

Ministerial Announcement on Leaving Certificate

Minister for Education Norma Foley TD has today confirmed that the gradual return to normal Leaving Certificate outcomes will begin in 2025. For students in 2024, there will be no change from last year with grades to stay at the same level on average.

This means that, as with 2022 and 2023, the State Examinations Commission (SEC) will continue to apply a post-marking adjustment after all marking on the Leaving Certificate examinations is completed to ensure grades in the aggregate reach the appropriate levels.

From next year, the SEC will apply a post marking adjustment which will bring the overall Leaving Certificate results in the aggregate to a point broadly midway between the 2020 and 2021 level.

The level of future year adjustments to examinations and assessment after 2025 and the timeline for phasing out a post-marking adjustment will be informed by the 2025 experience.

Minister Foley said:

“As is widely recognised, we must return aggregate results towards pre-pandemic levels. However, given the disruption to teaching and learning for students, it was right to maintain overall results at their current level in the last two years through a post-marking adjustment. It is right to do so again in 2024, with the majority of students this year not having had the opportunity to sit Junior Cycle examinations given that most students sitting the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2024 would have completed Junior Cycle in 2021.

“We must over time return to the normal arrangements for the Leaving Certificate outcomes, and by making a modest, gradual reduction in the level of post-marking adjustment applied, we will minimise the impact on students in so far as possible.

“I can confirm that the process of returning Leaving Certificate outcomes to pre-pandemic levels will begin for 2025 students and it will be a gradual process, in line with my commitment that there would be no cliff-edge in terms of a return to pre-pandemic outcomes.

“This means there will still be a post-marking adjustment exercise in 2025 that will seek to bring the overall set of results on the aggregate to a point no lower than broadly midway between the 2020 and 2021 levels. While lower than the 2024 outcomes, results on the aggregate in 2025 are expected to be above 2019 levels by at least 5.5 percentage points on average.”

Following on from confirmation on the application of a post-marking adjustment to the overall set of results in 2024, the SEC has today advised that it intends to issue the Leaving Certificate 2024 results on Friday 23 August. Minister Foley said: “I am delighted that this clarity has allowed the SEC to confirm that it intends to issue Leaving Certificate 2024 results on Friday 23 August, bringing welcome certainty for this year’s students.”

Minister Foley also announced today that existing assessment adjustments for Leaving Certificate which apply for students in 2024 will continue to apply in 2025.

Minister Foley said:

“I can confirm that the existing assessment adjustments that have been in place for the past two years and again this year will stay in place in 2025. So students will continue to benefit from these adjustments, including greater choice in examinations, enabling them to perform at their best.” Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Patrick O’Donovan TD, has welcomed the clarity today’s announcement has provided.

Minister O'Donovan said:

“We recognise the challenges that the pandemic heaped upon our young people through their school experience and, in fact, this year's cohort didn't even have the opportunity to sit their Junior Cycle examinations.

"In spite of the adversity they faced, the education system and our young people responded admirably, often navigating a virtual world to ensure students could still pursue their dreams and career goals.

"But it is important that the special arrangements introduced in response to COVID-19 to begin to be unwound, and I welcome the clarity Minister Foley's announcement today provides. We must consider the impact adjustments have on both past and future Leaving Certificate students. We have started on the path towards unwinding these adjustments.”

Minister Foley also confirmed that in respect of Junior Cycle, the assessment adjustments in place since 2022 in relation to Classroom Based Assessment will remain for students sitting Junior Cycle in 2025 and 2026. Guidance for schools in that regard will issue in due course, informed by the findings of the Longitudinal Study on the Framework for Junior Cycle, commissioned by the NCCA, which is expected to be complete in late 2024.

Notes for Editors

An increase in the overall set of results has been noted in Ireland and internationally following pandemic-related interventions. In Ireland, the implementation of Calculated Grades in 2020 and Accredited Grades alongside examinations in 2021 resulted in overall results on the aggregate, as measured on the composite, level adjusted scale, rising by 4.4 percentage points in 2020, and by a further 2.6 percentage points in 2021, or overall approximately 7 percentage points higher than those in 2019.

In order to ensure that students who had been impacted by the Covid pandemic would not be disadvantaged with regard to access to further and higher education, Minister Foley made a commitment that there would be no cliff-edge seen in terms of the overall set of Leaving Certificate results. Two types of intervention have been implemented in recent years.

The first of these is adjustments to the examination and assessments arrangements. These play to student strengths by leaving intact the familiar overall structure of the examinations, while incorporating additional choice for students in the examinations. In some cases, the adjustment measures provide more time for tuition by, for example, reducing preparatory work for practical examinations.

The second intervention is the application by the State Examinations Commission of a post-marking adjustment to the marks arrived at through the normal marking process in both 2022 and 2023. This post-marking adjustment has ensured that results in the aggregate have remained the same on average since 2021.

This approach was justified given the ongoing disruption to learning which students had experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in keeping with the approach taken in neighbouring jurisdictions, it is now timely to plan the return to normal Leaving Certificate outcomes and phasing out of the post-marking adjustment.

Clarity on Leaving Cert result processes and timelines is critical to ensuring smooth transitions for students into post-school options, and enabling planning in the tertiary education sector.

It is intended that in 2025, a post-marking adjustment will mean that results on the aggregate are expected to be above 2019 levels by at least 5.5 percentage points on average.

This will be a gradual process, in line with Minister Foley's commitment that there would be no cliff-edge in terms of a return to pre-pandemic outcomes.

Once the 2025 examinations process (including marking, post marking adjustment and provision of results following any appeals) is complete, the experience will be reviewed in order to determine the approach for the following year.

In relation to examinations and assessment adjustments, in 2024 and 2025 these will be the same as that applied to State examinations in 2023, but updated as relevant. Detail on the adjusted assessment arrangements for every subject/module descriptor in the Leaving Certificate Established, Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and Junior Cycle programmes will be issued to schools in due course, and schools will be asked to ensure that all students are made aware of these changes.