



# Random Numbers

- In the vast majority of courses, admission is based solely on examination results; the available places are offered to those applicants with the better results.
- To compare results, points are awarded for different grades. The points awarded for Leaving Certificate results are shown in the CAO Handbook.
- To determine who should be offered places in a course, the applicants for that course are placed in order of merit. In other words, the applicant with the highest points score ( best set of results ) is placed at the top of the list and the other applicants are placed in descending order, according to their points score. The applicant with the lowest points score goes to the bottom of the list.
- The higher education institution will tell us to make a certain number of offers; for example, they may tell us that 200 offers are to be made in a particular course.
- Who is entitled to the 200 offers ? Obviously, the 200 applicants at the top of the list, i.e. those with the higher points.
- Sometimes, however, a situation may arise where, for example, the 198<sup>th</sup>, 199<sup>th</sup>, 200<sup>th</sup>, 201<sup>st</sup> and 202<sup>nd</sup> applicants all have the same points score but there are only 3 places available between them. A decision has to be made about which 3 out of the 5 with equal points will be offered the final places. How is this decision made?
- At an earlier stage, for each course for which she enters, each applicant is given a number which has been generated at random by the computer. The random number is exactly that; it is not associated with the CAO Application Number; it does not depend on when the applicant applied; it has no connection with anything. It is totally random, like lottery numbers.
- In the event of a tie on points, such as the five applicants competing for the last 3 places, then the random number of the applicants is taken into account.  
In effect, the order among the five with the same points score is set by their random number; the applicant with the highest random number goes first, followed by the one with the next highest random number, etc, and the applicant with the lowest random number goes fifth.  
The three with the higher random numbers are offered the 3 available places and the other two applicants are placed at the top of the waiting list.

### EXAMPLE

**LIST BEFORE BEING RE-ORDERED ACCORDING TO RANDOM NUMBER**

Applicant	Position of applicants in points order	Random number ( relevant only for last available places )
1	600	----
2	595	----
3	590	----
----	----	----
----	----	----
198	360	3429
199	360	1236
200	360	7658
201	360	4173
202	360	5617

**LIST AFTER BEING RE-ORDERED ACCORDING TO RANDOM NUMBER**

Applicant	Position of applicants in points order AND THEN IN RANDOM NUMBER ORDER	Random number (relevant only for last available places )
1	600	----
2	595	----
3	590	----
----	----	----
----	----	----
198	360	7658
199	360	5617
200	360	4173
201	360	3429
202	360	1236

The three applicants with the higher random numbers are placed ahead of the two with the lower random numbers and those three are offered the available places.

## EXAMINATION RECHECKS ( Implications )

- The question sometimes arises as to what happens if an applicant has her results rechecked. She is upgraded so that she now has the minimum points which were required for admission to a particular course, but random selection had operated at her revised points level.  
How is the applicant treated ?
- It is simply a matter of looking at her random number which had been generated originally with all the other applicants for the course. What if her random number is higher than that of the last person who was offered a place ? Obviously, if her correct results had been available at the time, she would have been entitled to an offer of a place because she would have been higher on the list than the last person who actually got an offer.  
She should have been entitled to the place then so she is entitled to the place now.
- On the other hand, what if her random number is lower than that of the last person who was offered a place ? Obviously, even if she had been in her rightful position in the order of merit list for the course, she would not have been offered a place; her random number was too low. Naturally, her revised result does not now entitle her to a place because her random number is still too low. She has not suffered any loss because we look to see exactly where she would have been if her correct results had been available from the outset.