

The Leaving Certificate Points System

2020 highlighted the fragility of the Leaving Certificate structure. Students had been removed from schools for weeks when it was announced that they would be unable to sit traditional exams. It was a time of much debate and uncertainty. Yet it has given us a unique opportunity to reevaluate and reform the historically critiqued point system.

If we had been in charge of creating a technology to predict students' grades in 2020 we would have programmed or sought out an AI system. This system would analyse previous student year groups anonymously - finding connections and correlations between their mock results, school exams and junior cert results concerning the leaving cert grades of these previous years. The relationships between these variables might then allow a prediction of 2020's student results.

Allowing AI to generate predictions removes challenges for teachers who may not know which data points are predictive of success in the leaving cert. However, there are critiques of our system. There is uncertainty over how much weight certain variables should hold, if external data other than grades should be taken into account and whether or not generated results should be adjusted to fit a normal distribution curve similar to that of previous years. It was interesting to see that even within our small group there were many varied opinions on these decisions.

We concluded on a set of rules the system should follow in the year 2020. Recent grades should be given more weight; 6th-year grades would be weighted heavier than 5th-year grades. Individual schools do not have to have a normal distribution of grades but the nation's grades must. Standardised tests taken across schools such as the junior cert would be given more weight than individual teacher-made class tests. Mock exams, while may be standard across some schools, are often taken on different dates in the school year and this should be accounted for (we assume that students on average improve their grades the closer they leaving certificate exams are).

An additional measure that could be taken to account for AI bias is to have teachers review the grades. First individual class teachers would review grades, then the subject department, and finally the vice principals and principals of the school. This human review of the AI would feed back into the AI system's self-learning.

Looking forward to the future, we believe that the Leaving Cert should be reformed. We must be prepared to offer alternate assessments for students should it be required as it was in 2020. We hope to be prepared by further developing the AI system to be fairer. For this to work, continuous assessment needs to be implemented and the grades need to be given to the AI as training data. In other words, setting up the system such that it has multiple standardised tests that are weighted heavily but also have other class tests which are not weighted as heavily used

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to train a data set in which outcomes are known. Therefore standardised tests should be taken regularly during the course to provide standardised data to the AI.

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