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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS

**FAQ document to support NPC(PP) Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades
Helpline
Opening 05 October 2020**

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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide FAQ material to support the NPC(PP) Leaving Certificate helpline which, in conjunction with the council, is being re-opened from 11.00 on Monday 05 October 2020. It is based on material originally provided to support members of DES who operated a Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades helpline which was open from Wednesday 30 September to Sunday 3 October. The line was set up to respond to calls relating to the statements from the Minister for Education and Skills of 30 September and 3 October regarding the Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades process.

The decision to adopt a model of Calculated Grades by the Department was a result of COVID-19, which prevented the State from running the conventional Leaving Certificate Examinations. The purpose of this process was to allow as many students as possible to progress to employment, further education and training, or higher education. The Department contracted a Canadian company, Polymetrika International Inc. to assist with the development of the Calculated Grades model.

Schools provided an estimated percentage mark and a rank order for each student's subjects. The process of national standardisation was applied to the school information in order to ensure comparability between the standards applied by individual schools and the national standard (i.e. ensuring that one school was not overly generous and another, overly harsh).

Following standardisation, the estimated percentage marks were converted to calculated marks and subsequently, to calculated grades which were provided to students on 7 September. Students were able to access these grades online via the Calculated Grades Student Portal which was set up and operated by the Department's Calculated Grades Executive Office.

The following information was announced by the Minister and Department on 30 September and 3 October:

Last week (week-beginning 21 September), two errors were identified in the Calculated Grades process.

The first error was identified by Polymetrika as having taken place when processing students' data. The error, in one out of 50,000 lines of code, is in relation to the processing of Junior Cycle data. The system was meant to draw on the core Junior Cycle subjects of English, Irish and Maths, and combine them with the students' 2 *best* non-core subjects for all of the students in each class in each school. The coding error instead combined them with the students' 2 *weakest* non-core subjects.

The error means that, in some subjects, some students received Calculated Grades that were lower than they should have been, while some students received grades that were higher than they should have been.

In the course of the complete review which the Department undertook, Departmental staff found a second error in the section of the code dealing with Junior Cycle results. The Junior Cycle subject Civil, Social and Political Education (CPSE) was meant to be disregarded as part of the model but was not. This second error, however, has had a negligible impact on results.

The Department then engaged US-based company Educational Testing Services, ETS, to perform a review of the coding done for the system of Calculated Grades. ETS completed their review and provided it to the Department on 3 October. The review identified one further error, relating to how

the program code handled cases where students did not sit all three core subjects (Irish, English and Maths) at Junior Cycle level. All errors have been rectified, and the system re-checked and re-run.

As a result of the rerun process:

- 5,408 students received a higher grade, by one grade band, in one subject,
- 621 students received a higher grade, by one grade band, in two subjects,
- 71 students received a higher grade, by one grade band, in three or more subjects.

These 6,100 students who are receiving higher grades were notified of this on 3 October.

In addition to the students who received a lower grade than they should have in this year's Leaving Certificate, some students received a higher grade than they should have. However, these students will not be affected in any way. Their original calculated grades stand.

ETS also identified an issue concerning how the algorithm used in the standardisation process treated students' marks at the extreme ends of the marks scale (99% and over, 1% and below). ETS stated that this had no material impact on the results and no student could receive a lower grade as a result of it.

On 30 September, all students were texted and advised to check www.gov.ie/leavingcert regarding the announcement that day.

On 03 October, all 2020 Leaving Certificate students received a text advising them either:

- that they would be receiving at least one higher grade and should check the student portal to view their results or,
- that they were not impacted and their grades are unaffected

Impacted students were able to log onto the Calculated Grades Student Portal from 6.00pm on 3 October to see their revised Calculated Grades and calculated marks for each subject. Students whose grades are not impacted will have seen no change in their grades when they logged on. These students may, however, have seen that they achieved a higher calculated mark in a particular subject(s), but that this increase did not result in an increased grade.

In addition to the helpline, students could also email queries to lc2020@education.gov.ie.

The DES Calculated Grades helpline closes on Sunday 4 October at 4.00pm.

Calculated Grades results— Regarding Announcement on 03 October

What was announced on 03 October?

Following the announcement on 30 September that the Department of Education and Skills had found two errors in the Leaving Certificate 2020 Calculated Grades process, the Minister announced that she would make a further statement once further reviews into the errors found in the Calculated Grades process had been completed and more information could be shared.

On 03 October, the Minister [announced](#) that the independent review had been completed by US-based company Educational Testing Services (ETS), and shared information on the number of students impacted.

The Minister also announced that the independent reviewer raised two further issues, one being a third error regarding Junior Cycle data, and another issue regarding how the coding treated particular data relating to extreme/outlier cases. However, this issue had no material impact on the results and no student could receive a lower grade as a result of it.

Students who are impacted have been notified and were able to access their revised Calculated Grades from 6.00pm on 03 October.

Can I see a copy of the ETS report?

The ETS report has been published on www.gov.ie/leavingcertificate

I got a text message saying I was impacted. How can I check my Calculated Grades?

If you received a text message and email stating you were impacted, you could check your revised statement of results from 6.00pm on Saturday 3 October on the Calculated Grades Student Portal at www.gov.ie/leavingcert. You will be able to see your revised calculated grades and calculated scores.

I got a text message saying I was not impacted. I think I deserved higher grades. My results were lower than the grades my school gave me.

Students received only one set of grades, these were issued following the conclusion of the calculated grades process, including the process of national standardisation. The estimated marks and rank orders provided by schools were not grades.

Schools and teachers differed considerably in the way they estimated students' marks. Some will have been overly harsh in their estimations while others will have been overly generous. This means that if the Department had left schools' estimated marks unchanged, students would not have been treated equally for Leaving Certificate 2020. That would not have been fair.

The process of national Standardisation is the best process we have to ensure equity of treatment for the students of 2020 across all schools.

Students whose grades are not impacted will see no change in their grades if they log on. These students may, however, see that they achieved a higher calculated mark in a particular subject(s), but that this increase did not result in an increased grade.

I didn't get a text message or email.

There may have been a delay in receipt of the text or email on 3 October, or the email may have gone to spam. You should log onto the Calculated Grades Student Portal anyway to check if your results have changed.

How many students are affected?

6,100 students have received higher grades with 6,780 grades affected.

- 5,408 students will receive a higher grade, by one grade band, in one subject,
- 621 students will receive a higher grade, by one grade band, in two subjects,
- 71 students will receive a higher grade, by one grade band, in three or more subjects.

No student has received a reduced grade in any subject as a result of this process.

How many grades are affected?

In total, 6,870 grades have been affected.

This includes:

- 4,632 higher level grades
- 2,144 ordinary level grades
- 15 foundation level grades
- 79 Link module grades for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP)

How many students are not impacted?

51,510 students have had no grade change (although a number of them may see an increase in the mark they achieved for a particular subject(s), but where this increase did not result in an increased grade).

The Minister said she found out last week (w/b 21 September). Why did it take so long to announce this?

The Department took action to address the errors immediately they were discovered.

The Department was required to get a detailed and full picture concerning the issues and their impacts before advising students.

Have students' results been lowered from their results given on 7 September?

No. No student will receive a reduced grade in any subject as a result of this process. The grades they received on 7 September will stand.

Students who got a higher Calculated Grade than they should have will not be impacted –other students may, however, have missed out on CAO places as a result?

The decision not to downgrade any students is consistent with the established practice of not reducing the marks or grades of students who have not appealed their results, but who through an appeal by another student or other systemic check are identified as somebody who received higher marks or grades than they should have.

In keeping with that principle, and mindful of the fact that the mistake was not the students' mistake, students who received higher grades as a result of the errors in the Calculated Grades system will not be downgraded. The Leaving Certificate results of these students will remain unchanged as they do every year in these circumstances.

This year there has been an increase in the numbers of '[available places](#)' in certain courses in colleges so that improved CAO offers can be made to more candidates.

In addition, there were extensive additional higher education places in 2020 compared to last year.

As candidates receive and accept improved CAO offers arising next week, some will move from one course to another and this will create the potential for further offers to other candidates in succeeding rounds of the CAO. This will mean an overall increase in the numbers of students in third-level education and will lessen the risk of candidates not being able to participate in third-level education.

Have students been told?

All students received a text message on 30 September advising them to check www.gov.ie/leavingcert for information regarding the announcement made that day.

On 03 October, all students will have received another text message. This message advised them either:

- that they are receiving at least one higher grade and need to check the portal to view their results or,
- that they are not impacted and their grades are unaffected.

All students who are receiving a higher grade will also have received an email advising them to log onto the student portal to access their amended results.

Students who are impacted were able to log on to the Calculated Grades Student Portal from 6.00pm on 03 October to view their improved grades and print a new statement of provisional results which will replace their first statement.

Students whose grades have not been affected by this will have received a message notifying them of this. They will see no change to their Calculated Grades if they log onto the Calculated Grades Student Portal. These students may, however, see that that they achieved a higher calculated mark in a particular subject(s), but that this increase did not result in an increased grade.

Where can students see their revised Calculated Grades?

Students can access their statement of provisional results on the Calculated Grades Student Portal. The portal can be found on www.gov.ie/leavingcert.

How can I get a hard copy of my new results?

You will be able to download and print your 'Statement of Provisional Results of Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate 2020' from the Calculated Grades Student Portal once you have been contacted to be told that you are affected.

I've changed my phone number. How can I update my contact details?

You can have your contact details updated by contacting the Calculated Grades Executive Office directly by emailing lcsupport2020@education.gov.ie.

Regarding Errors Found and Use of Junior Cycle Data

What are the first two errors that were found?

The first error was discovered in the software coding used to process calculated grades. The error affected the way in which candidates' Junior Cycle results were included in the standardisation process.

It was intended that the students' Junior Cycle results, at an aggregate class level, in English, Maths and Irish would be used, together with their *best* two other subjects as part of the national standardisation process; the error, however, meant that the students' results in English, Maths and Irish were used together with their *weakest* two other subjects.

It should be noted that individual Junior Cycle results were not used to determine an individual's own Calculated Grades. The Junior Cycle results were considered at an aggregate class level.

The effect of this error has been that, in some subjects, some candidates received Calculated Grades that were lower than they should have been and some received grades that were higher.

The second error, which also related to the way in which candidates' Junior Cycle results were included in the national standardisation process, was that the results of the Junior Cycle subject CSPE (Civic, Social and Political Education) were included in the data being used by the model. This was incorrect, as in line with the design of the Calculated Grades process, this subject should not have been included in the data used by the model. However, the impact of this second error was negligible.

What is the third error that was found?

Following the identification of the first two errors, the Department engaged Educational Testing Services, ETS, a US based non-profit organisation to conduct an independent review.

ETS identified a third error as part of their review. Further details can be found in the ETS report which has been published on www.gov.ie/leavingcertificate

This error occurred in the use of data where a student did not sit all three core subjects at Junior Cycle.

A small minority of students don't sit these three core subjects in their Junior Cycle examinations. Sometimes it may be because they have not lived in Ireland and studied Irish at primary level. Sometimes it may be that they have different learning needs.

In those cases, the system was meant to use the average national Junior Cycle score, in the missing subject, of the group of students who took their Leaving Certificate in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Instead, it chose that student's next best subject for inclusion in the group computation.

ETS also identified an issue concerning how the algorithm used in the standardisation process treated students' marks at the extreme ends of the marks scale (99% and over, 1% and below). However, ETS stated that this had no material impact on the results and that no student could receive a lower grade as a result.

So all of these errors relate to how Junior Cycle data was used?

Yes. The three errors identified relate to how the Calculated Grades model used Junior Cycle data.

The Minister's statement said that ETS identified another issue. What else did they find?

ETS also identified an issue concerning how the algorithm used in the standardisation process treated students' marks at the extreme ends of the marks scale (99% and over, 1% and below). However, ETS also stated that this had no material impact on the results and that no student could receive a lower grade as a result.

Is the report from ETS published?

Yes, the report is on www.gov.ie/leavingcert.

Should students not just be given the marks their schools gave them?

Schools and teachers differed considerably in the way they estimated students' marks. Some will have been overly harsh in their estimations while others will have been overly generous. This means that if the Department had left schools' estimated marks unchanged, students would not have been treated equally for Leaving Certificate 2020. That would not have been fair.

The process of national Standardisation is the best process we have to ensure equity of treatment for the students of 2020 across all schools.

I thought my Junior Cycle/Certificate results didn't matter. I did not sit my Junior Cycle exams/I had an exemption from Irish for the Junior Cycle exams. Have I lost out as a result of this?

It is important to note that a student's individual Junior Cycle results did not feed directly into determining his/her calculated grades, so whether or not you sat any or all of your Junior Cycle exams, or say had an exemption from Irish, will NOT impact on your individual Calculated Grades results.

This is not the way the Junior Cycle results data was used by the model,

A student's individual Junior Cycle results did not feed directly into determining his/her calculated grades

Instead, the overall, or aggregate, Junior Cycle results for a class grouping were used, as this aggregate data provides a good means of determining the performance of a class group in the Leaving Certificate.

It should also be noted that the most important data used for determining calculated grades results were the estimated percentage marks and class rank orders provided by your school.

I sat my Junior Cycle exams in one school but transferred to another school for my Leaving Certificate. What impact will this have on my Calculated Grades results?

None. It doesn't matter whether or not a student changed schools between Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate. The Department has been able to link and transfer student data between schools. The data was then used in an aggregate way for the Leaving Certificate class group in the school where you attended.

It is also important to stress that each student's individual JC results are not feeding directly into determining his/her calculated grade. Instead, the overall, or aggregate, Junior Cycle results for a class grouping were used, as this aggregate data provides a good means of determining the performance of a class group in the Leaving Certificate.

How were the errors first found?

The first error was found when the company engaged to develop the Calculated Grades model, Polymetrika, was processing data relating to fifth year Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) students. This data is to form part of the Leaving Certificate Applied results in 2021, as the LCA is assessed over two years.

The second error was found by Department staff as part of checks regarding the first error.

The third error was identified by ETS as part of its review of the code for the Calculated Grades model.

How can I be confident in the system now?

The Department has been open and transparent in the development of Calculated Grades process. Students were informed of the errors and their correction at the earliest possible opportunity.

These errors were not discovered as a result of an appeal but because of the ongoing work and checking of our contractor.

The Department has responded thoroughly and speedily to resolve the error and issue corrected grades.

On discovering the errors, the Department engaged a specialist third party, Educational Testing Service (ETS), to review the coding, as well as continuing to work with Polymetrika to examine the code.

Was the system not tested?

The system of Calculated Grades is a complex and sophisticated system which had to be developed from scratch within an extremely tight timeframe in order for students to get their Calculated Grades results in time.

The statistical model itself was developed specifically for the Irish Leaving Certificate and there are 50,000 lines of programming code within the model.

The Department had checks at a number of stages to ensure that data was collected correctly from schools and transferred correctly between the various stages of the standardisation process, the validation process and the grading processes.

Unfortunately, the checks made did not show the errors.

Who wrote the code which contained the error?

The Department contracted Polymetrika International Inc. to assist in contingency planning for the Leaving Certificate 2020. This work included the development of source code for Calculated Grades. The principal of Polymetrika, is an international expert in the field of psychometrics, the science of educational testing. This was a bespoke development in response to the inability to run the 2020 Leaving Certificate.

Calculated Grades results/Postponed Leaving Certificate Exams— General Queries

The information contained in this section is being provided as a number calls to the helpline to date have related to aspects of the Calculated Grades process that are not linked to the announcements made by the Minister on 30 September and 3 October, but to other issues concerning the Calculated Grades process.

When did Calculated Grades first issue to students?

Calculated Grade results were first issued on 7 September at 9am and students were able to download them from the online Calculated Grades Student Portal.

Can I see the estimated results that the school submitted for me?

Yes. This information is available on the Calculated Grade Student Portal. You will be able to access there:

- (i) the estimated percentage mark provided by the school for each of your subjects,
- (ii) your class ranking for each subject provided by the school,
- (iii) your calculated percentage mark for each subject from the Calculated Grades process,
- (iv) your calculated grade (e.g. H1, H2, O1, O2) from the process.

Can I see where I was placed in my class rank?

Yes. This information has been available on the Calculated Grades Student Portal since the 28 September.

For further information regarding the class rank order, please call the Calculated Grades Executive Office Helpline at 1800 111 135 and 1800 111 136.

What if I am unhappy with my Calculated Grade?

The Calculated Grades Student Portal reopened on 14 September to allow students to view their estimated percentage mark and calculated mark to allow students to consider this data if they were considering an appeal of their Calculated Grade.

The appeals process is a process review focussed on looking for errors in the transmission and processing of student data through the process.

Applications for appeals closed at 5pm on 16 September.

Every effort will be made to process appeals as quickly as possible but it is not possible at this time to commit to a date for the issue of the appeal results. Students will be notified of this date as soon as possible.

Students are also now also able to register to sit the postponed Leaving Certificate examinations which are due to start on 16 November. This can be done via the Student Portal on www.gov.ie/leavingcert.

The examinations will be held in schools at evenings and during weekends. Further details regarding the examinations, including the exam timetables, can be found on the SEC website at www.examinations.ie

Registration for the November exams closes on Wednesday 7 October at 5pm.

For further information, please call the Calculated Grades Executive Office Helpline at 1800 111 135 and 1800 111 136 or check the SEC website at www.examinations.ie.

My results were unfairly marked down by the Calculated Grades process. The grades awarded by my school were much higher.

Students received only one set of grades, these were issued following the conclusion of the calculated grades process, including the process of national standardisation. The estimated percentage marks and rank orders provided by schools were not grades.

Schools and teachers differed in the way they estimated students' marks. Some will have been overly harsh in their estimations while others will have been overly generous. This means that if the Department had left schools' estimated marks unchanged, students would not have been treated equally for Leaving Certificate 2020. That would not have been fair.

The process of national Standardisation is the best process we have to ensure equity of treatment for the students of 2020 across all schools.

I was entitled to a spelling and grammar waiver, reader, scribe etc. Was this factored into my Calculated Grades?

Yes. Schools were instructed to provide an estimated mark as if the examinations had gone ahead as normal. This was to factor in any reasonable accommodation you were due to receive. Schools were provided with advice regarding this.

I was due to sit my examinations through Irish and receive bonus marks for this. Was this factored into my Calculated Grades?

Yes. Schools were instructed to provide an estimated mark as if the examinations had gone ahead as normal. This was to factor in whether or not a student was due to sit examinations through Irish. Schools were provided with advice regarding this.

When are the postponed exams happening?

The postponed Leaving Certificate examinations are due to start on 16 November, provided public health advice permits. The examinations will be held in schools at evenings and during weekends. Further details regarding the examinations, including the exam timetables, can be found on the SEC website at www.examinations.ie

For further information, please call the State Examinations Commission/Calculated Grades Executive Office Helpline at 1800 111 135 and 1800 111 136.

When is the postponed exams timetable being published?

The postponed examinations timetable is available on www.examinations.ie.

For further information, please call the State Examinations Commission/Calculated Grades Executive Office Helpline at 1800 111 135 and 1800 111 136.

Can the 02 October deadline to register for the November 2020 Leaving Cert exams be extended until after the results of the error checks are known and advised to students?

The deadline for registration for the November Leaving Certificate has been extended until 5.00pm on Wednesday 7 October.

If you are considering applying to sit an examination(s) in November, you are advised to register. If you subsequently decide to opt out of the November exams in a subject you should send an email to the SEC at the dedicated email address November2020@examinations.ie, quoting your name and examination number and the subject(s) you want to opt out of.

If I have registered for the November 2020 Leaving Certificate exams in some subjects can I opt out of a subject if I receive an upgrade as a result of the error checking process?

Yes, If you want to opt out of the November exams in a subject you should send an email to the SEC at the dedicated email address November2020@examinations.ie, quoting your name and examination number and the subject(s) you want to opt out of.

Will I get 100% for orals/practicals in the postponed Leaving Certificate exams?

No, the arrangement announced last March, that students would receive 100% in respect of oral and practical components in certain subjects, no longer applies. Students' Calculated Grades factor in all assessment components. The November examinations will be written examinations only. Students' projects will be marked in some subjects where projects had been completed. More information is available on www.examinations.ie.

For further information, please call the Calculated Grades Executive Office Helpline at 1800 111 135 and 1800 111 136.

I have registered to take some Leaving Certificate examinations in November 2020. I say my HPAT in February 2020. Will these HPAT results still be valid to combine with the results of my calculated grades and written exams?

Yes, you can use the February 2020 HPAT results when applying for CAO places on foot of your 2020 Leaving Certificate.

CAO and Higher Education

Will I get a new CAO offer?

The Department of Education and Skills has provided the CAO with revised corrected results for those 6,100 students who have received higher Calculated Grades.

The CAO are working to establish how many of these students would have been eligible for a higher preference offer in previous rounds of the CAO process, had they received the correct grades on 7 September.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will work with the CAO and the higher education institutions to see how these students can be facilitated to commence the course that they would, in other circumstances, have been offered in an earlier round.

In cases where it is not possible to offer a place in the 2020/21 academic year, the offer of a deferred place for the 2021/22 year will be made. The higher education institutions will do their utmost to accommodate students in 2020 where this is possible.

When will I get a new CAO offer?

If you are eligible for a new CAO offer, you will receive one as soon as possible.

If I accepted a CAO Round 1/2/3 offer, can I still get an improved offer if my grades increased?

Yes. If you are eligible for a new CAO offer, you will receive one as soon as possible.

Am I guaranteed a place in college this year?

In cases where a CAO applicant is deemed to be entitled to a place on a course based on upgraded Leaving Certificate results, and there is a place available in the course in question, the applicant will receive an offer to take up a place on that course immediately.

Where an applicant is deemed to be entitled to a place, and there are capacity issues in the course, all possible efforts will be made to facilitate the applicant in taking up that place in 2020. However in cases where this is not possible a deferred offer will be made which will guarantee them a place in the course in the 2021 academic year.

Higher education institutions will do their utmost to accommodate students in 2020 where this is possible.

What about my fees?

Where a new offer is issued the student can continue in their existing course and defer their new offer until the 2021/22 academic year.

The position of the Minister for Further and Higher Education is that no student affected by the calculated grades error should be financially disadvantaged as a result of this matter and he will work with Government colleagues to ensure this.

I've already paid my student registration fee. Will I have to pay it again if I change course?

In most cases, where it is early in the term and a student withdraws from their course, including where they transfer to another course in a different institution, they are refunded the registration fees. Students should contact their institution directly to find out what process needs to be followed in these cases.

If I didn't matriculate with the Calculated Grades I received on 7 September but I do so now with my improved grades, will I receive a CAO offer?

Yes, if the revised offer means that someone is now eligible for a Higher Education place where they were not before, due to matriculation, basic entry requirements or course specific entry requirements, they will be eligible to receive a new offer.

I have already started college. Will I lose my college place if someone else now has higher points as a result of the error?

No. No student who has accepted a CAO offer of a place or commenced their course in a HEI will lose out as a result of this.

I applied to go to university in the UK. What do I do?

You should wait until finding out if your results are changing.

Should you be notified of an upgrade in a subject as a result of the errors, and you believe that it would have made a material difference to your application, you should first contact the higher education institution you applied to.

If necessary, following that, contact the Department by emailing lc2020@education.gov.ie.

I applied to go to university abroad. What do I do?

You should wait until finding out if your results are changing.

Should you be notified of an upgrade in a subject as a result of the errors, and you believe that it would have made a material difference to your application, you should first contact the higher education institution you applied to.

If necessary, following that, contact the Department by emailing lc2020@education.gov.ie.

How will HEAR and DARE applicants be affected by any increase in calculated grades they may receive? (It is understood that HEAR and DARE offers are usually only made under Round 1).

Neither DARE nor HEAR eligibility is affected by the errors in the Leaving Certificate 2020 Calculated Grades process. When the revised Leaving Certificate calculated grades are provided to the CAO, DARE / HEAR eligible applicants will continue to be treated by the CAO in future rounds of offers as before.

What if I got a bursary or scholarship based on my original calculated grades results and another student now gets better points as a result of the adjustments now being made? Will I lose the bursary/scholarship and what will the other student get?

The Department of Education and Skills has not yet made any awards for the bursary schemes that it manages directly.

No awards for Department managed bursaries will be made until after the revised grades are made available.

Other bursaries and scholarships are managed directly by HEIs or other person(s)/organisations and not by the Department. You should contact the awarding body for further information.