In any case, care must be taken that documents are treated and conversations conducted in a manner that is in compliance with the school's data protection policies (as noted later in this Guide).

10.4 Carrying out the alignment process

There is no strictly delineated set of tasks that must be carried out during the alignment process. This is because there are differences between

- The contexts of different schools
- The kinds of information schools and teachers have available to them
- How they organise that information, and
- The kinds of information about student performance that may have informed the professional judgements made in different subjects.

Nevertheless, the following questions may serve as useful prompts for the process:

- What do we know collectively about the different class groups to which we are trying to apply a common standard? This knowledge might relate to
 - the way the classes may be streamed or set
 - our experience of teaching them
 - individuals who may have moved from one of our classes to another and how they compared to the others in the class they left and the class they moved to
 - whether the different classes have self-selected into broadly 'better' or 'weaker' groups because of the way different subjects are timetabled against each other.
- In short, what do we know that helps us discern how we might expect these class groups to perform relative to each other?
- In considering the above, are we sure that we have focussed on information about achievement and likely achievement, (rather than, for example, classroom behaviour)?
- How do the students in my class compare—in terms of aptitude, engagement and achievement—with others I have taught before? Do the same observations hold for other teachers in respect of their groups?
- If the estimated results for one group appear to be stronger than those for another, are there good reasons for this?
- Are there particular students who are exceptionally strong or weak at this subject in comparison to others in the class(es) and other students that I/we have taught?



This list is not exhaustive, and not all these prompts need to be considered. Any information that will enhance the fairness or accuracy with which the teachers in the alignment group can form a collective professional perspective to align their standards with each other can be considered.

10.5 Alignment across classes

The need to align standards between different class groups in the school will arise when:

- The same teacher teaches two different class groups in the subject
- Two or more teachers are teaching different Leaving Certificate class groups in the subject.

A single teacher may be teaching two different class groups that may be nominally of mixed ability but where one is, in reality, a stronger group than the other—perhaps as a result of self-selection effects caused by the other subjects that are timetabled against that subject in the timetable 'blocks'. Over the course of the programme, the teacher might have had a tendency to mark one group more leniently than the other, as a result of what they believed was required to motivate them.

For the Accredited Grades process to be fair to all, this tendency needs to be set aside so that none of these students has her/his estimate inappropriately influenced by virtue of which class s/he was in. It should be noted that, while two students at the same level in the same class should not be placed on the same estimated percentage mark, it is permissible for two students in different classes of the same subject to be given the same estimated mark.

A national standardisation process will be carried out later by the SEC, using data available from the state examinations, which includes, but is not necessarily limited to, national data on past Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate/Cycle examination performance of students in each subject. However, the SEC does not have the kind of data or evidence that would allow the reliable realignment of standards between different teachers within the same school. Therefore, alignment of standards among different teachers of the same subject in the same school is critical.

This is why the alignment procedures that are to be followed at school level are so important. Full and careful participation in the alignment procedures within the school are the only means through which fairness across different class groups taking the same subject within a school can be achieved.

10.6 Following the alignment process

The alignment process may cause a teacher to revisit the original draft estimated marks (on Form A) for one or more students, which may in turn (but will not necessarily) result in a change to the marks.

Therefore, following the alignment process, each teacher should review the estimated marks for their class group/s and adjust them if and as necessary.

After the subject alignment meetings and their review of the estimated marks, each teacher will finalise and sign and date the Form A for each student for their respective class group/s. Before submitting the form to the principal, a final check should be carried out to ensure accuracy. As this is part of the alignment process it can be done collectively and then it can be agreed by the subject alignment group either that one person will forward all the Forms A for that subject to the principal, or that each teacher will forward her/his own, whichever is the more convenient.

Unless the principal has cause to refer something back to the subject alignment group, in accordance with the specified criteria (set out later in this document – Part IV, Section 14), this concludes the work of the teachers, so it is important that care be taken with this submission of finalised data.

In the event that any teacher realises after submission of the data to the principal that an error has been made they should contact the principal to seek to rectify the error, provided that this is done in sufficient time to allow for any amendments that are required to be



made. If this occurs, the amended record (i.e. the completed Forms A and B) will need to be considered by the teacher, the subject alignment group and the principal before final sign-off and submission.

Copies should be made of these forms and the original and copies should be retained in the school once completed. The SEC may request forms later in the context of the appeals process. The school should **not** forward any forms until requested to do so.

Some additional information about a potential variation in the alignment process in the case of Leaving Certificate Applied is given in section 13.2.

Part III: Student, programme and subject-specific information

11. Some student-specific issues

11.1 Students who are new to a class

If a student has joined a class from another class in the school, the teacher should consult with the previous teacher and get whatever relevant documentation they have that will assist in the provision of an estimated percentage mark for that student.

If the student has joined a class from another school, and if the length of time is such that it is considered that the teacher does not have enough evidence to make a sound judgement, the principal/deputy principal should be consulted. See Section 16.

11.2 Students who have recently changed level

Teachers will have received notification from the SEC, through the school, of the final level selections confirmed by the student on the CSSP. There may be one or more students in a class who have recently changed level. The level confirmed by the student through the Portal is the level at which the estimated mark must be provided. When confirming their final level selections, the attention of students was drawn the fact that the final selection could not be changed later by them or by their school. Students were advised to consider their choice of level in each subject very carefully and that if they selected a level higher than that which they have been studying they may receive an estimated mark lower than that which they were expecting from their school. When considering the available evidence of achievement for such a student, the teacher should draw on her/his experience of how students in the past have fared when they changed level. Teachers must give an estimated mark at the level selected by the student on the student portal and provided to the school by the SEC.

When reviewing numerical or grade data in records of tests or other assessments, it should be borne in mind by the teacher that they will have set and marked these at the standard of the level the student was intending to sit at the time. Therefore, performance would obviously have been better on comparable tasks set and marked at the standard that applies at the lower level, in cases where a student has now opted for a higher level.

In estimating a mark for a student who has changed level, teachers should base their professional judgement on the student concerned and the teacher's own experience of students who have changed levels in the past. If further help is required, the in-school alignment process may be of assistance in relation to this. For further information on the alignment process, please refer to Section 10.

11.3 Answering through Irish

In the case of students who are entered to take their examinations through Irish, the teacher should base her/his estimate of the student's likely mark on the assumption that the bonus that is applicable for answering the written paper through Irish is included in the estimate. It is anticipated that most teachers who are teaching through Irish will have internalised and taken account of the impact of the bonus when making their initial judgements, so that no explicit calculation of the bonus will be needed. Nevertheless, if any teacher is unsure how the bonus applies in their subject, information is available on the State Examinations Commission's website at the link <https://www.examinations.ie/?l=en&mc=ca&sc=im>.

It is not considered advisable for teachers to engage in explicit calculations of the Irish bonus, for the following reasons.

It must be noted that the bonus mark only applies to the written component of each examination. In order for a correct calculation to be made, a teacher of a subject involving a

coursework or practical component would have to separate out their overall estimated mark into distinct marks for each component, calculate the bonus applicable to the written component and then reassemble the overall mark. Apart from the complexity of this task, it is considered that this process of separation, calculation and reassembly is an unwarranted interference with the main judgemental task that teachers and schools are being asked to make, which is to give an overall holistic judgement, taking account of all relevant information. It is much more preferable for teachers and schools, where possible, to work on the basis of their previous experience of how the bonus marks have mediated their expectations of student achievement.

If teachers and schools consider that more concrete guidance is required, then the following should be considered fully adequate to the task:

- Take full account of the fact that the bonus applies to the written paper only
- Be aware of what the 'base rate' for the subject is (10%, 5%, or no bonus)
- Take account of the fact that a 'sliding scale' applies to marks above 75% of the marks available, so that the effect of the bonus gradually diminishes from this point onwards. (For example, in the case of a subject with a written paper only and which attracts a 10% bonus, a candidate achieving 75% would get an additional 7.5% from the bonus, which is the maximum possible benefit, and students scoring more than 75% would get a bonus that gradually decreases to 0 as the mark increases.)

As the following recently introduced subjects may not appear on existing lists of subjects to which bonus marks apply, it should be noted that the base rate for Politics and Society (written examination) is 10%, the base rate for Physical Education (written examination) is 10% and the base rate for Computer Science (combined written and programming examination) is 5%.

11.4 Reasonable accommodations

Where any reasonable accommodation has been approved for any student, (such as a reader, scribe or waiver), the estimate of the student's likely performance should be based on the assumption that this accommodation would have been available. Accordingly, it is assumed that the necessary supports for learning have been put in place and that appropriate supports and accommodations have also been in place for the formal and informal assessment activities that take place throughout the two years of whichever Leaving Certificate programme the student is following. These arrangements will not necessarily have been identical to those provided during the certificate examinations, as the context and constraints are different, but will have been intended to achieve the same objective—to remove any access barriers that might stand in the way of a student fully understanding what they are being asked to do and/or demonstrating what they know and can do.

In interpreting any evidence from such tests or assessments when forming a judgement as to the likely performance of such a student, consideration should be given as to whether the arrangements in place at the time of that assessment were adequate for that purpose. If they were not, then the teacher will need to take account of this and, based on their knowledge of how the student does in class when normal supports are in place, consider how the student is likely to have achieved on the assessment concerned in the event that appropriate arrangements had been in place.

11.4.1 Avoiding unconscious bias

Likewise, it is very important to remain alert to possible sources of unconscious bias that might affect estimates. It is assumed that all teachers are aware of their students' individual learning needs and have provided the necessary classroom-based supports to remove any barriers that may have had an impact on their performance in formative and summative assessments. It is also assumed that teachers have a very good knowledge of their students. However, by being alert to the source/s of unconscious bias, there is a better chance of examining the evidence more objectively, focussing on evidence that is clearly about attainment in the subject and not about other factors, such as behaviour, learning disability, or absences from school-based summative assessments due to ill-

ness, for example. Teachers' knowledge and observations of an individual student's learning, formative assessment of that learning during classroom interactions, and summative assessment of attainment, may combine to inform a teacher's evidence-base for estimated percentage marks for a student with disabilities, as it does for all other students.

11.4.2 Late diagnosis of a disability

Additional care should be taken in any cases where there has been a late diagnosis of a disability, i.e. occurring sometime during the two years of the programme concerned. In this case, account should be taken of the fact that outcomes from tests and other assessments that predate supports being put in place may under-represent the student's actual level of achievement in the subject, module or task under consideration.

11.4.3 Awareness of nature of need

With regard to any student with additional needs that necessitate support and/or accommodation in a learning or assessment environment, it is expected that all of the student's teachers will have been made aware of the nature of the need and the appropriate supports at the time they were first identified. In circumstances where school management is not confident that this has occurred, it should now ensure that all necessary information on students with disabilities is provided to all teachers, to inform their work in estimating percentage marks.

It should be noted that a close familiarity with the details of the scheme of Reasonable Accommodations operated by the State Examinations Commission, including the details of how various accommodations and waivers are implemented, is not needed in order to make the professional judgements required. It is the underlying principles of the scheme that are most important. Key among these are that the arrangements are not intended to compensate for any lack of achievement resulting from a disability but to remove, as far as possible, any barriers to the students' displaying their true underlying levels of achievement.

11.4.4 Exemption or waiver

Some examination accommodations involve a 'waiver' or 'exemption', which means that there is an element or elements of the discipline that these students will not be tested on. Where a student has been granted such a waiver or an exemption, then any deficiency that the student might previously have displayed in respect of the element waived should be ignored when arriving at an estimated mark. The focus should be solely on the aspects of the discipline that have not been waived. For example, if a student for Leaving Certificate English has been granted a waiver in respect of spelling and written punctuation, then the teacher should consider the extent to which they might have penalised that student in the past for such errors in their classwork, tests and assessments. The teacher should then, when interpreting and weighing evidence of achievement, take account of the fact that deficiencies in spelling and punctuation would have been removed from consideration if the examinations had happened as normal.

12. Programme-specific and subject-specific information

12.1 Established Leaving Certificate subjects, and LCVP

In addition to the adjustments set out in [Assessment Arrangements for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021](#) (December 2020), [Further adjustments to the written examinations, Leaving Certificate, 2021](#) (March 2021).

Most subjects have more than one examination component, whether that be coursework, two written papers, an oral or practical examination, and so on. When weighting the evidence, each component must be given its usual weighting (or adjusted weighting where relevant) as outlined by SEC for this year's examinations.

In the case of these subjects, a single overall estimated percentage mark for the subject as

a whole is required, encompassing all of the examination components and not a separate mark for each component. The estimate should take into account all evidence available, including the teacher's reflection on the student's engagement with the coursework over the two years of study.

12.2 Languages and Music

The single estimated percentage mark for languages should incorporate all components of the examination, including the oral, aural and written examination. Likewise, for Music, the single estimated percentage mark should incorporate all components of the examination, including the performance test and the written examination.

12.3 Subjects with a coursework examination component

As noted above, the estimate should be for the subject as a whole and take account of all evidence available, including the teacher's reflection on the student's engagement with the coursework over the two years of study.

The assessment of coursework should centre on the relevant skills and processes underpinning the knowledge, applied knowledge and understanding relevant to the particular subject. Evidence of students' learning may be gathered from elements of examination coursework completed to date.

12.4 Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme – Link Modules

As in the case of all subjects with a coursework component, the single estimated percentage mark for Link Modules (LCVP) should incorporate both the portfolio of coursework and the written examination.

12.5 Home Economics – Scientific and Social

In the case of Home Economics, a single overall estimated percentage mark for the subject as a whole is required, encompassing all of the examination components, including the journal, and, where relevant, the coursework associated with the textile elective. The estimate should take into account all evidence available, including the teacher's reflection on the student's engagement with the coursework over the two years of study. The coursework submitted to the SEC is for exam purposes only; and teachers have to incorporate *their estimate* of the coursework within their overall scores for Home Economics.

12.6 New subjects and specifications introduced since 2018

Given that State examinations in Leaving Certificate Physical Education, Computer Science, Agricultural Science and Economics have not taken place in normal circumstances, teachers will have little if any data on previous outcomes in these subjects in the school to reflect on and assist with this process. Teachers are advised to refer to the specifications and guidelines for these subjects. In particular, they should refer to the *Assessment* section of the specifications, and to the *quality descriptors* in the guidelines. These documents are available on www.curriculumonline.ie.

In the case of Computer Science, Agricultural Science and Economics the estimate should be for the subject as a whole, combining all components into a single estimated percentage mark and taking account of all evidence available.

In the case of Physical Education (PE), it will not be possible to proceed with the Performance Assessment component of the examination, given public health considerations. Candidates who sit the examinations in this subject this year will be awarded results based on the written examination and physical activity project components, with the weighting for the Performance Assessment reallocated to the Physical Activity Project. That is, the written examination in 2021 has a 50% weighting and the Physical Activity Project has a 50% weighting.

This adjustment should also be reflected in the SEC Accredited Grades process. A single overall estimated percentage mark for the subject as a whole is required, encompassing the two examination components of the physical activity project and the written examination—not a separate mark for each component.

In the case of Agricultural Science and Economics, while the specifications are new, teachers will be able to draw on their experience of teaching students under the previous specifications for these subjects.

12.7 Construction Studies and Engineering

In the case of Construction Studies and Engineering, it will not be possible to proceed with the day-practical examinations this year, given public health considerations. Candidates who sit the examinations in these subjects will be awarded results based on the written and practical coursework components with the weighting for the practical skills test reallocated to the practical coursework. That is, in both Engineering and Construction Studies at Higher level in 2021, the modified written paper has a weighting of 50% and the coursework has a weighting of 50%. In both subjects at Ordinary level in 2021, the modified written paper has a weighting of 40% and the coursework has a weighting of 60%.

These adjustments should also be reflected in the SEC Accredited Grades process. A single overall estimated mark for these subjects as a whole is required, encompassing the two examination components of the practical coursework and the written examination – not a separate mark for each component.

13. Leaving Certificate Applied – specific information

A broadly similar process for arriving at the estimated mark applies for the Leaving Certificate Applied as is outlined previously in this document. The earlier information should be considered in conjunction with the information specific to the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in the published document [State Examinations and Accredited Grades - Arrangements for Leaving Certificate Applied 2021](#) and [A Guide to State Examinations and Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021](#). Also relevant is [Leaving Certificate Applied \(LCA\) Advice for management and teachers of LCA 2020/21 in Second-Level Schools and Centres for Education](#).

Given the modular nature of the LCA programme, students are assessed on the completion of each module. While estimated percentage marks are not required for the completion of modules, students' continued engagement in learning and the completion of key assignments provide evidence of learning and achievement that will assist teachers in the estimation process for the examination components of LCA. Schools are being asked to provide estimated percentage marks for assessments due for completion in May for Year two (session four) of LCA. Schools are also required to provide the same data for Year one (session two) students for a number of subjects and tasks as outlined below.

Note: Year two students have registered on the CSSP to opt in for Accredited Grades, examinations or both at this stage. They will be provided with a further opportunity to do this when the portal reopens between 27 and 30 April. Year one candidates have not been required to register on the CSSP. In the case of both Year one and Year two students, specific information in relation to subjects for which students are entered and their choices in respect of each one as to whether to receive an accredited grade or take the examination, or both, will be gathered directly from their schools by the SEC. Information in relation to this will be provided in due course.

13.1 What evidence informs professional judgement?

As noted earlier, it is important that the judgements are objective and only take account of evidence about student performance from both summative and formative assessment activities. Teacher knowledge and experience of the curriculum and the examination are essential to this process, as is consideration of all available and relevant evidence.

Other evidence for consideration specific to the LCA programme includes key assignments completed for both current and previous sessions in the subject as appropriate. Given the integrated and cross-curricular nature of the programme, consideration should also be giv-



en to how the students engaged with and performed in previous modules and tasks relevant to the subject area under consideration. [For example, when considering Social Education, students’ engagement with and performance in the Contemporary Issues Task, which is anchored in this subject, may be considered.](#)

13.2 Estimated percentage mark and in-school alignment in the case of LCA

A description of the process of arriving at the estimated percentage mark is provided earlier. This requires teachers to work independently to arrive at a draft estimated percentage mark for each student which is followed by review and consideration by the subject alignment group. In the case of the LCA there are two possible approaches that may be followed.

- It is likely that, for the most part, there will be a single teacher involved in teaching LCA subjects in each school. For this reason, it is advised, where possible, that the LCA co-ordinator undertakes the alignment process with the single subject teacher. The co-ordinator has significant experience with the programme requirements and also with the students

- An alternative approach to the process, which is satisfactory given the cross-curricular nature of the programme, is to involve a number of (or all of) the teachers of the relevant LCA students in a single collective process of estimating marks and alignment, assisted by the LCA Co-ordinator.

Given the support and guidance role to be performed by the LCA co-ordinator during this process 7 additional Leaving Certificate Aide days, will be assigned to the LCA co-ordinator, will be provided to schools for this work

13.3 Additional Guidance on LCA and Accredited Grades

More detailed guidance for schools to assist in the estimation of marks for all assessment components of the LCA is provided for use by LCA coordinators and teachers undertaking the accredited grades process for LCA in the document **Leaving Certificate Applied 2021: Guide for Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks.**

Part IV: Oversight by principal

14.Oversight of process by principal

In line with the principles of fairness, equity and objectivity, the principal has an important role in ensuring adherence to the principles of fairness, equity and objectivity for all involved in the Accredited Grades process. The principal will review the process applied to the collection of the data to assure the fair treatment of individual students. He/she will also ensure that an appropriate standard is applied consistently within the school and in situations where more than one class group is entered for a subject.

Principals should review the Forms B with regard to the estimated marks for each class group to confirm as far as possible in the circumstances that the standard applied by the teachers is fair and appropriate. This is of particular importance where there is more than one teacher teaching the subject. Forms B are reviewed by the principal to ensure that there is a consistency of standard across teachers and that the standards are comparable in respect of the estimated percentage mark. Such consistency of standards across teachers does **not** mean that the distribution of marks for each class should be the same. The principal, based on their own knowledge of the school along with their experience of examination outcomes from previous years, should be able to judge whether the standards being applied are broadly aligned.

While respecting the professional judgement of the teachers engaged in the in-school alignment process, where it appears that an anomaly or error has arisen, the data sets should be returned for further review to the subject alignment group. In such circumstances, the principal does not have any role in altering a student's estimated mark; their role is to return the queried marks to the subject alignment group for further review.

A principal may return the data sets to the subject alignment group for further review if they reasonably believe that one or more of the following grounds may apply:

- There was a procedural flaw in the process up to this point; for example a misalignment between the estimated marks for a class group as compared with other class groups
- There were unexplained inconsistencies in the data sets submitted following the subject alignment stage
- There is persuasive evidence that a student's estimated mark is inconsistent with the school's information on the student's achievement from a range of sources
- There is evidence of a lack of objectivity (i.e. bias, discrimination, undue influence) in the procedure as applied.

In instances where the data sets are returned by the principal to the subject alignment group for further consideration, the principal indicates the reason(s)/stated grounds for the return of the data. The stated grounds are confined to one or more of the above grounds. The group will consider the stated ground(s), and, if deemed necessary, will make any adjustments it may consider appropriate and return its final consideration to the principal.

Once the process of reviewing the data sets is concluded and the principal is satisfied that the process of alignment and, where applicable, the review, has transacted in good faith in accordance with this Guide, the Form B for each class will be counter-signed by the principal. At this stage, Forms A and B are no longer considered to be 'draft' versions; they are now considered to be the finalised records of the school's estimated percentage marks. The person(s) to whom the data entry task has been delegated will then commence the inputting of the data using the designated data collection system, the details of which are being finalised currently. There will be separate guidance provided for those involved in

this data submission process.

Once the final set of estimated percentage marks for each class is inputted, the principal will sign a printout of the final set of data. This is to be attached to the relevant Form B. This will constitute a confirmation that all processes have been completed at the point of submission of data.

The Forms A and Forms B should be kept securely in the school until the appeals process has concluded. See also note under 10.6 above.

After all of the data for all of the subjects has been entered, the Data Collection system will allow a view of the full suite of estimated marks submitted for each student on a single screen as a further check.

15. Specific measures for noting

15.1 Out-of-school subjects and out-of-school learners

Separate guidance has been published in relation to the Accredited Grades process for out of school subjects and out of school learners and is available The [Guide to Accredited grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 for \(a\) Out-of-school Subjects, and \(b\) Out-of-School Learners](#) and [Guide for Schools and Students on implementing the Accredited Grades Process for Out-of-School-Subjects and Out-of-School Learners](#).

15.2 Students new to the school

If there is not sufficient evidence available in the school on which to base a sound estimate, the principal should contact the previous school the student attended to ascertain whether additional information can be made available to support the process.

In most, if not all, instances, it should still be possible for the school to provide estimated marks for such a student, even if it does not prove possible to obtain information from the previous school. This will depend on how long the student has been in the school and the amount of evidence of learning that the school/relevant teacher has acquired. As much relevant information as possible should be sought and/or assembled to allow the teachers involved to make the best judgement possible in the circumstances.

15.3 Repeat students

If a student is repeating in the school, having previously been enrolled in that school for the first sitting of the Leaving Certificate, evidence of achievement from both cycles should be considered, but particular weight should be given to the student's work and level of achievement during the repeat year. If the student was a Leaving Certificate student in 2020, teachers should exercise great care in using evidence of learning during the period of school closure in 2020. If the student has a different teacher during the repeat year from the one they previously had, arrangements should be made to ensure that the most recent teacher (who will be making the estimate) is in a position to consult with the previous one and has access to any necessary documentation that may assist in providing an estimated percentage mark.

If the student was previously enrolled in a different school, the same procedures as described above in respect of *students new to the school* apply.

15.4 New or substitute teachers

The principal should seek to ensure that the estimates of student performance are made by the person best able to do so. In many cases, this will be a matter for the judgement of the principal of the circumstances that apply. In cases where teachers who have recently retired or are on approved leave or have moved to positions in other schools may still be contactable by the school, these teachers may be willing to co-operate with this process in whatever way they can in the best interests of the students in these circumstances.

Nonetheless, it is recognised that there may be cases where there is no access to the previous teacher, for a variety of reasons. In such a case, arrangements should be made for

assistance to be provided to the new teacher, whether that be by the principal or another experienced teacher of the subject in the school. Whatever can be done to ensure the best available estimates in the circumstances should be done.

16. Submission of Data

The submission of the data will be facilitated through a secure web-based application. Further guidance on the submission of data will issue shortly to the management of schools.

PART IV

Part V: Standardisation of data by the State Examinations Commission

17. Standardisation of data by the State Examinations Commission

Research makes clear that because teacher judgements are made in the context of each school, they need to be examined and adjusted at a national level to ensure comparability across different schools and that a common national standard is applied. For this reason, the school estimated percentage marks will be combined with recent national data through a process called standardisation in order to generate the SEC Accredited Grade for the students in the subject.

The school estimated percentage marks will be combined with national data through a process called standardisation in order to generate the Accredited Grade for the students in the subject. This standardisation process will seek to mitigate the effects that can arise from different schools, despite their best efforts, applying different standards in their estimation.

The standardisation process being used will not impose any predetermined mark on any individual in a class or a school. If the group of students in a school in the current year is particularly “strong”, the expected level of achievement of the group will reflect that fact. Likewise, if one or more individuals stand out as particularly strong, that will be reflected in the school’s estimated marks and will thereby be taken into account.

The past Leaving Certificate performance of the specific school concerned will not be used as part of the standardisation process.

18. Issue of provisional results

Candidates will receive the most beneficial combined outcome of their Accredited Grades and their Leaving Certificate examinations (if they choose to sit these examinations) at the same time. Where, in any subject, a student has opted for Accredited Grades and also to sit the examination, they will be credited with the better of the two results.

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 percentage marks submitted by their school and the final mark that generated the 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 each component.

For candidates who did not take the Leaving Certificate examinations, only the estimated percentage marks submitted by the school and the final mark that generated the Accredited Grades will be available.

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

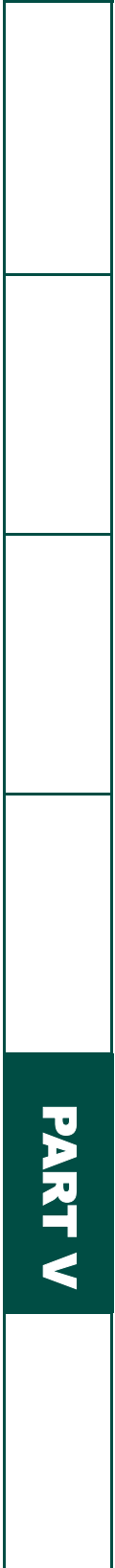
19. Appeals process

It will be open to a candidate to appeal their result in the Leaving Certificate examination and/or their Accredited Grade.

In the case of candidates appealing an Accredited Grade, the appeal shall be limited to establishing whether any error has occurred in respect of the transmission to, or receipt by, the Commission of the estimated mark for the subject concerned.

The scope of the appeal of the Accredited Grade does not encompass a reopening of or a challenge to the professional judgements exercised by a school (incorporating teachers, principals, and deputy principals) in generating the school's estimated percentage marks. Accordingly, no documentation other than the final completed Forms A and B in respect of all in-school candidates should be retained by the school in a secure location for the purpose of appeals.

Where the school processes Accredited Grades for a student who is studying a subject outside of the school, or for an out-of-school learner, the school should retain Forms OOS8 and OOS9 and any supporting documentation. In the event of an appeal that may arise as a result of a decision by the Panel of Registered Teachers not to submit an estimated percentage mark for a subject in these cases, such an appeal will only involve a review of the procedures implemented. The evidence of learning retained on file will not form part of such a procedural review. Retaining evidence of learning on file is to facilitate administration.



Part VI: General issues for teachers and principals

20. Confidentiality and data protection

In the course of the work, documentation that includes personal data about individuals will be accessed, generated, and discussed. It is important that all involved remain at all times in compliance with the school's data protection policies, whether that be in relation to generating, accessing or transmitting records, or in relation to the channels through which confidential information is discussed. For instance, if discussions are going to take place between colleagues over conference calls or using online facilities, the principal/deputy principal must be aware of the platform being used and satisfied that it is in compliance with the school's policy. If sharing digital drafts or finalised completed forms by email with colleagues across networks that extend beyond those controlled by the school, it is likely that the school's policy will require that the documents be encrypted, (or perhaps that they should not move that way at all). This needs to be confirmed before any material is shared. Likewise, if sharing these by some other digital means, the principal must be satisfied that the method used is satisfactory, before the alignment process commences.

Documentation should not be retained for any longer than it is required.

- For teachers: When the principal has signed off on the post-alignment estimated marks and submitted them, subject teachers **should not retain** copies of Forms A or B or any drafts of the forms or any documentation that was generated in the course of completing them. Any such documentation should be conclusively and securely disposed of.
- For the principal: When the principal has signed off on the post-alignment estimated marks and submitted them, they should retain copies of Forms A and B in a secure location for the purposes of appeal.
- Where the school processes Accredited Grades for a student who is studying a subject outside of the school, or for an out-of-school learner, the school should retain Forms OOS-8 and OOS-9 and any supporting documentation until the school has been notified that all stages of the appeal process have been completed.

If a school receives a data access request from a student for their estimated marks before the issue of results, the school should respond to say that:

- In line with section 56 of the Data Protection Act, it is not possible to respond to the request at present, and
- the request will be taken to have been made on the later of either the date of the first publication of the results of the 'examination' (i.e. the Accredited Grades process), or the date of the request.

In an effort to reduce the volume of requests that might be made to schools for this data, the guidance provided to students will also make this clear.

ETB schools are public bodies for the purposes of FOI. While each FOI body is an independent decision-maker, the DES is of the view that Section 30(1)(a) of the FOI Act provides a basis for exempting the estimated grade from being released prior to the final Accredited grade being issued.

21. Conflicts of interest

The principles of equity, fairness and objectivity are paramount in the accredited grades system. If there is a student in a class about whom there is an actual or perceived conflict of interest involved in giving an estimated mark to, such as a son, daughter, sister, brother, nephew or niece of the relevant teacher, this should be drawn to the attention of the principal by the teacher. The teacher may still need to assist with the process, by handing over data or factual information, but must not be involved in any judgement process that relates to that student as an individual. There will be additional oversight by the principal/deputy principal in such cases. This will include the principal/deputy principal countersigning Form A to confirm that appropriate arrangements were put in place and that they provided additional oversight and approval of the estimated mark. In instances where the principal is the teacher concerned, the deputy principal will make the necessary arrangements and oversee all tasks in relation to this student and this student's class.

22. Student-teacher contact and fairness in the Accredited Grades model

The principal, deputy principal(s), teachers and 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 or any other party seeming or purporting to act on behalf of a 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.

Therefore, the holding of 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 and must not under any circumstances involve any discussion related to the estimated marks that the school is submitting.

Teachers, school management 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.

Where a person communicates with a person who performs a function in relation to the provision of an estimated mark (e.g. teacher, tutor, principal, other person), either on behalf of themselves or another person, for the purpose of improperly influencing the consideration of any matter which falls to be considered or decided in performing that function, that communication is prohibited. If this happens to a person who performs a function in relation to the provision of an estimated mark, they must not entertain that communication and should state that they cannot engage in a discussion on any aspect of the estimated percentage mark. If they are a teacher or tutor, they must report it to the principal and the prin-



principal must acknowledge in writing receipt of this information. In the case of a principal or other person, they must report it to the Department/State Examinations Commission. If it is reported to the principal, they must immediately notify the Department/SEC in writing of any information they received. The Department/SEC must acknowledge in writing receipt of this information from the principal or other person. Where a prohibited communication occurs, the Department/SEC may carry out a review. Following that review, the Department/SEC may, following due process, withhold the results of that candidate. Where, in relation to the provision of any estimated mark, a person provides false or misleading information, again following a review, the Department/SEC may also withhold results.

The terms and procedures for the withholding of results by the SEC will be set down in regulations. Those regulations will provide for a right of appeal against a decision to withhold results. Where any such matter arises prior to those regulations, and their parent legislation, coming into operation, this should be reported to the Department and will be examined by it.

23. Basis of the accredited grades model

The accredited grades model was established by the Minister for Education following a Government decision. This decision was made following consultation regarding the arrangements for Leaving Certificate 2021 with representatives of students, teachers, school management bodies, school leaders, the State Examinations Commission, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the Department of Education.

In making its decision, Government decided to approve the Minister putting in place a system for the Accredited Grades model which is to be managed by the Minister until such time as the legislation is enacted to allow the SEC to administer the Accredited Grades scheme for Leaving Certificate 2021.

Pending the enactment of legislation to allow the SEC to administer the Accredited Grades Scheme for Leaving Certificate 2021, the Minister recognises that teachers and schools will carry out the duties described in this Guide, *Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 Guide for Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks* [April 2021] on behalf of the Minister. This means that all of the tasks being undertaken by teachers, principals and schools are being done on behalf of the Minister and further to the exercise by her of her Executive powers in establishing the accredited grades model.

24. Legal indemnity

As teachers, school leaders and educational professionals working in education centres and other settings will be implementing the Accredited Grades process in these settings, arrangements are being put in place to extend a State indemnity to them, to the boards of management, patrons and any other person performing a function in relation to the provision of estimated marks. The indemnity could be invoked where someone is sued in their own capacity (i.e. named in civil proceedings as an individual teacher, principal or board of management/ETB or other patron).

This indemnity will be subject to conditions around notification and cooperation with the State in defending any legal cases should they arise and will only be capable of being invoked where a person has acted bona fide, i.e. has made every reasonable effort to carry out their role in accordance with the guidance provided in this Guide and the relevant circular(s) of the Department and the State Examinations Commission.

Appendices

Process for generating Accredited Grades in 2021

Form A: Estimated Percentage Mark

Form B: Class Estimated Marks Verification

Overview of the School Estimated Process for the Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021

Documentation

Teachers should familiarise themselves with the various guides associated with the relevant Accredited Grades process available at gov.ie/leavingcertificate



14 May 2021

If administering an in-class teacher-designed test, the test should be no more than one lesson in duration (maximum one hour) and a maximum of three class tests may be administered up to **14 May 2021**.

Teacher's Estimation

Teachers use their professional judgement - draw on existing records and available evidence



14 May to 28 May 2021

Phase one of the subject alignment process will take place during this period. During this phase, the teachers may individually prepare for subject alignment meetings, and may commence the subject alignment process without impacting on tuition time

Completion of Forms

Teachers complete Form A for each student and Form B for each class group.



31 May to 3 June 2021

The Principal signs off on the School's estimated percentage marks.



Phase two of the subject alignment process will take place in the week beginning 31 May 2021.

From the 31 May to 3 June, schools will finalise the alignment process and prepare the estimated percentage marks for transmission through the web based application by 3 June.



Leaving Certificate 2021 – Estimated percentage mark

Read the two documents *A Guide to the Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate Students 2021* and *Guide to Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks* before completing this form. Complete one copy for each student in the class.

Do not divulge the estimated marks to the students or discuss your assessment of their likely performance with them in any way.

1. Student, subject and level details

Student's name:						
Student's examination number:						
Subject						
Programme			Level as confirmed to school by SEC			
LCE	LCVP	LCA	Higher	Ordinary	Foundation	N/A
Teacher's name:						
School roll number:						

2. Relevant information considered

I have taken account of all relevant information available to me about this student's achievement levels in the subject over senior cycle as follows

my experience of working with the student in class, and the quality of their assignments and key assignments (LCA)	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
my own records of the student's work, level of achievement	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
marks, grades, and other subject-specific information available on the school's centralised data system	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
the quality of work demonstrated in any partially or fully completed	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>

In addition, when determining the estimated percentage mark submitted,

I have taken account of any bonus marks that the student would have received for answering through Irish.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
I have taken into consideration the various assessment components, where applicable, for the subject area, such as oral, aural, written, practical and coursework	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
I have based my estimate on the assumption that any approved reasonable accommodations would have been made available.	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>
I have taken into consideration the adjustments to the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> not applicable <input type="checkbox"/>

3. Estimated percentage mark

Insert the overall percentage mark that you believe that this student will achieve if they proceed to take the 2021 examinations, based on their current observed levels of achievement. The estimate should reflect composite overall performance in the subject, with each component of the examination (written, practical, coursework, oral, aural) being considered in accordance with its proper weighting and taking account of adjustments to the Leaving Certificate examinations 2021.

Estimated percentage mark:	%
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Note: please sign overleaf →

4. Declaration regarding the school’s estimated mark

I confirm that:

- I have made all reasonable efforts to assemble as much of the relevant information as possible
- I have given due consideration both to the data and to my experience of working with this student
- I have reflected on the degree to which previous groups of students I taught have achieved Leaving Certificate grades that met my expectations
- I have participated in the process to assure alignment of standards among teachers of the same subject in the school
- Following these considerations, the estimate is the school’s considered professional judgement as to the overall percentage mark that this student is most likely to achieve in if they were to sit the adjusted examinations in 2021.

Signature:	Date:
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The above declaration must be signed. If the form is completed digitally, then it must be printed out and signed.

5. Conflict of interest

This section should **only** be completed where a perceived or real conflict of interest has been identified in relation to giving an estimated mark.

I confirm that:

- Arrangements appropriate to the circumstances have been made, and
- I have provided additional oversight and approval on the estimated mark.

Signature:	Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Principal <input type="checkbox"/>	Date:
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<p>Class ID:</p> <p>To be added at data entry stage</p>
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An Roinn Oideachais
Department of Education

Form B

Leaving Certificate 2021 – Class Estimated Marks Verification

Read the two documents *A Guide to the Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate Students 2021* and *Guide to Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks* before completing this form. This form is used to check that no two students at the same level (Higher, Ordinary, Foundation, Common) have been placed on the same estimated percentage mark. A separate form should be used for each level within a class. Class groups for the same subject should not be combined. This form should only be completed after an estimated percentage mark form (Form A) has been completed for each student.

1. Teacher, subject and level details

Programme:	LCE/LCVP <input type="checkbox"/>	LCA <input type="checkbox"/>
Subject:		
Level:		
Teacher's name:		
School roll number:		

2. Class confirmation list

Carefully list the students by examination number from lowest to highest. The mark entered for each student must correspond to the estimated percentage mark on Form A for that student.

Examination Number	Name	Estimated % Mark

I confirm that:

- I have checked that each estimated percentage mark entered above is the same as the value entered on the corresponding Form A for the student
- I have checked that no two students have been awarded the same percentage mark in accordance with the Guide to Schools

The above list represents the school’s considered professional judgement as to the overall percentage mark the school believes each student will achieve if they proceed to take the 2021 examinations, based on their current observed levels of achievement.

Signature:		Date:
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The above declaration must be signed. If the form is completed digitally, then it must be printed out and signed.

I confirm that:

I have checked the information on the above form and all associated Forms A

The process of reviewing the data sets is concluded and I am satisfied that the process of alignment and, where applicable, the review has transacted in good faith and in accordance with the *Guide to Schools*

Signature:	Principal <input type="checkbox"/> Deputy Principal <input type="checkbox"/>	Date:
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