



HOW YOUR TEEN CAN GET THE GRADES THEY DESERVE IN 2021

Junior Cert examinations have now been cancelled in Ireland for 2021, and LC exams are now optional for 6th Year students. For some students who don't perform well in exams (or just don't like them), this will be music to their ears. For others, not so much. Some may now be questioning what this means for the universities, colleges or apprenticeships they were working towards. Others might realise that they haven't performed consistently through the school year and now don't have the opportunity to cram ahead of an exam to push their grade up. There are still a lot of uncertainties about how it's all going to work, but here are a few things we do know:

How assessments will work

Teachers will be asked to award their pupils grades based on evidence that their work is to the standard of that grade. This will include any previous exams or internal assessment grade, but not just that. They might also consider their experience of teaching the student, and whether that info tallies with the work produced so far and the individual's engagement.

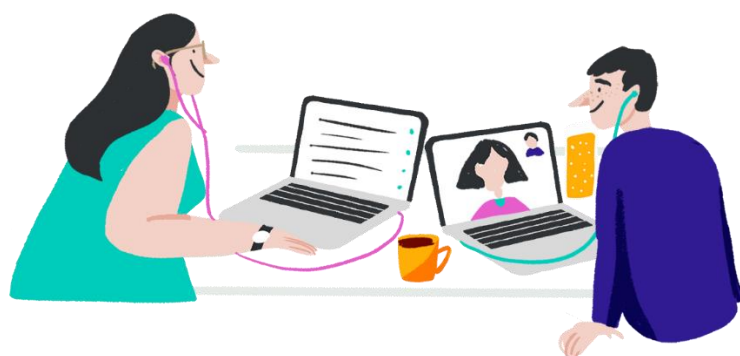
In some cases, schools might have had a chance to set sections of the LC paper at Christmas or some kinds of more formal assessments, and any data from those will be factored in. Teachers will also take into account the fact that that pupils have missed perhaps 6+ months of school, might not have had access to wi-fi or technology, and are unlikely to have completed all aspects of the curriculum. Final grades will also depend on any further info that comes from the Department for Education between now and the Summer. It is expected that the data required by the State Exams Commission will be entered by teachers

around the end of May/early June, so if that's anything to go by, students have about a term to convince their teachers to allocate the grades they think they deserve.

What your teen can do to get their best grades without exams

1. Keep standards up all year
2. Engage during lessons
3. Stay motivated
4. Stay connected

1. Keep standards up all year



The most important things are for students to listen to their teachers, email or message them if they're unsure about anything, and complete all the homework and classwork they get set. Each piece of work a teen completes and sends to their teacher will help them build a picture of the grade they should be awarded in the Summer.

Some teens might feel this adds pressure to each piece of work they do, but really it means your teen has lots of opportunities to prove themselves. If they struggle with a new topic one week, for example, but then work at it and improve by a couple of weeks later, the teacher will a) be impressed that a student has worked through a challenge and b) have evidence in their later work that they should achieve a higher grade.

2. Engage during lessons



Teachers are looking for genuine engagement during live lessons, and teens should get involved as much as they can. They shouldn't be afraid to ask questions, just like they would in school lessons. Our tech platforms like Google Classroom and Zoom let you virtually raise hands to ask questions — teens should use it and wait for the teacher's response rather than interrupting. If there's something the student really doesn't want to say in front of the class, then it's fine to message the teacher privately about it. It'll show initiative and engagement (although teaching staff may not be able to give an immediate response), and help them keep up with their learning.

Crucially, pupils need to stay for the whole call every lesson so they can take in everything the teacher communicates with them. Teachers will know if students dip out of the live lesson at the first opportunity, and this can cause learning gaps to grow if it's an ongoing habit. For the same reason, students shouldn't chat with classmates unless it's been requested in relation to the task, and they should be prepared to unmute and answer questions when they're asked.

3. Stay motivated



We know this one is easier said than done. During the various tier restrictions and lockdowns across Ireland, we've all had to find ways to stay focussed and productive. And it's difficult! Key elements that help include having a daily structure, having a sense of achievement and having something productive to show for each day. For teens, online school can provide the basis for all of these: the digital timetable offers up the structure for them to follow, they can feel a sense of achievement when they learn something new, and completing the school work means they have something productive that shows engagement with each lesson.

It can help teens to see the value of knowledge for its own sake rather than it all being about the end goal of an exam or final grade. The online teaching platform and knowledge acquired through live lessons can be used by students to challenge themselves in a way they've not felt able to before. Some will feel more confident in this digital environment – without quite the same in-class scrutiny from peers – and they might be able to push themselves more as a result.

As a parent, do what you can to keep communication open; acknowledge that we're all in an extremely challenging situation, and recognise that they probably feel frustrated by this whole experience. Online classes offer up some of the

face-to-face interaction that we all need, but it's likely your teen will crave more human connections for their own wellbeing, so allow them to contact other friends online out of school hours.

Your teen should also remember that they'll need a grade to move ahead to whatever is next, whether that's work, college, university, or an apprenticeship. Demonstrating now that they can apply themselves to the structure and routine of a digital classroom will be of long-term benefit for their future working or studying days.

4. Stay connected



As well as seeing their classmates in their remote school lessons, your teen and their friends can help each other by staying connected at this time. They could set up a WhatsApp group where they talk about the work they have to do this week, share online resources and remind each other of upcoming deadlines. Or they could schedule Zoom study sessions with mates where they get on with their work “together” as they might have in a study hall after school – this is a nice way to create accountability with each other, and it’ll help fend off isolation too. Even within your family, if you have more than one child, an older sibling can boost their own learning by teaching another. If they’re closer in age, blocking out quiet study time where they’re together but focused can help them stay motivated too.

If they’d benefit from some 1-1 academic support, our guidance counsellor can be contacted via email here: jmcgree@patricianfethard.ie .

Teaching staff can also help them keep up with their learning, fill in learning gaps where necessary and boost their motivation during this challenging time. Contact email addresses can be found on our webpage: www.fethardsecondaryschool.ie along with further supports, information and timetables.