



**NCCA**

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta  
Curaclaim agus Measúnachta  
National Council for  
Curriculum and Assessment

# Leaving Certificate Economics

Guidelines to support the  
Research Study

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## Introduction

This document, *Leaving Certificate Economics: Guidelines to support the Research Study for Leaving Certificate Economics*, provides

- detail of the nature and scope of the Research Study, described in the curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Economics
- guidelines and support for schools, teachers and students on completing the Research Study.

These guidelines should be used in conjunction with the curriculum specification for Leaving Certificate Economics, which can be accessed at <https://curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/Senior-Cycle-Subjects/Economics>.

The State Examinations Commission is responsible for the development, assessment, accreditation and certification of the second-level examinations of the Irish state. A common brief, which contains instructions and clarification to all examination candidates of the procedures for completion and submission of the Research Study Report, can be found on the SEC website at [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie).

## Assessment for Certification in Economics

Assessment for certification is based on the aim, objectives and learning outcomes of the Leaving Certificate Economics specification. The Leaving Certificate Economics specification can be accessed at <https://curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/Senior-Cycle-Subjects/Economics>.

### ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS

There are two assessment components in Leaving Certificate Economics:

- written examination (80%)
- research study (20%)

Both components of assessment reflect the relationship between the application of skills and the theoretical content of the specification. Differentiation at the point of assessment is achieved through written examinations at two levels – Ordinary level and Higher level. The research study will be based on a brief issued annually by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). A common brief will be issued for Ordinary level and Higher level. A differentiated marking scheme may apply.

Mode	Timing			Ordinary level weighting	Higher level weighting
Written examination	End of Year 2			80%	80%
		Section A	Choice of short answer questions	20%	20%
		Section B	Choice of extended response questions	60%	60%
Research study	Term 1 of Year 2		Report	20%	20%
Total				100%	100%

## Research Study

Through the research study, students are afforded an opportunity to research into and analyse an economic issue, problem or question, to evaluate findings and reflect on their own learning. The research study will assess the students' ability to use the knowledge, understanding, concepts and skills developed in their study of Economics to evaluate information and data and make informed conclusions. The key skills of information processing, communicating, critical and creative thinking, being personally effective and working with others can be applied through the student's engagement in the research study.

The research study will be based on a brief issued annually by the State Examinations Commission. A common brief will be issued for Ordinary level and Higher level. The brief will outline topics from which students will choose one as the basis for their research study. The brief will also outline the parameters for the research study and for the Research Study Report, which will be submitted to the State Examinations Commission for assessment. The research study will be completed in sixth year.

In particular, the research study requires students to pursue an individual line of inquiry based on the topic chosen. In doing so the students demonstrate that they can:

- research and process information and data that is relevant and meaningful to understanding a particular economic issue, problem or question
- apply concepts, models and theories in the evaluation of information and data in order to make an informed conclusion.

A student's individual line of inquiry should be an area of economics that is of interest to the student and that relates directly to the learning outcomes in the Leaving Certificate Economics specification. The research study may examine an issue, problem or question at a personal, local, regional, national or international level.

It is important to note that students are not assessed on the research study itself, but on their report on the research study. The report on the research study accounts for 20% of the total marks. During the process of completing the research study, it is strongly recommended that students keep a portfolio/folder (in hardcopy/digital format) of the research process. This will facilitate the completion of the Research Study Report. Each student must complete and submit an **individual** report on his/her research study, which can be authenticated by the teacher.

## Process for Completing the Research Study

As part of their research study, students will pursue an individual line of inquiry drawn from a research topic. A choice of topics, relating to an overall economic theme, will be provided to students. The topics will reflect knowledge and content related to the learning outcomes of the specification.

In order to complete the research study, students should:

1. Choose an individual line of inquiry relating to their chosen research topic. The line of inquiry can be of personal, local, national or international interest. The line of inquiry must relate to the knowledge and content of the learning outcomes in the Leaving Certificate Economics specification.
2. Select relevant and reliable sources of information and data. The sources should be qualitative and quantitative and relate to the student's line of inquiry.
3. Apply a relevant economic concept to the individual line of inquiry.
4. Analyse and evaluate the sources of information in order to make an informed judgement in response to the line of inquiry.
5. Make conclusions in relation to the line of inquiry.
6. Reflect on new knowledge, understanding and skills learned and how their thinking has changed as a result of undertaking the research study.

### **1. CHOOSE AN INDIVIDUAL LINE OF INQUIRY RELATING TO THEIR CHOSEN RESEARCH TOPIC**

Students must state the chosen line of inquiry as an economic question, problem or issue they wish to address based on the topic drawn. Care is needed in the choosing of a line of inquiry

and the choice of line of inquiry should be made in consultation with the teacher. Students should not undertake substantive work on the research study until the teacher has approved a line of inquiry. Where the line of inquiry selected for the research study derives from an area of genuine interest to the student, the research study can help students to link the theory and practice of economics and empower young people in becoming more engaged and informed citizens. To help students choose a line of inquiry, they should consider the following:

- What do I already know about the topic of my research study?
- What else do I need to know about the topic of my research study?
- What is the central question/problem/argument/issue ?
- Why is this an important question. problem. argument/issue?



## **2. SELECT RELEVANT AND RELIABLE SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND DATA**

Students need to select relevant and reliable sources of information and data. Students can carry out desk (secondary) and/or field (primary) research on their line of inquiry. To help students at this stage of the process, they should consider the following:

- What primary and/or secondary resources can I use?
- How do I know the information is valid and reliable? Do I need to consider bias?
- Are the sources quantitative, qualitative or both?
- How is the information relevant to the line of inquiry selected?
- What other information do I need?
- What parts support/do not support my line of inquiry?
- What weighting or emphasis will I put on the different parts?
- Are new questions/models/concepts or theories raised?

Students may use books, journal articles, newspapers, internet sites and other sources for desk research in gathering data, ideas and information relating to the research study. However, the use of field (primary) research must be original. Students should use qualitative and quantitative sources of information and data.

All secondary sources must be acknowledged, whether quoting, paraphrasing or borrowing ideas. Before using internet-based material, students should evaluate online material for reliability and validity. Appendix A on page 18 provides further information on referencing sources.

## **3. APPLY A RELEVANT ECONOMIC CONCEPT TO THE INDIVIDUAL LINE OF INQUIRY**

Students must reference and explain at least one economic concept as the basis of their research relevant to their line of inquiry.

#### **4. ANALYSE AND EVALUATE THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Students must gather, record and appraise the sources of data and information relevant to their line of inquiry. Student must evaluate their evidence in order to make relevant informed conclusions and judgements relating to their line of inquiry.

#### **5. MAKE CONCLUSIONS**

Students make informed conclusions based on their research and findings. To help students at this stage of the process, they should consider the following:

- What is my conclusion and why have I reached this conclusion?
- How well does it connect with the line of inquiry selected?
- How well does it respond to the aim of my research study?
- How do the conclusions relate to the economic concept underpinning the line of inquiry?
- What else is important or relevant?
- Does my research raise new questions? What might these questions be?

## **6. REFLECT ON NEW KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND SKILLS LEARNED AND HOW THEIR THINKING HAS CHANGED**

Students need to reflect on some insights gained from engagement with the research study.

To help students at this stage of the process, they could consider the following:

- Is there some new knowledge and/or understanding I have gained and why is this knowledge and/or understanding considered to be important?
- Was my research process as effective as I could make it? What aspects did I do well and what could I improve?
- Have I developed a skill through engagement in the research study and how could this skill positively impact on future learning/experience?
- Has the undertaking of this research changed my thinking, behaviour or opinions in any way?
- Has undertaking the research process raised other/new questions in relation to my line of inquiry?

### **Time needed**

The research study and Research Study Report is completed during Term 1 of Year 2 (Sixth Year). The research study should take approximately 20 hours to complete over a 6 – 8 week period. On completion of the research study each student must produce an individual Research Study Report under teacher supervision. The level of teacher oversight has to be such that it is possible to authenticate the work as that of the individual student.

The research study must be the student's own work. Authentication procedures will be put in place to ensure compliance with this requirement.

## The Research Study Report

Students are required to present and submit a Research Study Report in a format prescribed by the State Examinations Commission. A common brief will be issued by the State Examinations Commission for all students studying Leaving Certificate Economics. This accounts for the fact that at the time of undertaking the research study and writing up the Research Study Report students may not yet have decided what level of written paper they will take. The Report will be marked at the same time as the written paper and differentiation will take place at that point. The Report must be presented in a digital completion booklet. The completion date for submission of the Report is the end of Term 1 (December) of Year 2 (precise date set by the State Examinations Commission via a circular).

### FORMAT OF THE REPORT

The Research Study Report will contain the following sections:

- Introduction: students state and explain the individual line of inquiry they wish to address based on the chosen topic; outline clearly their aim(s) for their chosen line of inquiry; select relevant and reliable sources of information.
- The research process: students reference and explain a relevant economic concept as the basis of their research; analyse and evaluate the selected sources of information and data; assess how their analysis and evaluation relates to their line of inquiry.
- Conclusions: students present their conclusions as they relate to the stated line of inquiry.
- Reflection: students reflect on the knowledge, skills and insights gained from engagement with the research study; demonstrate how thinking has evolved and/or how attitudes, opinions or behaviour may have changed as a result of undertaking the research study.
- Communication, presentation and overall coherence.

Relevant data may be presented in tabular, graphical and other formats appropriate to presenting the data clearly. Students may insert additional graphs, charts, surveys or images that are directly related to the research study and provide evidence of elements of either the process or outcomes of the research study (e.g. survey tool, summary chart of data gathered, photo of key event, etc.) in the Research Study Report. Images referred to in the body of the report should be properly labelled.

## Assessment Criteria for the Research Study

The assessment criteria relate to the performance of Ordinary level and Higher level students in the research study, although a differentiated marking scheme will apply.

*A high level of achievement* in the research study is characterised by a thorough engagement with the topic. The student's report is purposeful and clear. The report is sufficiently detailed to provide concrete evidence of the student's knowledge and understanding but moves beyond a mere re-telling of facts and information to focus on insights and learning gained. Students demonstrate an ability to research, select, organise and process information and data from a variety of sources for relevance and reliability very judiciously. They accurately apply concepts and theories to analyse and evaluate qualitative and quantitative information and data from different sources; manipulation of data, where appropriate, will be correct. Students present informed conclusions which are clearly based on evidence. The student shows a clear capacity to reflect on how the topic relates to his/her own life and how his/her attitudes, opinions and/or behaviour has been influenced.

*A moderate level of achievement* in the research study is characterised by a good engagement with the topic. The report is clear and, in the main, provides evidence of the student's knowledge and understanding providing some insights on the learning gained. Students can research, organise and process information and data from a variety of sources for relevance adequately. They apply relevant concepts and theories to analyse and evaluate qualitative and quantitative information and data from different sources; manipulation of data, where appropriate, will be in the main correct. Students present considered conclusions which are in the main based on evidence. The student shows some capacity to reflect on how the topic relates to his/her own life and how his/her attitudes, opinions and/or behaviour has been influenced.

*A low level of achievement* in the research study is characterised by some engagement with the topic. The report provides a basic summary of the topic with few personal insights on the learning gained. While the report provides some evidence of the student's knowledge and understanding, the student demonstrates a limited ability to research, organise and process information and data. The application of concepts and theories and analysis and evaluation of qualitative and quantitative information and data may be flawed; manipulation of data, where appropriate, will be basic. Students present some conclusions based on evidence, though they may include irrelevant material. There is limited evidence of a capacity to reflect on how the topic relates to his/her own life and how his/her attitudes, opinions and/or behaviour has been influenced.

## Differentiation in the Research Study

In the case of the report on the research study, differentiation will be effected at the point of assessment through the application of separate Higher and Ordinary level marking schemes. The scheme to be used will be determined by the level at which the candidate takes the written examination.

## The Teacher's Role

To facilitate the provision of feedback to students during their engagement with assessment, the process of completing the Research Study should be viewed as part of teaching and learning, and not solely for assessment purposes. It is envisaged that teachers will guide, support and supervise throughout the process. Support may include:

- Clarifying the requirements of the research study.
- Looking at the brief issued by the State Examinations Commission and seeing where there are links to the specification.
- Identifying what areas of the specification students may need to engage with in order to facilitate the choice of topics.
- Prompting the student's critical thinking in relation to the topics drawn by reflecting on the questions listed below:

What do I already know about the topic of my research study?

What else do I need to know about the topic of my research study?

What is the central question/problem/argument/issue ?

Why is this an important question. problem. argument/issue?

- Ensuring that the line of inquiry chosen by the student is appropriate and related to the learning outcomes of the specification.
- Facilitating access to appropriate resources where possible.



- Providing instructions at strategic intervals to facilitate the timely completion of the research study.
- Providing supports for students with special educational needs as outlined on page 16
- It is important to ensure that an individual line of inquiry is taken by each student and that the contribution of each student is clear and significant so that it can be authenticated by the teacher. The research study is not a group project although collaborative research and discussion is actively encouraged as part of ongoing teaching and learning.

Note that only work which is the student's own can be accepted for submission to the State Examinations Commission. It is not envisaged that the level of support involved requires teachers to edit draft reports, or to provide model text or answers to be used in the student's evidence of learning.

## Reasonable Accommodations/Inclusion

The Economics specification requires that students engage with economic analysis on an ongoing basis throughout the course. In addition, the assessment involves a research study, which accounts for 20% of the total marks awarded. This emphasis on investigative activities may have implications for students with physical/medical/sensory and/or specific learning difficulties. In this context, the scheme of Reasonable Accommodations, operated by the State Examinations Commission, is designed to assist students in the Leaving Certificate who have physical/medical/sensory and/or specific learning difficulties.

## Useful Links

- Leaving Certificate Economics curriculum specification: <https://curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/Senior-Cycle-Subjects/Economics>
- Background information on the development of the specification for Leaving Certificate Economics: <https://www.ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/economics>
- State Examinations Commission: All instructions for completing and submitting the Research Study will be included in a brief, issued by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) during the second year of senior cycle on [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie).
- Supports for teachers of Leaving Certificate Economics from the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST): <https://www.pdst.ie/sc/economics> and [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie)

## Appendix A: Guidance on Referencing Sources of Information

- All research sources used (books, articles, web-sites, person-to-person interviews, etc.) must be duly acknowledged.
- Where students are citing written sources, they should give the author's name, the title of the book or article, and the name of the publisher and year of publication with hyperlink and date read or downloaded if published online.

Example:

Fitzgerald, J. (2019) Three Nobel Winners Prove Economics is not Such a Dismal Science (Irish Times) available <https://www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/three-nobel-winners-prove-economics-is-not-such-a-dismal-science-1.4054254> [Accessed on 22/10/2019]

- Where students wish to refer to an internet site or online source, there should be enough accurate detail to enable the examiner to authenticate the reference. It is recommended that they should supply the author's name or the organisation's name, the title of the page or article, the website address or URL and the date on which the material was read or downloaded.

Example:

Central Bank of Ireland (2017) Is Brexit Keeping a Lid on Irish Inflation? available <https://www.centralbank.ie/publication/economic-letters/is-brexit-keeping-a-lid-on-irish-inflation> [Accessed on 6/11/2019]

- Where students have conducted primary research it is not necessary to include the full survey questionnaire/results or interview transcript. Students should provide details of the primary research conducted in the references and bibliography section of the report .

Examples:

Primary research conducted via survey from 4/10/2020 to 10/10/2020 with a sample size of 10 respondents

Primary research conducted via interview on 10/11/2020 with two interviewees

- Plagiarism is a serious offence and occurs when a student uses other people's work without clear acknowledgement of one's sources. Direct copying of material from secondary sources – other than essential references, e.g. definitions, short quotations - is not permitted.