

SUPPORTING A BETTER TRANSITION FROM SECOND LEVEL TO HIGHER EDUCATION:

Implementation and Next Steps



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Whole-of-System Approach Transition Reform Group

- Department of Education and Skills
- State Examinations Commission
- Institutes of Technology Ireland
- Irish Universities Association
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- Higher Education Authority
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland



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Background

- Dual use of the Leaving Certificate to record achievement in second-level and to select for higher education gave rise to concerns
- High pressure and high stakes led to:
- Impact on second-level students and on teaching and learning at second-level
- Impact on student experience in early undergraduate years
- Three key directions identified in March 2013 have been built upon by the partners on the Group – 4 areas of change.



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ISSUES
RELATING TO
PREDICTABILITY
IN THE LEAVING
CERTIFICATE

A NEW GRADING
STRUCTURE FOR
THE LEAVING
CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATION

A PROPOSED
APPROACH FOR A
REVISED COMMON
POINTS SCALE FOR
ENTRY INTO HIGHER
EDUCATION

BROADER
UNDERGRADUATE
ENTRY



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Predictability Research

- Much public discussion around the exams as to what may or may not “come up” – creates high pressure environment for students and teachers;
- Is predictability a major feature of the Leaving Certificate?
- SEC asked Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment to find out;
- Major study on the Leaving Certificate complete - full report and 4 working papers to be published by the SEC on Friday 1st May 2015.



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Predictability – Key Findings and Next steps

- Predictability not a major concern but there is some minor predictability issues in a small number of subjects examined;
- Perception of predictability in public discourse does not serve students well – research showed that those who thought they could predict the exam tended to perform less well than those who had not narrowed their preparation too much;
- Report raises wider issues about the Leaving Certificate to be considered further - the Department of Education and Skills has formally requested the advice of the State Examinations on how to address the issues identified.



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New Grading Structure – Why change

The current model with 14 narrow grade bands of 5%:

- Puts pressure on students to achieve marginal gains in examination performance
- Focuses excessive student attention on the detail of the assessment process rather than the achievement of broader learning objectives
- Is quite unique internationally
- Consultation - support from practitioners and students for a model of based on an eight-point grading scale based on 10% grading bands.



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New Grading Structure

Existing (14-point) Scale	% Awarded	NEW SCALE	% Awarded
A1	90-100	H1 / O1	90-100
A2	85<90	H2 / O2	80<90
B1	80<85		
B2	75<80		
B3	70<75	H3 / O3	70<80
C1	65<70	H4 / O4	60<70
C2	60<65		
C3	55<65		
D1	50<55	H5 / O5	50<60
D2	45<50		
D3	40<45		
E	25<40	H6 / O6	40<50
		H7 / O7	
F	10<25	H8 / O8	0<30



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New Grading Structure Implications

Less pressure on students to chase every mark

But broader grading bands = more students on the same grade

- Implications for selection for Higher Education (random selection)
- To be addressed by broader entry routes and careful design of a revised common points scale



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Proposals for a revised points scale

Universities and Institutes of Technology developing a revised common points scale with the objectives of:

- Fairly rewarding scholastic achievement;
- Minimising random selection
- Preserving the relative value of ordinary level and higher level in the current points scale;
- Incentivising the take-up of higher level subjects



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A worked example – revised points scale

Higher Level Grade %	Sample CAO Points (HL)	Sample CAO Points (OL)	Ordinary Level Grade %
H1 (90-100)	120		
H2 (80<90)	106		
H3 (70<80)	93		
H4 (60<70)	81		
H5 (50<60)	70	73	O1 (90-100)
H6 (40<50)	60	60	O2 (80<90)
		47	O3 (70<80)
H7 (30<40)	45	34	O4 (60<70)
		21	O5 (50<60)
		8	O6 (40<50)
			O7 (30<40)
H8 (0<30)			O8 (0<30)



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Key Features of Proposals

- Number of points with each step-up in grade vary by different amounts at higher level to reduce risk of students ending up on the same points total and to minimise use of random selection;
- All options being fully tested and modelled on Leaving Certificate examination data;
- Ordinary Level O1 and O2 grades equate to H5 and H6 grades – preserving the current relative value of higher and ordinary level;
- Points are awarded for a H7 (30<40%) – removing risk for students aiming higher of not receiving any points for this level of achievement;



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Broader Undergraduate Entry

- Reduces complexity – more than 1,000 choices at this level in the universities and institutes of technology alone - difficult to navigate for students;
- Clearer choices should lead to better choices;
- Commitments are being met by both sectors – institutes of technology have reviewed all Level 8 programmes and are putting common entry routes in place with denominated routes;
- Universities have reduced routes to 2011 levels and committed to further reduction of 20% of entry routes in the university sector by 2017;
- Restructuring and curricular reform offers broader experience for students in 1st year with specialisation further into their degree.



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Next steps and timelines

- A revised common points scale to be finalised and published by the higher education institutions in September 2015;
- Research and evaluation systems to build on evidence base to assess impact and inform further phases;
- New grading scale and revised common points scale will first apply to those sitting their Leaving Certificate in 2017.



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Transition Reform Announcement

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