An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)

Advice for management and teachers of LCA 2020/21 in Second-Level Schools and Centres for Education

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Version 1.0

Overview of Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCA)

The Leaving Certificate Applied is a single award based on a unified programme, rather than a set of grades achieved in discrete subjects. LCA is designed as a two-year programme that is divided into four sessions. Over those four sessions, students accumulate credits through three different routes:

- Satisfactory completion of forty-four modules
- Completion of seven student tasks
- Final examinations.

This advice note sets out the curriculum and assessment arrangements for the LCA Year 1 and Year 2 students for the academic year 2020/21. The revised arrangements take account of the varying levels of student engagement in learning during the 2019/20 school year and acknowledge the modular nature of the LCA. This guidance for the LCA Programme should be read in conjunction with *Returning to school: Guidance on learning and school programmes for post-primary school leaders and teachers* available at: www.gov.ie/backtoschool

1. Advice for LCA <u>Year 2</u> for the Academic Year 2020/21

During the academic year 2019/20, LCA students experienced disruption to teaching and learning during session 2 owing to Covid-19 restrictions and the school closure period. This resulted in varying levels of student engagement with the learning outcomes of some of the LCA module descriptors. This impact of the school closure and the potential restrictions arising from public health requirements during the coming school year need to be considered in the context of planning for teaching and learning in 2020/21.

LCA <u>Year 2</u> students will have already received credits for session 1 in 2019/20. As part of the Calculated Grades Model for Leaving Certificate 2020, calculated grades, which will be converted to credit equivalents, will be awarded for the relevant subject and task examination assessment components that were due to be completed in **session 2**, 2019/20. In order to receive these calculated grades, students will have registered on the Calculated Grades Student Portal. As usual, credits for successful module completion will be awarded through the LCA portal.

This section is set out under the following four headings associated with the LCA programme:

> 1.1 Satisfactory completion of modules
> 1.2 Student tasks
> 1.3 Final examinations
> 1.4 Changes to credit allocation for LCA Year 2

Proposed changes and the rationale for the amendments identified are also set out.

1.1 Satisfactory completion of modules
Over the two-year duration of the programme, students should complete forty-four modules. In order to be awarded credits for modules, students complete each module by

attending the classes and out-of-school activities related to the module; a minimum attendance of 90% and completion of the Key Assignments related to each module are required.

To provide schools with enhanced autonomy and flexibility in planning for teaching and learning most suited to their context, arrangements for the satisfactory completion of modules for LCA Year 2 students have been revised and the details are set out below.

Arrangements for the satisfactory completion of modules for LCA Year 2 for the academic year 2020/21

- All learning outcomes for each module should be completed, within the confines of current health and safety advice.
- Students should complete a minimum of **two** Key Assignments to achieve the credits available for each module **and** maintain a minimum of 90% attendance
- If a student cannot attend the school due to a valid Covid-19 related restriction, the school should be flexible in its approach to monitoring and recording attendance
- In the event of a localised closure where learning is progressed remotely, schools should ensure that an appropriate system is in place to track students' engagement.

In many cases, successful completion of the Key Assignments requires students to work in groups or to engage in activities in the wider school community or in their local communities. In the current climate, it may be necessary to adapt how a Key Assignment is completed. This can be accommodated through individual teachers planning for Key Assignments in a way that takes the learning environment and possible Covid-19 restrictions into consideration. For instance, it may be possible to organise a virtual tour of a local library or restaurant rather than taking students on an out-of-school visit to those venues. Evidence of student learning in key assignments can be stored in hard copy or electronically using the school learning management systems.

1.2 Student Tasks

Students complete a total of seven tasks across the two years of the LCA programme. LCA Year 2 students will have already received credits for session 1 in 2019/20 in relation to the General Education Task. Credits for this task were awarded following an external assessment process during the week beginning 03 February 2020.

During session 2, which began in February 2020, students were due to undertake a task in each of the following areas: Vocational Preparation; Vocational Education and Personal Reflection (Part One). Due to Covid-19, a special arrangement was made whereby these students could register on the Calculated Grades Student Portal to receive a calculated grade for these tasks, with each calculated grade being converted into a credit equivalent.

During the academic year 2020/21, if normal circumstances prevailed, LCA Year 2 students would have been completing a further four tasks as follows: in session 3, one task in each of the following areas: Vocational Education; General Education (Contemporary Issues Task), Practical Achievement Task; and in session 4, a Personal Reflection Task (Part Two).

To provide schools with enhanced flexibility in planning for the completion of Student Tasks for LCA Year 2 students, arrangements for the academic year 2020/21 are as set out below.

Arrangements for Student Tasks for LCA Year 2 for the academic year 2020/21
• Reduction in the number of tasks due for completion in session 3 from **three** to **two** by requiring students to complete **either** the Vocational Education Task **or** the Contemporary Issues Task **and** the Practical Achievement Task; the LCA Portal will be able to deal with this change
• During the grading process, the final credits will be scaled to adjust for the completion of two tasks instead of three in Session 3
• Completion of the Personal Reflection (Part Two) in session 4.

Providing schools with an opportunity to select a task anchored in **either** Vocational Education **or** in General Education allows the teachers and students to choose a task most suited to their individual school and student context.

The Practical Achievement Task is, for the most part, conducted outside of school and will be less affected by enforced student absence and/or potential localised school closures related to possible Covid-19 outbreaks.

When planning for the Student Tasks, up-to-date public health advice should be considered. Creative and innovative ways of task planning should also ensure that students derive maximum engagement and learning in their chosen task.

Arrangements for the examination of the tasks, to include interviews, will be based on the most up-to-date health and safety advice at the time.

1.3 Final Examinations

Final examinations are conducted in seven subject areas as follows:

Subject	Components	Credits allocated to final examination
English and Communications	Oral and written paper	12 credits
Social Education	Written paper	10 credits
Mathematical Applications	Written paper	10 credits
Gaeilge Chumarsáideach and one Modern Languages	Oral and written paper	6 credits per language
Two vocational specialisms	A practical performance or practical course work and written paper	12 credits per specialism

Owing to Covid-19, a special arrangement was made for LCA students who were due to sit the final examinations in *Gaeilge Chumarsáideach* or Modern Languages at the end of

session 2 in 2019/20. The student cohort, if registered on the Calculated Grades Student Portal, will receive a calculated grade for the relevant language examination. Each calculated grade will be converted into a credit equivalent. Should they wish, these students will also have the opportunity to sit the Leaving Certificate Applied written language examination at a date in the future when it is considered safe to do so.

Due to school closures, schools will have engaged with session 2 modules to varying degrees. Students may not have the opportunity to re-engage with this learning in sessions 3 and 4. In order to acknowledge these issues, the arrangements set out below will be put in place.

Arrangements for the Final Examinations for LCA Year 2 for the academic year 2020/21
- Consideration is being given to the format of the final examinations (written papers and other assessment components) to take account of the impact of the school closure period on student learning; in so doing, the focus is on ensuring that students will have adequate opportunities to demonstrate their learning
- The Department will provide subject-specific information about the written examinations and other assessment components before the start of the 2020/21 school year.

As the LCA Year 2 students work towards their final examinations, the impact that the school closure period has had on their learning, particularly in session 2, will need to be considered when planning for teaching and learning.

Some module descriptors require the development of skillsets that may not have been possible to develop or maintain in a remote learning environment. As students re-engage with their learning, teachers should be mindful of these deficits and plan accordingly.

Arrangements for interviews and practical performance tests associated with the final examinations will be based on the most up-to-date public health and safety advice.

1.4 Credit allocation for LCA Year 2

Students who successfully complete the Leaving Certificate Applied programme are awarded a certificate at one of three levels based on the number of credits they have accumulated as set out below.

Pass 120-139 credits	Merit 140-169 credits	Distinction 170-200 credits
(60%-69%)	(70%-84%)	(85%-100%)
Students who acquire less than 120 credits or who leave the programme early will receive a record of experience.		

2. Advice for LCA Year 1 for the Academic Year 2020/21

This section is set out under the following four headings associated with the programme:

2.1 Transition and induction programme

Owing to the school closure, students and their parents/guardians may not have had an opportunity to engage with transition into the LCA programme. Therefore, the induction programme that is routinely provided by the school for LCA Year 1 students is particularly relevant. Consideration should be given to amending the content of the induction programme in order to address gaps which may have arisen in supporting students' transition to LCA. Further details on planning an induction programme are available at: www.pdst.ie

2.2 Curriculum

As outlined in Department *Circular 0061/2019*, four revised LCA module descriptors were due to be introduced in September 2020. These were: *English and Communications, Mathematical Applications, Introduction to Information and Communication Technology,* and *Information and Communication Technology ‐ Specialism.* The introduction of these revised module descriptors has been deferred until September 2021. Teachers should continue to teach the original module descriptors for these subjects

2.3 Satisfactory completion of modules

To achieve credits for the satisfactory completion of modules, LCA Year 1 students should complete all four Key Assignments and a minimum of 90% attendance should be maintained. If a student cannot attend the school due to a valid Covid-19 related restriction, the school should be flexible in its approach to monitoring and recording attendance. In the event of a localised closure where learning is progressed remotely, schools should ensure that an appropriate system is in place to track students' engagement.

In the current climate, it may be necessary to adapt how a key assignment is completed. This can be accommodated through individual teachers planning for key assignments in a way that takes the learning environment and Covid-19 restrictions into consideration. For instance, it may be possible to organise a virtual tour of a local library or restaurant rather than taking students on an out-of-school visit. Evidence of student learning in key assignments can be stored in hard copy or electronically using the school learning management system.

2.4 Student tasks

There is **no change** to the schedule for the completion of Student Tasks for LCA Year 1 students.

Session 1 Tasks	Session 2 Tasks
General Education	Vocational Preparation
	Vocational Education
	Personal Reflection Task (Part One)

LCA Year 1 in session 2 will be completing the Personal Reflection Task (Part One). When planning learning activities, teachers need to consider how the skills of student reflection are being developed and will need to ensure that sufficient opportunities are provided for students to reflect on their learning over the year.

Arrangements for the examination of the tasks, to include interviews, will be based on the most up-to-date public health advice.

2.5 Final examination in languages

In instances where students are due to complete the final examinations in a language at the end of session 2 in May 2021, planning for teaching, learning and assessment should continue as normal.

3. Planning for contingencies

3.1 Planning for work experience for the academic year 2020/21

The school week comprises a minimum 28 hours instruction time, inclusive of work experience. During the two-year programme, LCA students must complete a minimum of two mandatory modules in work experience. Two main approaches are taken by schools in scheduling work experience:

- **Block release**: In cases where it is possible for students to safely complete their work experience in accordance with public health advice and social distancing requirements they should do so. Where it is not possible for all or some students to do so during the block(s), they should attend timetabled classes as normal during the designated weeks. Where only a small number of students attend classes as normal, consideration could be given to including, in these lessons, a focus on work-related activities

- **One-day per week**: It is highly unlikely that students will be able to complete work experience in the early part of the school year so schools should plan accordingly.

For LCA Year 1, it is still possible to complete the introductory units in preparation for entering the workplace. These units typically contain student reflection on their skills and qualities and activities and topics such as a skills audit, goal setting, career investigation, job search, creating a CV/application, research into employer/employee rights, health and safety in the workplace, pay and conditions, and interview skills. Some of these research pieces may be completed with support on designated work experience days in session 1.

In the current climate, it may be necessary to adapt how a key assignment is completed for the mandatory modules in Work Experience. This can be accommodated through individual teachers planning for key assignments in a way that takes the learning environment and possible Covid-19 restrictions into consideration. For example, it may be necessary for a school to adapt the interpretation of work placement in a key assignment to include experience of the world of work and training.

In instances where access to work placement is delayed because of possible Covid-19 restrictions, students should be provided with access to teaching and learning opportunities during scheduled work experience weeks. This time could be used to provide:

- A planned recovery of learning programme to build on the varying levels of student engagement which may have occurred during the school closure

- Planned activities to support work placements; for instance, additional time could be allocated to completing work preparation modules, careers investigations and journals.

Some students will encounter difficulties in sourcing work experience placements. Schools may have to plan for a continuum of support for those students in accessing work placements.

For LCA Year 1 and Year 2 students doing the additional Vocational Preparation and Guidance Modules in Work Experience some alternative approaches to work experience placements may be considered:

- **Education partnerships:** Schools could link with local businesses, Local Enterprise Offices or further education facilities to explore options for remote learning for their students. Opportunities to provide remote tours of local industries, virtual job shadowing and question and answer sessions with those in key roles may provide useful insights into the world of work

- **Mentoring:** In addition to the local partnerships, students may be able to access mentors in industries they are interested in. These mentor sessions could be accessed virtually

- **Online training**: Students may be able to access online training courses in areas they have identified as relevant to their area of interest. There are free online courses in areas relevant to the world of work that could provide additional training, assessment and certification opportunities for students. The NCCA will provide assistance and guidance to the support services, in the provision of further advice in this regard.

3.2 Progressing learning

Owing to the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, teaching, learning and assessment could be disrupted due to a localised school closure. In such instances, schools should ensure that an appropriate system is in place to support ongoing student engagement with the planned learning activities.

Advice and support in relation to contingency planning for distance learning is available in *Returning to school: Guidance on learning and school programmes for post-primary school leaders and teachers* and should be used as necessary to support and progress students' learning in LCA.

3.3 Additional supports

The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) will have a range of LCA supports available for new coordinators and teachers. These will comprise online versions of:

- Seminars for new coordinators and teachers
- LCA task seminars
- LCA subject specific seminars
- School support for LCA

The PDST will be in contact with schools in relation to this provision.