

New Leaving Certificate Grading Scale and revised Common Points Scale

The Universities and the Institutes of Technology have been working in partnership with the Department of Education and Skills to bring about progressive and incremental enhancements of the transition from second to third level. The central focus of this work has been to agree reforms of Leaving Certificate assessment and grading and the admissions processes to higher education, in order to mitigate some of the undesirable effects of the so-called 'points system'.

As part of this process, it has been agreed to change how the Leaving Certificate examinations are graded, using fewer broader grade bands. The current 14-point grading scale (A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, etc. where the grade bands typically cover 5%) will be replaced by an 8-point scale (based on a grade band 10% wide). This requires a new Common Points Scale. The revisions to the Common Points Scale and associated adjustments are being made jointly by the universities and the Institutes of Technology. These revised arrangements have been the subject of extensive discussions with the HEIs and their governance structures during the period of development. The revised arrangements will be applied by all universities, institutes of technology and their linked providers from 2017.

1. New Leaving Certificate Grading Scale in 2017

The Department of Education and Skills will introduce a new Leaving Certificate grading scale in 2017. The new scale has 8 grades, the highest grade is a Grade 1, the lowest grade a Grade 8. The highest seven grades 1-7 divide the marks range 100% to 30% into seven equal grade bands 10% wide, with a grade 8 being awarded for percentage marks for 0 to 29.9%. The grades at higher level and ordinary level are distinguished by prefixing the grade with H or O respectively, giving H1-H8 at higher level, and O1-O8 at ordinary level.

New Grades	% Marks
H1 / O1	90-100
H2 / O2	80<90
H3 / O3	70<80
H4 / O4	60<70
H5 / O5	50<60
H6 / O6	40<50
H7 / O7	30<40
H8 / O8	0<30

Table 1. New LC grading scale, to be introduced in 2017

This new 8-point grading scale will replace the current 14-point scale at both Higher and Ordinary levels. The objective is to reduce pressure on students. Currently, the majority of students receiving a given grade are within 3 percentage marks of a higher grade, and 5 extra points, creating pressure towards rote learning and using the marking scheme to gain those few additional marks. The new broader grade bands will ease the pressure on students to achieve marginal gains in each examination. The new grading system will also allow for greater flexibility, variety and innovation in Leaving Certificate assessments. The broader objective is to allow for an enhanced learner experience in senior cycle, with a greater focus on the achievement of broader learning objectives.

The new 8-point scale moves the Irish Leaving Certificate closer to school leaving examinations in other countries, such as Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, Finland, and to the International Baccalaureate.

2. Revised Common Points Scale in 2017

The Irish universities, Institutes of Technology and all other colleges which accept applications through the CAO, will introduce a revised Common Points Scale in 2017, as follows:

Higher		Ordinary	
Grade	Points	Grade	Points
H1	100		
H2	88		
H3	77		
H4	66		
H5	56	O1	56
H6	46	O2	46
H7	37	O3	37
H8	0	O4	28
		O5	20
		O6	12
		O7	0
		O8	0

Table 2. Revised Common Points Scale, to be introduced in 2017

The main features of this revised Common Points Scale can be summarised as follows:

- A revised points scale is required as a result of the new 2017 LC grade bands.
- The revised points scale maintains the current alignment between the points awarded for achievement at Higher Level and the points awarded for achievement at Ordinary Level. The validity of this alignment has been confirmed by research conducted by the Education Research Centre. This ensures that due recognition is given to a broad range of second-level learning achievements and will encourage and promote wide participation in higher education.
- The revised points scale will minimise the use of random selection in the admissions process, by minimising the number of candidates presenting with identical points scores. This is achieved by using a non-linear points scale, which distributes candidates across the full range of possible points scores (0 – 600). The new scale has been optimised based on extensive mathematical analysis and modelling of the distributions of points scores that would result from different non-linear scales.
- The revised points scale will award points for the new H7 grade. This is designed to encourage the take-up of higher level curricula in senior cycle, and to reduce the risk of taking higher level examinations. At present, many students (up to 20% in some subjects) withdraw from higher level close to the LC examination. Furthermore, the research conducted by the Education Research Centre confirms that the level of achievement represented by a H7 is equivalent to the level of achievement represented by an O3, and the State Examinations Commission will reinforce this alignment through their standard-setting and grading processes. Given that points will be awarded for an O3, it is appropriate to award the same number of points for a H7 grade.
- The revised points scale is also designed to reward high levels of performance in some subjects above more even performance across a broader number of subjects. The revised scale distinguishes between applicants who would otherwise, under the existing points scale, achieve equal aggregate points scores. For example, under the current points scale, an applicant with 6 higher level C1 grades is awarded 420 points. An applicant with 3 higher level C3 grades and 3 higher level B2 grades is also awarded 420 points. Under the new points scale, in 2017 an applicant with 6 H4 grades will be awarded 396 points, while an applicant with 3 H3 grades and 3 H5 grades will be awarded 399 points.

Given the non-linear design and other features of the new points scale, a simple comparison of an applicant's points score under the new scale with the pre-2017 points scale will not be possible. Students will, on average, receive slightly less points than under the current system. However, all students

applying through the CAO from 2017 will be awarded the new points, no matter when they sat the Leaving Certificate. This means that all students applying through the CAO will be on a level playing-field.

3. Bonus points for Mathematics

25 bonus points will continue be awarded in 2017 for higher level mathematics, at grades H6 and above, in a manner similar to the present scheme.

4. Revised Basic Matriculation requirements in 2017

As a result of the new Leaving Certificate grades, in 2017 the universities and Institutes of Technology will also introduce revised basic matriculation requirements, as follows:

- Where the requirements are currently 5 ordinary level D3 grades, in 2017 these will become 5 O6/H7 grades.
- Where the requirements are currently 2 higher level C3 grades and 4 ordinary level D3 grades, in 2017 these will become 2 H5 and 4 O6/H7 grades.
- Where the requirements are currently 3 higher level C3 grades and 3 ordinary level D3 grades, in 2017 these will become 3 H5 and 3 O6/H7 grades.

Subject requirements which form part of basic matriculation remain unchanged. Any revised subject requirements specific to individual courses for 2017 will be approved and published by each HEI over the coming period.

5. Revised scoring for QQI-FET awards

From 2017 the points awarded for QQI-FET (formerly FETAC) awards will also be revised in order to maintain the current equivalence with the Leaving Certificate. This is required in order to maintain the existing equivalence with the current points scale, and reflects the overall marginal reductions in student points scores under the new points scale.

Currently the maximum possible total score of 360 (120 credits x 3 for a distinction) is multiplied by 10 and divided by 9 to give a maximum overall points score of 400. From 2017, this maximum possible total score of 360 will be multiplied by 13 and divided by 12, to give a revised maximum overall points score of 390 for applicants from further education and training.

6. Revised scoring for LCVP awards

Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) grades are aligned with the current Leaving Certificate grading scheme and its points equivalent. With the introduction in 2017 of the new Leaving Certificate grades, points will be award for LCVP as follows:

LCVP Grade	Current Points	Revised LCVP Points
Distinction	70	66
Merit	50	46
Pass	30	28

Table 3. Revised points for LVCP awards, to be introduced in 2017

7. Scoring for pre-2017 Leaving Certificate applicants

All of the current (pre-2017) LC grades from D3-A1 can be mapped directly to a grade on the new grading scale. For example, the existing A2 and B1 grade bands are both collapsed into the new grade 2. This means that for students who sat the Leaving Certificate before 2017, the A2 and B1 grade should both be treated the same as a new grade 2. The points to be awarded from 2017 for pre-2017 Leaving Certificate grades are set out in the tables below. In line with the decision to award points to students who achieve a grade of H7 under the new Leaving Certificate grading scheme, students who achieved an E grade at Higher Level under the earlier grading schemes will from 2017 be awarded points.

The current (pre-2017) E grade band covers from 25–39% and does not map directly onto the new H7 grade band, which covers the range 30-39%. Therefore, the points awarded for a pre-2017 higher level E grade will be less than for a H7 and have been calculated mathematically on the non-linear scale at 33 points.

Points will be therefore awarded to students who sat the Leaving Certificate from 1992-2016 as follows:

Current (pre-2017) Leaving Certificate grading scale	New Leaving Certificate grading scale	New points at Higher level	New points at Ordinary level
A1	H1 / O1	100	56
A2	H2 / O2	88	46
B1			
B2	H3 / O3	77	37
B3			
C1			
C2	H4 / O4	66	28
C3			
D1	H5 / O5	56	20
D2			
D3			
E	H6 / O6	46	12
		33	0

Table 4. Points for pre-2017 Leaving Certificate applicants, to be introduced in 2017

The pre-1992 grade bands have been converted to the new grade that matches 2/3rd of the percentage range. These grades will from 2017 then be scored under the revised points scale. It should be noted that all applicants presenting these pre-1992 results will be mature students.

Pre-1992 LC Grade	Percentage	Current Points Awarded Higher Level	Current Points Awarded Ordinary Level	New LC Grade Equivalent	New Points Awarded Higher Level	New Points Awarded Ordinary Level
A	85 - 100	95	55	H1/O1	100	56
B	70 < 85	80	40	H3/O3	77	37
C	55 < 70	65	25	H4/O4	66	28
D	40 < 55	50	10	H6/O6	46	12
E	25 < 40	0	0		33	0
F	10 < 25					
NG	<10					

Table 5. Points for pre-1992 applicants, to be introduced in 2017