



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission**

Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath

Cir. S18 /17

TO THE BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT/AUTHORITIES OF SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS.

The purpose of this circular is to bring to your attention changes at the 2017 examinations which you are asked to draw to the notice of teachers, students, parents and guardians. These changes concern;

1. LEAVING CERTIFICATE GRADING SYSTEM CHANGES
2. GRADING OF JUNIOR CYCLE ENGLISH
3. COLOUR OF EXAMINATION PAPERS
4. ON-LINE MARKING OF JUNIOR CYCLE/CERTIFICATE ENGLISH AND HIGHER LEVEL FRENCH

1. Leaving Certificate Grading System Changes

A new grading system will apply to all of Leaving Certificate subjects from 2017. The new grading system reduces the number of grades from 14 in the old system to 8 under the revised arrangements.

The following table provides an explanation of the revised grading system compared to the previous grading system.

Level	OLD		NEW	
	Percentage	Grade Descriptor	Percentage	Grade Descriptor
Higher, Ordinary, Foundation/ Ard, Gnath, Bonn	≥ 90 to 100	A1	≥ 90 to 100	1
	≥ 85 and < 90	A2	≥ 80 and < 90	2
	≥ 80 and < 85	B1	≥ 70 and < 80	3
	≥ 75 and < 80	B2	≥ 60 and < 70	4
	≥ 70 and < 75	B3	≥ 50 and < 60	5
	≥ 65 and < 70	C1	≥ 40 and < 50	6
	≥ 60 and < 65	C2	≥ 30 and < 40	7
	≥ 55 and < 60	C3	≥ 0 and < 30	8
	≥ 50 and < 55	D1		
	≥ 45 and < 50	D2		
	≥ 40 and < 45	D3		
	≥ 25 and < 40	E		
	≥ 10 and < 25	F		
	≥ 0 and < 10	NG		

The new grading system will be used on Statements of Provisional Examination Results and on the final Leaving Certificates.

The grades will be used consistently across all three examination levels – Higher, Ordinary and Foundation. The Statements and Certificates will indicate the level taken using the following notation beside each subject

Higher/Ard level, H/A
 Ordinary/Gnath level, O/G
 Foundation/Bonn level F/B

All grades will be awarded in accordance with the published grading system and no tolerances can be applied. Note that the use of percentages is used to facilitate understanding of the Grading system. In the examination marking and resulting processes, grades are derived from marks not percentages. So for example while a mark of 539 out of 600 in an examination is worth 89.83% when expressed as a percentage, the grading is awarded based on the marks which equate to a Grade 2. Rounding up to the next grade band is not permissible.

2. Grading of Junior Cycle English

English is the first subject being examined in the reformed Junior Cycle programme. A revised grading system will apply in English this year which will be rolled out to other subjects as other reformed subjects come on stream. This means that this year the grading that applies to English and that which applies to all other Junior Certificate subjects will be different. From this year's examinations, both sets of grades will be in use; the new descriptors for Junior Cycle English and the existing Junior Certificate grades for all other subjects. This format of grading will continue to apply until 2021 when the last of the Junior Certificate examinations are terminated.

In the Junior Certificate, candidates will continue to achieve grades of A, B, C etc. to NG based on marks achieved, a total of 7 grades.

In the Junior Cycle, achievement will be indicated using the grade descriptors of Distinction, Higher Merit, Merit, Achieved, Partially Achieved, and Not Graded, a total of 6 grade descriptors.

The following table provides an explanation of the current and revised grading system for Junior Certificate / Cycle subjects.

Level	Junior Certificate		Junior Cycle	
	Percentage	Grade Descriptor	Percentage	Grade Descriptor
Higher, Ordinary, Foundation ¹	≥ 85 to 100	A	≥ 90 to 100	Distinction
Ard, Gnath, Bonn ¹	≥ 70 and < 85	B	≥ 75 and < 90	Higher Merit
	≥ 55 and < 70	C	≥ 55 and < 75	Merit
	≥ 40 and < 55 ²	D	≥ 40 and < 55	Achieved
	≥ 25 and < 40	E	≥ 20 and < 40	Partially Achieved
	≥ 10 and < 25	F	≥ 0 and < 20	Not Graded (NG)
	≥ 0 and < 10 ³	NG		

Both the old and the new grading systems will appear side-by-side on the Statements of Provisional Examination Results issued by the SEC and on the final Junior Certificate Profile of Achievement (JCPA) which will be generated by schools and issued for the first time in respect of the 2017 examinations. The JCPA will include details of the final grades awarded by the SEC following the conclusion of the Junior Certificate/Cycle appeals process. The technical arrangements for the production of the JCPA are currently being finalised by the Department of Education and Skills. A broad outline of the arrangements that will apply are set out in Department of Education and Skills circular letter 15/20017. Final details will be communicated to schools and centres by the Department in due course.

Junior Cycle English will be offered at Higher and Ordinary Level and there is no longer a Foundation level option in this subject.

From 2017, the descriptor NG will be shown on Junior Certificate/Cycle Statements of Provisional Examination Results and on the final JCPA in respect of both Junior Certificate and Junior Cycle subjects

3. Colour of Examination Papers

Examination papers are traditionally printed on coloured paper with different colours representing different levels. To improve the readability of the examination papers the SEC is changing the appearance of the examination papers from the 2017 examinations by providing examination papers printed on white paper with the colour of the paper only appearing on the outside cover. In general, the 2017 examination papers for Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied and Junior Certificate /Junior Cycle will be printed on white paper with colour on the outer covers, details as below:

Leaving Certificate:

Higher level: Pink cover with white inner pages
Ordinary level: Blue cover with white inner pages
Foundation level: Peach cover with white inner pages

Leaving Certificate Applied:

Common Level: Cream cover with white inner pages

Junior Certificate:

Higher Level: White cover with white inner pages (same as in previous years)
Ordinary Level: Yellow cover with white inner pages
Foundation Level: Green cover with white inner pages
Common Level White cover with white inner pages (same as in previous years)

Junior Cycle English:

Higher Level: Lilac/white covers with white inner pages
Ordinary Level: Yellow/white covers with white inner pages

There may be some few exceptions to these arrangements in the case of subjects with a very small number of candidates.

4. On-Line Marking Of Junior Cycle/Certificate English And Higher Level French

At the 2017 certificate examinations the State Examinations Commission (SEC) will be continuing its pilot in the use of on line marking in Junior Cycle English (Higher and Ordinary Level) and again in Junior Certificate Higher Level French.

On-Line marking involves the marking of candidate's responses by examiners using specially designed software which enables them to interact with scanned images of the candidates' examinations scripts. This technology is used by all of the UK examinations boards, including Northern Ireland, and throughout Europe. Online marking facilitates high quality, reliable marking of candidates examination responses.

There are many advantages to on line marking both for the examiners and for the system as a whole. In particular, it allows examiners to focus on the marking exercise and not on the administration of the marking and eliminates the possibility of clerical errors.

There is no significant change for students as they will sit their examinations in the normal way and their completed examinations scripts will be returned to the SEC in Athlone in the normal way. In both of these subjects, the examination papers are also the answer books. At that point their scripts will be scanned and the paper document will become an electronic script. The paper record will of course be retained. The examination

papers for these subjects include minor modifications, such as having small bar codes applied to each page, to facilitate the scanning process.

Examination superintendents will be provided with information about the on-line marking of Junior Cycle/Certificate English and Higher Level French. The Superintendents will be instructing candidates in the examination centres that they need to complete the paper in Blue or Black pen (This improves the accuracy of the scanning process.) Schools should ensure that students taking these subjects are aware of this requirement in advance of the examinations.

The second important piece of information that needs to be brought to the attention of students taking these subjects is about the use of supplementary answer paper. Last year, the SEC noted that some students included supplementary answer paper even though there was adequate space for the answers to be completed in their main examination script. The SEC is satisfied that adequate space for candidate responses has been provided in these papers and that it is possible for candidates to achieve full marks for responses completed in the space provided under each question and in the spare pages provided at the back of the booklet. The inclusion of additional loose pages complicates the scanning process and is to be avoided unless absolutely necessary. This year our Superintendents will be instructed to strictly apply the rule of not providing candidates with supplementary answer paper unless they have run out of space within the main examination script.

School authorities should arrange to notify teachers and students of Junior Cycle/Certificate English and French that these arrangements will apply this year. The main information points are:

- **These examinations should be completed in Blue or Black ink only**
- **Every effort should be made to answer the examination within the space provided in the examination paper. Supplementary answer paper will only be provided to students who have exhausted all of the space within the main examination paper.**

Please ensure that this important information contained in this circular is brought to the immediate attention of school personnel, students, parents and guardians.

If you have any queries regarding this circular please telephone (090) 6442778, 6442701.

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