

# **Outcomes from a Survey of Post-Primary Teachers Involved in the 2021 Leaving Certificate Accredited Grades Process in Ireland**

**Michael O'Leary, Zita Lysaght and Audrey Doyle**

The School of Policy and Practice

Institute of Education

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The Centre for Assessment Research, Policy and Practice in Education (CARPE)

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

June 2022







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**Published on the CARPE website on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

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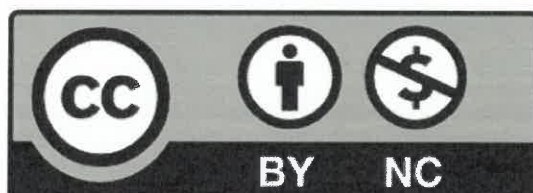
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**Please cite as:** O'Leary, M., Lysaght, Z., & Doyle, A. (2022). *Outcomes from a Survey of Post-Primary Teachers Involved in the 2021 Leaving Certificate Accredited Grades Process in Ireland*. Dublin: Centre for Assessment Research, Policy & Practice in Education (CARPE), Dublin City University.

**ISBN:** 978-1-911669-36-4



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## About the Authors



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A graduate of the National University of Ireland (BEd), Trinity College Dublin (MEd; MSc) and Dublin City University (EdD), **Zita Lysaght** is an assessment and mixed methods specialist. A member of the School of Policy and Practice in the Institute of Education at DCU, she leads modules on classroom assessment and research design on undergraduate, masters and doctoral programmes. She has been a member of the Advisory Board and Advisory Panel of the Centre for Assessment Research and Policy in Education (CARPE) since its inception in 2015. In this capacity, Zita contributes significantly to the running of CARPE in addition to supervising a diverse range of doctoral work and co-directing national and international research projects. Zita has twice received the President's Award for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and, formerly, was Co-Chair of the EdD programme and Chair of Postgraduate Studies by Research in DCU.



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## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our very great appreciation to all participating teachers for the effort and time taken to complete the survey questionnaire. We are grateful to everyone that helped us to promote the survey across national agencies and within schools. The input of those teachers involved in piloting the questionnaire instrument is also gratefully acknowledged.

The work of CARPE is supported financially by a grant from Prometric Inc – a test development, delivery and data management company headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. The content of this report has not been influenced in any way by Prometric and is solely the responsibility of the Authors.



## Executive Summary

The use of Accredited Grades (AG), as well as traditional examination grades for the Leaving Certificate (LC) in 2021, was an historical event in Irish post-primary education and, in global terms, a unique response to the cancellation of certificate exams precipitated by Covid-19. During the month of May 2021, post-primary teachers in schools across Ireland worked individually and in collaboration with school colleagues to generate an estimated mark for their students. Data from all schools were then submitted to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) for national standardisation. The majority of the LC2021 class opted to receive an Accredited Grade (AG) in addition to sitting an exam in at least one subject in the secure knowledge that, should the grades differ, they would be awarded the higher of the two.

In the closing months of 2021, following publication of LC results and completion of the appeals process, an online questionnaire survey of post-primary teachers was conducted. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: (i) to investigate how teachers engaged with the AG process in their schools and (ii) to determine if this experience changed their perceptions of their role as assessors. In addition, this survey was designed as a follow-up to research undertaken by the Authors in 2020 on the LC Calculated Grades (CG) process.

The data presented in this report capture the survey responses of 223 teachers whose biographical and school profiles reflected the population of post-primary teachers in Ireland. The findings are shared in a deliberately straightforward and uncomplicated way, devoid of detailed commentary. More in-depth analysis is provided in peer-reviewed research papers to follow.

As detailed in this report, quantitative data revealed that the teachers surveyed used a wide range of assessment information when estimating marks for their students. The outcomes from 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year exams were identified as being particularly important in informing teachers' judgements; so too were the results of continuous assessments and the LC performances of previous cohorts of students in teachers' schools. Among the challenges respondents reported facing during the AG process were decision-making around grade boundaries, concerns about outcomes from the national standardisation, the grading practices of other teachers, reconciling inconsistencies in student performance across 6<sup>th</sup> year and maintaining an unbiased position. In addition, a large proportion of teachers indicated that they found the process overly time-consuming although, overall, respondents were satisfied with the alignment meetings in which they had participated and expressed confidence in the professional judgements they had made. Significantly, almost all felt that they had been fair to their students. A range of feelings and beliefs about assessment, based on teachers' reflections on their experience of engagement in the AG process, were also recorded. These data are particularly interesting in so far they highlight a divergence of opinion within the teaching body regarding assessment reform at Senior Cycle. Given their significance and in keeping with the 2020 report on the CG process, the Authors elected to omit these data here and report them instead in a forthcoming peer-reviewed journal article.

Although the questionnaire contained closed-ended questions primarily, a relatively large volume of data was received in response to an open-ended question at the end. For the sake of parsimony, an indicative sample of comments are included in the main body of this report. A full record of the 82 comments received is contained in Appendix 2. In all instances, comments are reproduced exactly as received save for correcting typographical errors and/or redacting material that could be used to identify individual respondents.



Analysis of the qualitative data highlighted that issues of fairness and grade inflation were uppermost in respondents' minds. Some teachers expressed unhappiness at the way in which their colleagues and schools approached the process of estimating marks for students; others raised concern about the stress caused by the AG process for both teachers and students, albeit some respondents indicated that they felt they had coped reasonably well with the process. Comments regarding alignment meetings and the national standardisation process varied, reflecting respondents' experiences in individual schools with colleagues and principals and whether they thought teacher judgements needed to be externally moderated. Respondents' observations on the impact of the AG process on teacher-student relations were also mixed with some voicing concern about how the process had impacted negatively their relationship with students while others suggested the impact on student engagement/motivation was not uniform. The related issues of teacher assessment literacy and the need for professional development were also highlighted, with many noting that the expectations of teachers implicit in the AG process presented particular challenges for which they were not adequately prepared. Finally, teachers' equivocation regarding the use of continuous assessment at Senior Cycle is noteworthy: for some, engagement in the AG process reinforced their allegiance to traditional, externally set and marked examinations while others indicated interest in exploring the potential of combined assessment approaches in which teachers would play a more prominent role.

Data from this survey as well as those contained in the report on the LC2020 CG process (Doyle, Lysaght & O'Leary, 2021) were provided by over 850\* teachers who have been through a series of exceptional assessment experiences over the past two years. In the main, findings across both studies are consistent. With Senior Cycle reform firmly on the educational agenda, the opinions, insights, feelings and beliefs communicated in both reports deserve very careful consideration.

\*713 teachers responded to the CG study in 2021 and of those, 74 also responded to the AG study in 2022.



## Introduction and Research Context

Following the outbreak of Covid-19 in Ireland in 2020, the Leaving Certificate (LC) examination was cancelled and replaced by a system of Calculated Grades (CG) whereby teachers estimated marks and class ranks for each of their students and a national standardisation was carried out to ensure consistency of judgements across schools. Despite many challenges along the way, the process was completed in Autumn 2020 and the vast majority of students transferred successfully into the world of work or continued with their education. In Spring 2021, a report containing findings from a survey of teachers involved in the CG process (referred to in this document as the LC2020 survey) was published on the CARPE website (Doyle, Lysaght & O’Leary, 2021a). Shortly afterwards an article containing additional analysis of the data gathered was published in *Irish Educational Studies* (Doyle, Lysaght & O’Leary, 2021b). The publication of both documents was timely given the decision by the Minister for Education and her government colleagues that a system of Accredited Grades (AG) as well as written exams would be implemented in June 2021 in response to the ongoing health threat posed by the global pandemic. LC students were invited to take an AG in each subject and /or to sit a reduced content version of the traditional examination in June 2021. Those taking both options were given a guarantee that the higher of the two grades only would (i) count for entry to further and higher education and (ii) be recorded on their certificates (Department of Education, 2021a).

Broadly speaking, the system put in place for implementing accredited grades mirrored that implemented for calculated grades in 2020. However, two differences are noteworthy. First, in 2020, the public body normally responsible for the LC examination – the State Examinations Commission (SEC) - was unable to take responsibility for implementing the CG process due to legal impediments. Consequently, the Calculated Grades Executive Office was established to oversee the LC in 2020. However, following subsequent resolution of this legal issue by the Irish government, the SEC re-assuming responsibility for both LC options in 2021 and this was reflected in the change in name from ‘calculated’ to ‘accredited’ grades. Second, in light of the very negative reaction of teachers to the unexpectedly sharing of the ranks they had submitted to the DE with their students in 2020 (see Doyle, Lysaght & O’Leary, 2021), it was decided that class rank order data would not be collected as part of the 2021 AG process.

Hence, in April 2021, the DE published a new set of guidelines called *Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 Guide for Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks* (DE, 2021b). In this document it was explained that an Accredited Grade would be a combination of “a school’s estimate of a percentage mark to be awarded to a student in respect of their expected performance in an



examination in a particular subject” and, “national data on past Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate/Cycle examination performance of students in each subject” (DE, 2021b, p. 8). Further, as outlined, the process of arriving at an AG would involve two phases:

1. A school-based phase involving individual subject teachers estimating marks for their students, a school alignment of marks involving teachers of the same subject, oversight of the alignment process by the school principal and transmission of marks for national standardisation and
2. A national standardisation phase carried out by the SEC to mitigate the effects of different standards being applied across schools when arriving at estimated marks.

The school-based phase was completed in early June 2021 and, following completion of the national standardisation process over the Summer (in addition to the marking of scripts from the LC examination held in June), LC results were issued to students on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. Later that week (on September 7<sup>th</sup>), students were given access to both their LC examination marks and their estimated and accredited marks. An appeals process for candidates requesting rechecks of their accredited and/or exam results was opened on September 11<sup>th</sup> with the outcomes of appeals provided to candidates on October 8<sup>th</sup>. Following completion of the key elements of LC2021, the Authors launched a survey designed to gather data on the experiences of the teachers involved. The research sought to answer two questions:

1. How did post-primary teachers engage with the Accredited Grades process in their schools?
2. How did the process impact their perceptions of their role as assessors?

## Research Strategy

Following receipt of ethical approval to conduct the research from DCU’s Research Ethics Committee (November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021; DCUREC/2021/217), the questionnaire instrument administered as part of the survey of teachers involved in the LC 2020 Calculated Grades process was adapted for use with those involved in the LC2021 Accredited Grades process. To support comparison, where appropriate, between data from both studies, the AG survey instrument mirrored very closely that used in the CG survey in terms of layout and questions, with the vast majority of items being closed-ended, multiple choice (see Doyle, Lysaght & O’Leary, 2021, pp. 41-57). In light of differences between the CG and AG processes, some items used in the original LC2020 survey were omitted (e.g., the item which addressed the amount of time teachers spent estimating marks/ranks for their students) and replaced by new items (e.g., an item addressing whether students taught by survey respondents had taken the



option of an AG only, an exam only or both for LC2021 and/or an item designed to elicit data on issues not addressed in the previous survey such as teachers' perceptions of the contribution of alignment meetings to their professional development in assessment). Additionally, three new questions were added to the beginning of the survey, immediately following the consent statement. Respondents were asked to indicate: (i) if they had taken part in LC2020 CG process, (ii) if they had participated in the 2020 survey relating to the CG process and (iii) if they were willing to share their views on assessment reform at Senior Cycle. These questions were deemed important by the Authors because a large number of respondents to the CG survey had completed the first section of the questionnaire only, i.e., they didn't provide any data on the specifics of their experiences of assessment during the CG process.

The final version of the questionnaire instrument was organised in four main sections and focused specifically on the LC Established programme rather than on the LC Vocational or LC Applied programmes (see Appendix 1):

- Section 1 was designed to gather data on the respondents themselves (e.g., gender, teaching experience etc.), the kind of schools that teachers worked in, and the subject(s) they taught for LC2021.
- Section 2 invited teachers to reflect on the process of estimating marks for their students prior to attending the alignment meetings in their schools.
- Section 3 focused teachers' attention on their experiences of, and reflections on, the alignment meetings they attended with school colleagues.
- Section 4 asked respondents to consider how engagement in the process had influenced their perceptions of assessment and their identity/role as teacher assessors. This section concluded with an open-ended question inviting further comment by participants.

The survey, which was administered over a three-month period in November/December 2021 and January 2022 using the *Qualtrics* platform, employed three forms of volunteer sampling:

1. Principals known personally to the researchers were contacted and asked to bring the research and the *Qualtrics* web link to the attention of their school colleagues.
2. A list of contact details for all post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland was obtained through the DES website. These principals were also emailed and asked to bring the research and the survey's web link to the attention of their school colleagues.
3. Contact was made via email and Twitter with a range of national educational bodies such as the Teaching Council, teacher unions, subject associations, education centres and managerial bodies alerting them to the study.



## Response

In total, 487 teachers accessed the survey and completed the preliminary question regarding ethical consent. Of those, approximately 50% provided biographical or school data but did not respond to any of the substantive questions about the AG process. In light of this, two important decisions were made before data analysis began. First, the Authors agreed that data analysis in this report would focus on the responses of the 223 participants who answered at least one of the substantive questions regarding teachers' experiences of engagement in the LC2021 AG process. Second, while 208 teachers responded to the first open question about assessment reform and 163 continued with the survey, it was agreed that findings from these data (i.e. the 208 responses about assessment reform) would be reported separately in a later publication. Due to the variation in how participants engaged with the survey, it is important to note the precise number of responses pertaining to each of the survey questions throughout this report.

## Structure of the Report and Approach to Data Presentation

Presentation of survey data in this report is in four parts in keeping with the organisational structure of the research instrument. The sequence of numbers and letters used for the individual survey questions (see Appendix 1) are noted in the titles of tables and figures. Percentages provided in all data tables in the report are rounded to the nearest whole number and are based on the numbers responding to specific questions (*valid percent*) rather than on the total number of respondents (487); response numbers are listed at the foot of each table and figure. Although the questionnaire contained closed-ended questions primarily, a relatively large volume of data was received in answer to an open-ended question at the end of the survey instrument (see Appendix 1, Q11). In light of this and for the sake of brevity, a representative sample of the comments are included in the body of the report with the full set of comments included in Appendix 2. In both cases, save for correcting typographical errors or redacting material that could identify individual teachers, individual comments are reproduced as submitted under a range of inter-related themes. It should be noted that, throughout this report, findings are presented with minimal interpretation, thereby affording the reader an opportunity to engage more directly with both the quantitative and qualitative data. Where appropriate, commentary is provided on the extent to which the outcomes from this survey are similar to those from the survey on the LC2020 Calculated Grades with respect to individual questions asked in both surveys.

Complementing this report are a number of research articles yet to be published at the time of writing. These articles will provide in-depth analyses and interpretation of the survey data, especially in



respect of teachers' beliefs and feelings about assessment and their involvement in certifying the achievement of their own students.

## Survey Outcomes

### Respondents' Involvement in LC2020 Calculated Grades process and in the CARPE/DCU Calculated Grades Survey

As is clear from Table A, the vast majority of respondents (93%) had experience of participating in both the Calculated and Accredited Grades processes. One in three indicated that they had also participated in the research study focused on the experiences of teachers involved in the 2020 CG process.

**Table A. Participation in LC2020 Calculated Grades process and survey**

	Yes	No
	%	%
<b>Question A:</b> Did you take part in the Leaving Certificate 2020 Calculated Grades process?	93	7
<b>Question B:</b> In November/December 2020, we invited post-primary teachers to participate in an online survey of their experiences of involvement in the 2020 Calculated Grades process. Did you participate in that research?	33	67

n=223



## Biographical and School Data (Questionnaire Section 1)

Teacher biographical and school-related data were collected from all respondents. Teachers were also required to list the subject(s) they taught for LC2021. The findings are presented in Tables 1-3 and in Figure 1 that follow.

**Table 1. Teacher biographical data (Question 1a-d)**

Gender	Years teaching		In current school		In total		Number of LC Classes taught		Role(s) in school	
	%		%	%			%		%	
Female	66	0 to 1	3	2		None	6	Assist./Deputy Principal	39	
Male	33	2 to 5	21	13		1	13	Subject/Dept. Head	64	
Other	<1	6 to 10	19	15		2 to 5	22			
		11 to 20	22	29		6 to 10	12			
		>20	36	41		11+	48			

n =173-223

As is clear from Table 1, the ratio of females to males was 2:1 reflecting the gender split among Irish second level teachers nationally. In terms of experience, 70% indicated that they had been teaching for 11 years or more with a further 15% teaching between 6 and 10 years. Not surprisingly given the focus on LC teachers, less than 2% indicated that they were in their first year of teaching. Approximately three of every four respondents (77%) indicated that they had been teaching in their schools for six years or more.

About half the cohort could be considered very experienced Senior Cycle teachers with 48% saying that they had taught LC classes eleven times or more. Conversely, just 6% could be considered inexperienced having taught an exam class once or not at all. One in five (22%) had experience of bringing students through the LC exams on between two and five occasions with a further 12% of respondents indicating that they had taught LC classes between six and ten times.

As well as being subject/classroom teachers, most respondents occupied roles that included either subject/department head (64%) and/or assistant/deputy principal (38%). Other roles listed by a



minority of respondents included AG coordinator, chaplain, guidance counsellor, LC year head, teaching principal, and SEN, TY or LCVP coordinator.

**Table 2. School data (Q2a-e)**

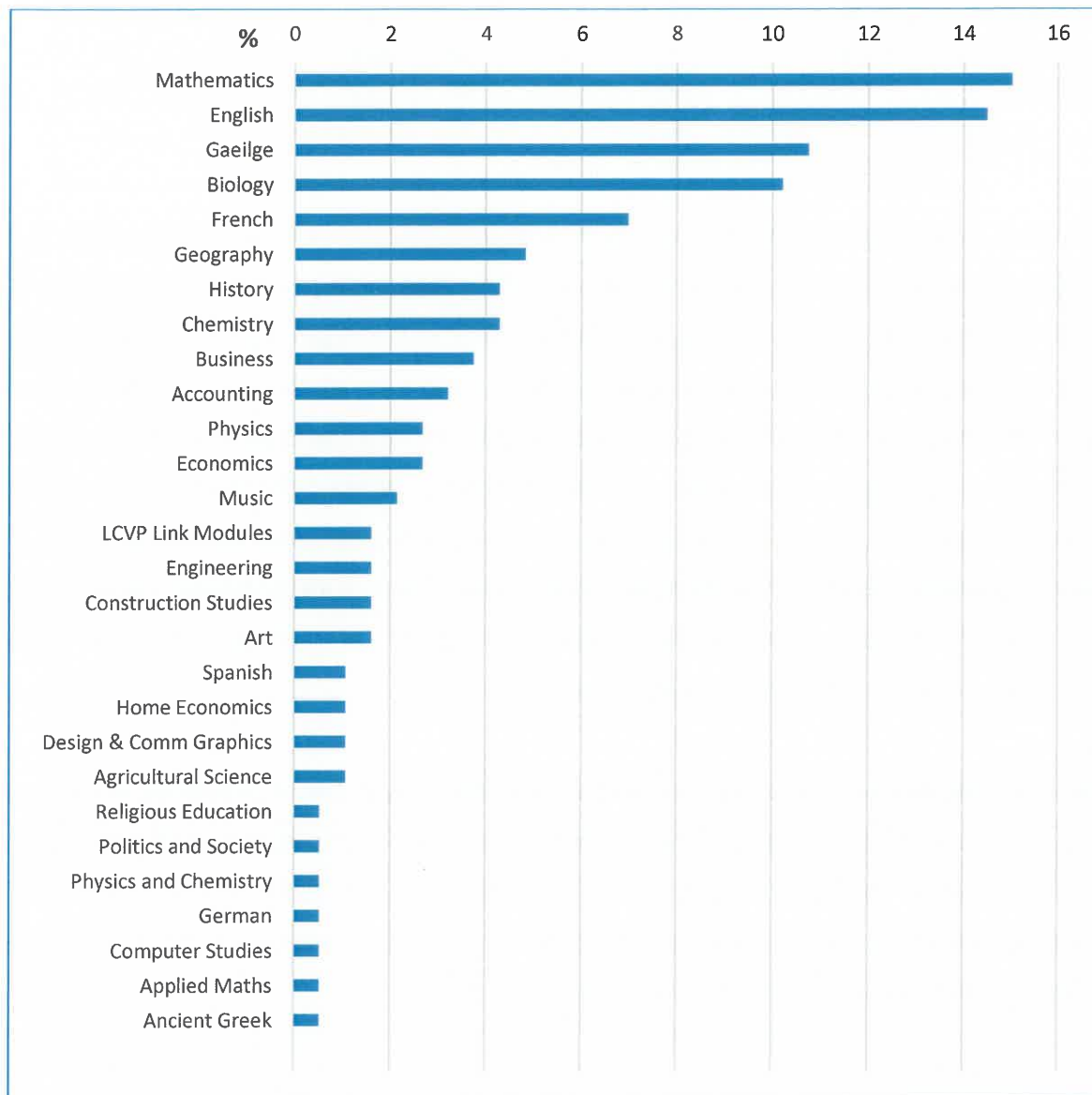
Student gender		Status		Size		Language of instruction		Location	
	%		%		%		%		%
Female	28	DEIS	21	<100	1	English	90	Rural/Village (pop. ≤ 2,000)	14
Male	12	Non-DEIS	68	100-299	13	Gaeilge	9	Small Town (pop. > 2,000 ≤ 5,000)	17
Mixed	60	Fee-Paying	11	300-599	36	Other	<1	Mid-size Town (pop. > 5,000 ≤ 15,000)	22
				600-999	37			Large Town (pop. > 15,000 ≤ 50,000)	21
				1000+	13			City (population > 50,000)	27

n =223

As the data in Table 2 indicate, most respondents worked in mixed gender, non-disadvantaged (Non-DEIS), schools with between 600 and 999 students where English was the language of instruction. The proportion of respondents working in DEIS schools (21%) is somewhat less than the percentage of DEIS schools in the post-primary system (circa 27%). While 11% of respondents to this survey worked in fee-paying schools, the proportion of fee-paying schools in the post-primary system nationally is about 7%. In all, 50% of teachers in this survey indicated that they worked in school with 600 pupils or more. The proportion of schools nationally with this number of students is 35% which suggests that teachers from schools with fewer than 600 students are under-represented in the sample. The percentage of teachers working in schools where English is the language of instruction (90%) reflects the proportion of such schools in the system (all national statistics taken from DES, Statistical Bulletin, 2020). With the exception of the DEIS profile, these data are comparable to those observed in the LC2020 survey. A question on school location was added for the LC2021 survey. The data derived from it show that respondents worked in schools located in a variety of settings. Unsurprisingly, almost half of the respondents (48%) worked in schools located in large urban areas.



While respondents were asked to list all of the subjects for which they submitted estimated marks, for the purposes of the survey, when answering subsequent questions, they were asked to focus on one subject only. As Figure 1 shows, teachers of 28 of the 36 LC (established) subjects responded to the survey. About 40% were either teachers of Maths, English or Gaeilge – the three subjects taken by almost all LC students. In keeping with the LC2020 survey, teachers of Biology, French, Geography, History, Chemistry and Business are also well represented in the AG2021 survey.



**Figure 1. Leaving Certificate subjects chosen by respondents as a focus for the survey (Q3b) (n = 186)**



**Table 3. Subject level and numbers of students and teachers involved in LC2021 Accredited Grades (Q3c-e)**

Chosen subject level (n= 219)		Number of students choosing LC2021 options in the chosen subject				Number of teachers in total in the school involved in the Accredited Grades process for the chosen subject (n=220)	
	%	# students	AG only % n= 172	Exam only % n= 87	Both % n= 189		%
Higher	83	0	6	79	2	One	37
Ordinary	17	1 to 5	43	6	17	Two	26
Foundation	<1	6 to 10	25	5	14	Three	9
		11 to 20	18	8	46	Four	10
		21 to 30	8	2	19	Five or more	19
		30+	0	0	3		

The data in Table 3 show that the vast majority of teachers responding to the study (83%) taught their subject at higher level (similar to the 85% observed in the LC2020 survey). The data also show that the option of an AG grade only was taken by some students with 68% of respondents indicating that they returned an AG only for between 1 and 10 (categories 1-5 and 6-10) students in their class. The data also show that taking the exam only was much less popular among students with 79% of their teacher respondents indicating that none of them had chosen to do this. What is clear in the table is that the option to take both an accredited grade and sit the exam was a popular choice among the students of these respondents – just 2% of respondents said that none of their students did this. These findings are consistent with those reported by the SEC who found that 8.8% of students opted for an AG only, 0.3% for exam only and 90.9% for both (SEC, 2021, p. 5)

The data in the third column of Table 3 show that about one third of teachers (37%) worked alone in their subject area while estimating marks for their students, with approximately another third (35%) working with one or two other colleagues. Just over a quarter indicated that four or more teachers, including themselves, submitted data for students in their school. Once again, these findings are reflective of those observed in the LC2020 survey.



## Teachers' Reflections on the Process of Estimating Marks Prior to Attending Alignment Meetings (Questionnaire Section 2)

The data in Table 4 pertain to whether or not teachers felt different types of assessment evidence were important when they were estimating marks for their students **prior** to attending alignment meetings. It should be noted that the items listed in Table 4 were either taken from the Calculated Grades guidelines document sent to schools (see DOE, 2021, p. 14) or based on what teachers indicated they had used during the Calculated Grades process in 2020 (see Doyle, Lysaght & O'Leary, 2021, pp. 8-16).

Data in Table 4 reveal that a wide range of assessment information was considered by teachers to be important when estimating marks for their students. Not surprisingly, the outcomes from exams in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year provided important information for the vast majority (90%+) of respondents. It should be noted that while 87% of respondents in the 2020 survey said that Leaving Cert mock examinations were important, just 56% of respondents replied similarly here. As in 2020, large percentages of respondents indicated that they valued the information they had amassed from continuous assessments and/or in-class formative assessments from 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year. For four out of every five teachers, knowledge of how students in previous LC classes had performed in the LC was deemed important to their decision-making. However, it is also noteworthy that just 46% of respondents indicated that knowledge of how students in other LC classes in the school had performed in previous LCs (school historical data) was of value to them in calculating marks with 54% reporting that historical data of this kind was unimportant. While engagement within class, especially in 6<sup>th</sup> year, was considered to be important by 68% of respondents, for most, engagement in learning outside of school and Junior Cert results were relatively unimportant factors in helping them estimate their students' marks. The vast majority of teachers who taught a subject with a course-work component indicated that this information was important also (72%). Most of the 140 respondents who had experience of marking for the SEC indicated that this was an important factor in their decision-making.



**Table 4. Evidence used to estimate marks (in order of importance) (Q4a)\***

		Important**	Unimport.***
	n	%	%
6th Year exams Sept. to Dec. 2020 (Christmas, monthly etc.)	210	98	2
6th Year exams as per Department of Education guidelines i.e. a maximum of three class tests, each one lesson in duration, administered up to May 14, 2021	206	93	7
Additional 6th Year exams January to May 2021 (including tests involving past LC papers/questions, oral exams etc.)	205	91	9
5th Year exams (Christmas, Summer, monthly etc.)	217	90	10
6th Year continuous assessments (exclude Leaving Cert course work components here – these are listed below - but include short tests, assignments, projects, experiments etc.)	199	87	13
5th Year continuous assessments (assignments, projects, experiments etc.)	207	83	17
Your knowledge of how students you taught in previous LC classes performed in the LC (including your own tracking data/assessment records and your familiarity with LC marking guides)	205	81	19
Your experience of marking/examining for the State Examinations Commission (SEC)	145	78	22
6th Year in-class/online class formative assessments (e.g. observation, questioning, discussions, self-assessments etc.)	203	75	25
5th Year in-class/online class formative assessments (e.g. observation, questioning, discussions, self-assessments etc.)	214	74	26
Leaving Cert course work components	140	72	28
6th Year engagement within class/online class (include diligence, work ethic, effort rather than personal behaviour)	206	68	32
5th Year engagement within class/online class (include diligence, work ethic, effort rather than personal behaviour)	213	63	37
Leaving Cert mock examinations	123	56	44
Your knowledge of how students in <b>other</b> LC classes in the school performed in previous LCs (including tracking data/assessment records maintained by your school)	197	46	54
5th Year engagement with learning outside of class/school (e.g. homework, clubs, societies etc.)	196	32	68
Junior Cert Result for the subject listed in Q3b	193	30	70
6th Year engagement with learning outside of class/school (e.g. homework, clubs, societies etc.)	189	28	72
Overall Junior Cert Results	188	15	85

\*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

\*\*Combined percentage: *Very Important and Important*; \*\*\*Combined percentage: *Relatively unimportant and Not Important at all*.

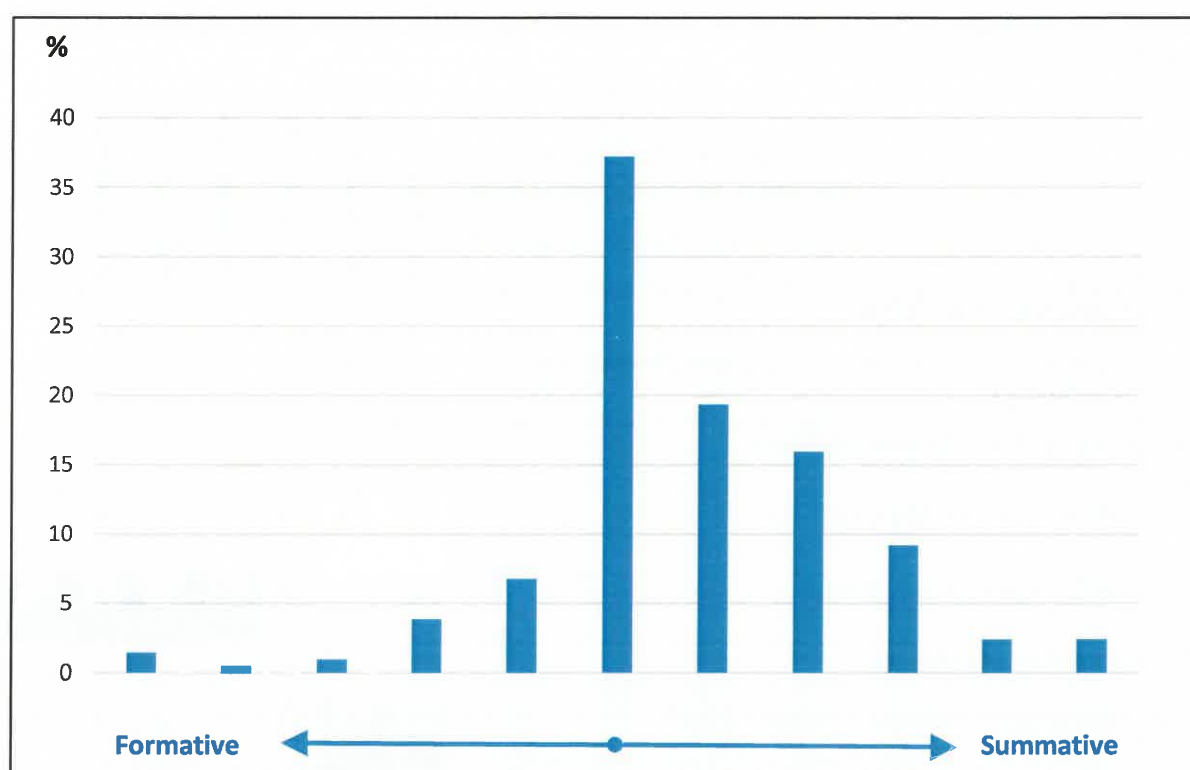
Note: An *Undecided/not applicable* option was included in the question responses but was not selected with respect to any of the statements.



In a guide for schools on the arrangements for LC2021, the DE provided the following advice to teachers:

It is important in the period leading up to the determination of estimated percentage marks that over-assessment is avoided and that an appropriate balance is achieved between formative and summative assessment (DE, 2021, p.14).

In response, a decision was made that this survey would address the issue by asking teachers to indicate, using an 11-point slider, the overall balance they struck between the use of formative and summative assessment data when estimating marks for their students (See Appendix 1, Q4b). The findings are presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2. The overall balance struck by respondents between the use of formative and summative assessment data. (Q4b) (n= 207)**

Consistent with the overall thrust of the data in Table 4, the figure demonstrates that teachers in the survey tended to lean more heavily on summative than formative assessment data – 49% choose to position the slider to the right of the mid-point, while just 14% positioned it to the left of the mid-point. One in three (37%) choose the mid-point between formative and summative while 2% or less indicated that they relied exclusively on one type or the other.



## Questionnaire Section 2: Question 5 (Challenges when estimating marks)

Question 5 in Section 2 of the questionnaire instrument invited teachers to read 14 statements describing different challenges they may have faced when estimating marks for individual students in their class (see Appendix 1). In Table 5, these statements are grouped according to five different types of challenges, beginning with compliance with the DE guidelines. Each set of statements is ranked from high to low based on the percentage of teachers who endorsed the statement for 90% or more of their students (column 2 in the table).

**Table 5. Challenges faced by teachers when estimating marks for individual students (prior to attending alignment meetings) (Q5)\***

Percentage of students (for which the statement is true)	90%+	About 75%	About 50%	About 25%	About 10%	About 5%	None
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>1. Application of guidelines</b>							
a) I applied the DE guidelines strictly when estimating the student mark	77	14	5	1	1	1	2
<b>2. Difficulty of the estimation tasks</b>							
a) Estimating a mark was easy	22	39	15	6	7	4	6
b) Estimating a mark was difficult	8	5	14	25	24	18	6
<b>3. Availability of evidence</b>							
a) I had plenty of evidence to estimate a mark	58	25	11	2	1	1	2
b) I had just about enough evidence to estimate a mark	7	8	8	11	13	25	29



**Table 5 continued**

<b>4. Decisions made about estimated marks</b>							
a) I gave the student the benefit of the doubt and awarded a mark that moved him/her above a grade boundary	6	5	9	7	14	21	38
b) I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I thought the national standardisation process might bring the student's grade down	6	4	6	6	12	13	53
c) I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I thought other teachers in other schools would mark leniently	3	4	1	3	5	7	77
d) I gave a mark that left a student just below a grade boundary	2	1	3	14	19	19	42
e) I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I thought other teachers in my school would mark leniently	2	3	1	1	4	5	85
f) I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC due to my knowledge of the student's challenging circumstances outside of school	2	3	2	2	3	10	80
g) I should have given the student a failing mark but didn't	1	1	1	1	3	17	76
h) I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I knew the student needed a particular grade (e.g. to access a particular course or job)	1	2	1	0	2	5	90
<b>5. Fairness of estimated marks</b>							
a) I gave the student a mark I believed was fair	92	6	1	2	0	0	1

The number of responses to each statement ranged from 201-204

\*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

In Table 5, two sets of percentage marks apply to each interpretation. For example, in respect of the first statement (1a), 77% of the teachers indicated that the statement, *I applied the DE guidelines strictly when estimating the student mark*, was true in the case of 90% or more of their students. A further 14% said that was the case in respect to about 75% of their class. Only one in ten teachers indicated that applying the guidelines strictly was problematic for 50% or more of their students.

In general, the data in the table are consistent across the percentages of teachers finding the estimation of marks easy or difficult (Items 2a-b). For example, about one in two respondents (shaded in yellow) indicated that estimating marks was easy for about 75% or more of their students.



Conversely, roughly half the respondents said this was a difficult task in respect to about 25% or less of their students (shaded in blue).

A majority of teachers 58% indicated that they had plenty of evidence to estimate a mark for the vast majority (90%+) of the LC students in their subject area. Another 25% said that this was the case with respect to about 75% of their students (Item 3a). Very few indicated that they had *just about enough evidence* for more than half of their students, e.g., the combined total in respect to Item 3b for the first three categories is just 23%. A comparison of combined percentages in the green and orange shaded cells show that there is a consistency in how most teachers responded to the issue about availability of evidence.

As the data in Table 5 indicate, some issues arose for teachers when making decisions around grade boundaries (Items 4a and 4d) and when considering factors such as the national standardisation (Item 4b), what teachers in other schools might do (Item 4c) and their students personal circumstances (Item 4f). For example, 62% said that they gave 5% or more of their students the benefit of the doubt and gave them a mark that moved them above a grade boundary (Item 4a). Leaving students below a grade boundary was also an issue for many teachers (Item 4d) with 24% saying that they should have awarded some failing marks but didn't (Item 4g). While most teachers indicated that they were not influenced by the marks they thought other teachers in their school or in other schools might give (see Items 4e and 4, respectively), almost one in two (47%) said that, for 5% or more of their students, they awarded a higher mark than they felt the student would have achieved in the LC because they thought the national standardisation process might bring the student's grade down (see Item 4b). Almost one in four (23%) indicated that they were influenced in some cases by the prospect of teachers in other schools marking leniently (Item 4c). While 20% of teachers said that challenging circumstances outside of school for some students led them to award a higher mark than they felt the student would have achieved in the LC (see Item 4f), just 10% indicated that knowing that some students needed a particular grade for a particular course or job was a factor in awarding higher grades. Overall, the vast majority of teachers (92%) felt that the marks they awarded were fair in the case of 90% or more of their students (Item 5a).

While most of the findings related to the data in Table 5 are comparable to outcomes observed in the LC2020 survey, two points of difference are worth highlighting. Relatively more teachers in this survey indicated that they were influenced to award higher marks to account for (i) the impact of the national standardisation (48% v 33%) and (ii) for how teachers in other schools would mark (23% v 12%).



## Questionnaire Section 2: Question 6 (Reflections on the process of estimating marks)

Data in Table 6 pertain to teachers' levels of agreement with statements describing different experiences they may have had during the process of estimating marks for their students prior to attending alignment meetings. The statements are grouped under two headings (numbered 1-3) and, within each heading, ordered from high to low on the basis of the percentage of respondents selecting the *Agree* option.

**Table 6. Reflections on the process of estimating marks for students (prior to attending alignment meetings) (Q6)\***

	Agree** %	Disagree*** %	Undecided/NA %
<b>1. Feelings during the estimation process</b>			
a) I felt confident when exercising my professional judgement during the process	81	13	7
b) I felt good about the marking decisions I made	73	16	11
c) I felt stressed during the process	59	38	3
d) I felt uncomfortable during the process at the prospect of my students learning how I had marked them	55	42	3
e) I felt guilty about the marking decisions I made	25	70	6
<b>2. Challenges during the process</b>			
a) The process of estimating marks for my students was overly time-consuming	62	37	2
b) When estimating a mark, I found it difficult to reconcile inconsistencies (peaks and troughs) in my students' performance throughout 6 <sup>th</sup> year	52	45	3
c) I found it difficult to maintain an unbiased position when marking my students	42	57	1
<b>3. Impact of prior experiences</b>			
a) My experience of involvement in the 2020 Calculated Grades process made the Accredited Grades process in 2021 easier for me	61	25	14
b) My experience of SLARs at Junior Cycle was helpful to me during the process	20	64	16

The number of responses to each statement ranged from 193-197

\*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

\*\*Combined percentage: *Strongly Agree* and *Agree*

\*\*\*Combined percentage: *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*



What is most noteworthy about the findings in Table 6 is the large percentage of teachers (81%) expressing confidence in the professional judgement they exercised during the Accredited Grades process (Item 1a). Almost three out of every four (73%) also said that they felt good about their marking decisions, with a minority (25%) saying they felt guilty (Items 1b and 1e, respectively). However, it should be noted that while 59% found the process stressful (Item 1c), this figure is down from the 81% that said they found it stressful in 2020. The percentage indicating that they felt uncomfortable about the prospect of their students having access to how they were marked (Item 1d) is also down (from 73% in 2020 to 55% here), although it should be noted that the statement in the 2020 survey asked about students having access to ranks rather than marks. Two out of every three respondents thought that the process was overly time consuming (Item 2a was not asked previously), while the percentages pertaining to those who agreed that it was difficult to reconcile inconsistencies in their students' performance and to maintain an unbiased position (Items 2b and 2c, respectively) are similar to those observed in the LC2020 survey.

It will be noted from Item 3b that just 20% of respondents said that involvement in SLARS was helpful to them during the AG process (the equivalent figure in 2020 was 31%). Significantly, 61% of respondents agreed that their involvement in the 2020 CG process made the AG process easier for them. In this case 25% disagreed (Item 3a).

## **Teachers' Reflections on the School Alignment Meetings (Questionnaire Section 3)**

In section 3 of the questionnaire, the respondents' attention was turned to the alignment meetings they attended with colleagues in their schools. Data generated from Question 7 in the survey (see Appendix 1) revealed that the vast majority of teachers (n=192) attended either one (47%) or two (37%) alignment meetings. About one in six (16%) attended three or more.

### **Section 3: Question 8a (Reflections on the alignment meetings)**

Data in Table 7 are derived from Question 8 in the survey (see Appendix 1) and show the extent to which teachers agreed or disagreed with statements pertaining to three issues: the experience of working with colleagues during the meetings, the outcomes of the process in terms of the marks awarded and how well the process worked overall. Again, in each category statements are ordered from high to low on the basis of the percentage of respondents agreeing with the statements.



**Table 7. Reflections on the alignment meetings (Q8a)\***

	Agree**	Disagree***	Undecided
	%	%	%
<b>1. Opinions on working with colleagues during alignment meetings</b>			
a) I found it easy to justify my marks to colleagues	91	7	2
b) I found it easy to work with my colleagues during the alignment meetings	86	12	3
c) I found the alignment meetings stressful	34	64	2
d) I found it hard to voice my concerns about how colleagues arrived at their marks	32	63	5
<b>2. Opinion on the outcomes of the alignment meetings</b>			
a) The way in which marks were estimated differed among teachers in my school	50	39	11
b) I awarded a higher mark than I felt students would have achieved in the LC following discussions with colleagues during alignment meetings	25	72	3
c) My students would have received a higher mark than I gave if they had been in a colleague's class	20	69	11
d) I awarded a lower mark than I felt students would have achieved in the LC following discussions with colleagues during alignment meetings	11	85	4
<b>3. Overall evaluation of alignment process</b>			
a) Overall the alignment process worked well	75	20	5
b) The DES guidance around the alignment process was helpful to me	58	38	4
c) My understanding of assessment was enhanced as a result of my involvement in the alignment meetings	37	53	10
d) I needed more guidance on how to resolve disagreements during alignment meetings	27	64	9

The number of responses to each statement ranged from 187-192

\*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

\*\*Combined percentage: *Strongly Agree* and *Agree*

\*\*\*Combined percentage: *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree*



Data in Table 7 show that a very high percentage of respondents indicated that they found it easy to work with colleagues during the alignment process (Item 1a) and to justify their decisions to them (Item 1b). That said, about a third agreed that the alignment meetings were stressful (Item 1c) and that they found it hard to voice concerns about how their colleagues arrived at their decisions (Item 1d). These findings are broadly in line with those observed in the previous survey, although the percentage who agreed with Item 1d is up from 23% to 32%.

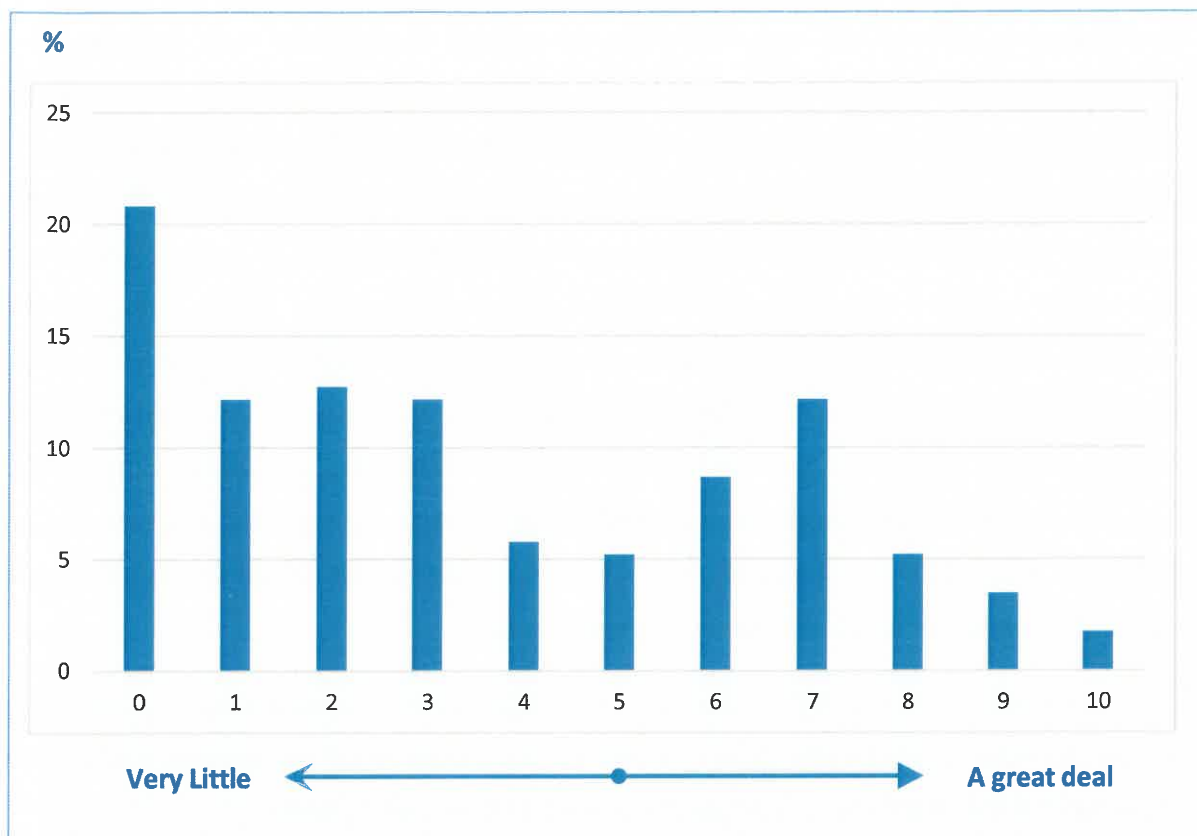
Respondents were divided on whether the estimation of marks differed among teachers in their school with 50% agreeing that it did (up from 38% in 2020) and 39% disagreeing (Item 2a). The data indicate that the marks initially awarded by some teachers changed following the alignment meetings with 25% agreeing they awarded a higher mark (Item 2b) and 11% a lower mark (Item 2c). One in five agreed that their students would have received a higher mark from a colleague (Item 2d).

Overall, respondents to this survey felt the alignment process worked well with 75% agreeing and just 20% disagreeing (Item 3a). In relation to findings about the DE support materials for schools, the majority of respondents (58%) found guidance in relation to the alignment process helpful (Item 3b). While this figure is down 10% from the figure observed for the LC2020 survey, it should be noted that just 27% of respondents in this survey indicated that they needed more guidance in relation to resolving disagreements during the process (Item 3d) (the equivalent figure for LC2020 was 21%).

The issue of whether or not participation in alignment meetings contributed to professional development was addressed in two ways in this survey (the issue was not addressed in 2020). Participants were asked if their understanding of assessment was enhanced as a consequence of their involvement in alignment meetings (see Item 3c in Table 7). 37% agreed that it had been while 63% disagreed. A further 10% were unsure.

Respondents were also asked to indicate, the extent to which this was the case using an eleven-point scale ranging from 0 (*Very little*) to 10 (*A great deal*). The outcomes are represented in Figure 3.





**Figure 3. The extent to which the school alignment meeting(s) contributed to overall professional development in assessment (Q8b) (n= 173)**

Overall, these findings are consistent with those derived from statement 3c in the table. Just 5% of respondents choose the mid-point with 64% to the left of it (towards very little) and 31% to the right. Just over 30% took the extreme view with one in five respondents choosing the zero point and one in ten selecting the opposite end of the scale.

### **Teachers’ Reflections on the Impact of having been Involved in the Accredited Grades Process in their Schools (Questionnaire Section 4)**

Data that speak to how engagement in the AG process impacted on teachers’ feelings and beliefs about assessment and their role in the assessment process going forward were gathered using 12 Likert-type agreement statements (see Appendix 1, Questions 9 and 10). These data are not included in this report but will be the focus of papers being prepared for peer review.



#### Questionnaire Section 4: Themes from Open-Ended Question (Q11)

The survey that informed this report provided two sources of qualitative data. An open-ended question at the beginning (see Appendix 1, Page 2, Question C) asked respondents to consider the following: *If you were leading Senior Cycle Reform, what changes, if any, would you make to assessment at Senior Cycle? Using numbered bullet points, please list your recommendations in order of priority?* This question was frontloaded in the survey to garner the views of as many second level teachers as possible in relation to proposed Leaving Certificate Reform (LCR). It was noted earlier that while 208 teachers responded to this question, a decision was taken not to present the findings from these data as they do not speak directly to the focus of this study, i.e., teachers' experiences of engagement with LC2021 and how this informs the way in which they conceptualise their role as assessors. However, as the data are clearly pertinent to national debate regarding LC reform, they are the subject of parallel analysis currently, the findings from which will be shared via a series of peer-reviewed papers and national and international presentations.

The final question of the survey (see Appendix 1, Question 11), and the second source of qualitative data for this report, invited respondents to reflect on their experiences of engagement in LC2021 and suggested that they might like to consider one or more of the following issues:

- The overall balance they struck between the use of formative and summative assessment data when estimating marks for your class.
- The extent to which engagement in the Accredited Grades process contributed to their overall professional development in assessment.
- How preparation of students for both the Accredited Grades and/or Examinations affected teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Approximately one in three of the 223 survey participants (n= 82) responded to this open-ended question. It is these data, exclusively, that are the focus of this final section of the report. Analysis of background data for this sub-set of teachers revealed no systematic bias in terms of gender, teaching experience, number of LC classes or profile of LC subjects taught, role in school or school type when compared with those who did not respond to Question 11.



Six themes derived from the data using a combination of inductive and deductive coding and thematic analysis of responses to Question 11 are presented here. These relate to:

1. Fairness and grade inflation
2. Teacher and student stress
3. Alignment meetings and standardisation
4. Teacher-student relationship and student engagement
6. Teacher assessment literacy and professional development
7. Continuous assessment and LC reform.

In the interests of efficiency and in order to give readers an overall sense of the data, each response is used once only (i.e. not referenced across themes) and reproduced in its entirety (save for some sentences/phrases that are redacted to protect respondents' identity). Immediately following each comment, in brackets, is an ID number linked to each (anonymous) respondent that will be used to integrate (link) the qualitative and quantitative data in future publications. All 82 responses are reproduced in full in Appendix 2.

### **Theme 1: Fairness and grade inflation**

Teachers expressed strong feelings and beliefs about their role in assessment for accreditation purposes with the issue of fairness emerging frequently. Many statements signalled that the traditional Leaving Certificate Examination is considered the most appropriate assessment modality because it is conducted externally by the SEC which, many teachers believe, eliminates potential bias and grade inflation while offering students anonymity and objectivity. Comments also reveal that some teachers' attitudes were impacted by actions taken locally, within and across schools, and nationally, in the course of standardisation:

*Fairness stems from external assessment. What is fair about the Leaving Cert is that everyone is a number and has their work assessed on its merits only. Teachers assessing students cannot be objective or fair (P. 13).*

*We cannot have teachers assessing their own students, it is not objective, the present LC may be unfair but it's unfair to everyone (P. 80).*

*I completely disagree with accredited grades. I find it very difficult to accept that the department can change the result I awarded when they knew nothing about my students' ability in my subjects. I believe the fairest system is the traditional exams and teachers should not assess their students in any format (P. 22).*

Several teachers pointed to deliberate grade inflation by some colleagues and schools as a major cause of concern that has the potential to derail any form of AG in the future:



*When I heard the number/percentage of students in other schools getting 625 I was very disheartened and felt that other schools took advantage of the accredited grades system, which put my high achieving students on the back foot, since we as a school were extremely fair in the grades we gave. If the accredited grades were to be repeated, I don't think that it would be fair on students as all schools will just start giving their students higher grades than they should because other schools have done it in the past (P. 81).*

*I have professional integrity so I followed procedures and protocols, and made sure to give the fairest grades to all my students. Some colleagues and teacher friends in other schools did not do the same. Many inflated their grades and openly said this. This had an overall impact on the grades of my students due to the implementation of the bell-shaped curve. Furthermore, the LC state exam in maths was extremely dumbed down, the choice was too broad, and the marking was too lenient so there was too much grade inflation. Revert to the old system please (P. 33).*

*I only taught my class for one year as they had a different teacher in 5th Year. They were a weak group and not very motivated to succeed, skipped assessments, didn't do homework so it was very hard to grade them. I was very fair in the grades I awarded as a class and put a lot of work into it but had to fail [REDACTED] students who had failed to show they could pass the exam. The fail rate dropped from about 8% to 2.3% at OL, so plenty of other teachers must have been generous in their marking, which is frustrating. A colleague who teaches another subject I teach awarded [REDACTED] H1s including a [REDACTED]%, despite the school NEVER receiving a H1 in this subject since it was offered, plus a high number of H2s and H3s too, which completely undermined the whole grade process in that subject in my opinion. There was no alignment meeting for that subject either. I would hate, hate, hate if we had to do this every year, as it really stressed me out. It also showed me (because the grades were so inflated from other years) that a high proportion of teachers cannot be trusted to be 100% impartial and unbiased in the grades they award. The LC needs to be maintained as an anonymously marked exam, where all components are marked externally, in the interest of fairness to all students (P. 38).*

*I feel that the students who sat the exams were disadvantaged. As a corrector in the LC, I feel that the accredited credit was higher even by X2 grades (inflated) in some circumstances. I felt some colleagues inflated the grades in other subjects so I felt under pressure to be generous. I also felt under pressure because I live and work in a small rural area/school. Students are doing less work. They have access to google translate. I am in favour of less subjects for LC but an end of year exam is imperative to keep standards (P. 25).*

Echoing the concern expressed in public commentary regarding the immediate and long-term negative consequences of year-on-year grade inflation, the challenges facing future Leaving Certificate students was also raised:

*As a very experienced teacher and school manager, I found it difficult to accept the exorbitant LCert points received by the 2021 cohort of students. I worry about the impact it is having and will have on the class of 2022 (P. 6).*



*Grade inflation has not been mentioned in this survey and I feel that regardless of the opinions about the merits of Accredited Grades, grade inflation is a verifiable and unwelcome outcome of this process (P. 16).*

The expectation that teachers could maintain objectivity when adjudicating on their own students' work – students with whom they had established personal relationships over the course of the junior and senior cycle years – was considered unrealistic by some:

*The anonymity of the marker is vital to the assessment process within the points system as it stands. Student/teacher/parental relationships are different to third level and influenced by the humanity and the compassion that are involved in teaching a child from the age of 12-18. To say that teachers are not influenced even subconsciously by their interactions with teenagers and young adults under their care for a lengthy time period, is neglecting to witness or acknowledge the roles teachers play in young people's lives and the bonds they form during their formative years in school. Remaining objective for the purpose of accredited grades is a high expectation and one that will not deliver fair and standardised results (P. 66).*

*The Leaving Cert in June is about the only time in the lives of our students when they actually are equal to everyone else in the country. I am principal of a school in a disadvantaged area. What the Accredited Grades brought home to me is how fair, objective and trustworthy the Leaving Cert actually is (P. 71).*

However, not all respondents agreed that trying to achieve fairness was unrealistic: One described how s/he approached the task of ensuring the marks awarded to all students were impartial:

*I made an Excel spread sheet that included all of the class tests, Summer exams, participation, etc. Then calculated a grade used weighted percentages of the categories so that it was impartial and fair to everyone (P. 37).*

## **Theme 2: Teacher and student stress**

In addition to expressing disappointment with the inconsistency of teachers' marking and the impact of this on the outcomes of LC2021 in terms of grade inflation, teachers talked about the stress, pressure and tension caused during the AG process, particularly in small rural communities:

*The accredited grading system was very stressful and caused a lot of tension in our school. Grading your neighbours and colleague's children was a very stressful process and I hope that I will never have to do that again (P. 64).*

*I live in a town small enough to live among my students' families. It was very stressful and even affected my child's friendships. It is highly unfair on a teacher to be placed in this position (P. 35).*

*It was a stressful experience and I hope we do not move to accredited grades or assessing our own pupils. Ireland is too small for this (P. 46).*



In a small number of instances, respondents expressed particularly strong negative sentiments about the pressure they felt from colleagues to adjust grades and the way the AG process changed their role as advocates for their students:

*I felt bullied by other more experienced teachers to alter my marks to suit the bell curve (P. 27).*

*I deeply resent the enforced change in my role from advocate to judge of my students (P. 23).*

Teachers also spoke about the stress caused to their students as a result of the pressure to perform in every class or to prepare for a dual system of assessment:

*I found it an exceptionally stressful process as we had no reliable data from fifth year. Students also felt under constant pressure in my class (in an academic school) as they felt they were being assessed every single class. They couldn't cope with the pressure at all (P. 29).*

*The stress placed on students wishing to "impress" their class teacher in tandem with preparing for the State Examinations was clear. One option should have been chosen by students so they could focus on their path (P. 75).*

*The emphasis on summative assessment from March to May 2021 put some students under immense stress and was extremely unfair to them, having already had approx. 9 weeks out of school. Some students require more in person teacher time than others! (P. 68).*

*At the end of the day the students had to produce a portfolio of work for the LCVP (Link Modules) Exam so this supported the accredited grades process. It is an impossible process to "predict" grades as performance on the day of the exam depends on so many factors. Some students are excellent exam candidates and others who do well in class tests will never perform as well in a terminal exam. I trained in England and have huge understanding of teacher led assessment for examination certification but this process did not contribute anything. The students felt overly pressured and the entire process just added to already heightened stress and anxiety levels (P.8).*

There were indications, however, that not all students found the process unduly onerous and upsetting. Indeed, according to some teachers, AG proved to be a highly motivating experience that resulted in less stress and higher grades, although it was acknowledged that stricter standardisation would be required in the future if grade inflation was to be avoided:

*I loved how the accredited grades process increased student engagement from the start of 6th year compared to other years! (P. 36).*



*It took the stress off the pupils as they had the cushion of knowing they had a grade. I made sure my H1 students would get a H1 based on what happened the year before. With the greater choice on the paper, some students concentrated on certain subjects and got grades higher in my subject from the exam than they would have got on the traditional leaving cert. I feel with more standardization all these issues could be solved (P. 45).*

Moreover, not all teachers expressed negative feelings about the AG process with some offering more nuanced commentary. One teacher, for instance, indicated that s/he found involvement in the AC process interesting and rewarding albeit this was tinged with regret at what was viewed as unfair intervention by school management; another respondent signalled that s/he felt that the AG process had eased student stress:

*I felt having been an examiner for ■■■ for the SEC greatly helped me in the assessment for the project work. I found the learning in the classroom was greatly focused on completing tasks in class, participation, completing homework and making sure all assignments were submitted on the due dates. There was a greater focus on students to complete ■■■ to a higher standard as they knew I was correcting it and they knew my judgement was final. I found the overall professional development of myself as a teacher was heightened as I had to show the work and grades to another teacher to justify my grades. This gave me great confidence in my teaching. I did not appreciate being questioned on my high grades by the principal at the end of the process which undermined my professional judgement and questioned my own judgment (P.28).*

*Overall, I felt the accredited grades system eased students' stress levels when it came to the final LC exam. Although, students chose both exam and accredited grades, the majority decided not to sit the final exam. I feel the accredited grade system benefits students who work consistently throughout the year but may not perform as well in the final exam (P. 50).*

### **Theme 3: Alignment meetings and standardisation**

Comments from a number of respondents in the survey suggest that teachers' experience of alignment meetings and standardisation were mixed. Concerns were expressed about the lack of opportunity to engage in school-based alignment meetings emerged in teachers' reflections on the problems and challenges encountered during the AG process. One respondent opined that his/her experience as an SEC examiner made the process easier:

*Being the sole teacher of the subject in a small rural school made the process difficult as there was no opportunity for alignment meetings. No option in survey to indicate this (P. 9).*

*I had an alignment meeting with the deputy principal as the only teacher of a LC subject so the meeting was very different than if it were a group of subject teachers. I would be concerned that work that students submit might not be their own if everything was to be part of their overall assessment (P. 31).*

*The alignment system I feel was thoroughly unfair. Students were not being assessed on the same criteria. Students or teachers were not clear on what data could/could not be applied.*



*Teachers across the board weighted different aspects very differently. The "guidance" and "support" provided loosely by the department was more of a hindrance than any sort of help.*

*Really enjoyed the process, felt as an experienced Examiner of LCA my experience as an Oral Examiner made this process easier. I had the marking scheme clear in my head. Was also able to advice colleagues. At stages was able to advise if they were being too generous or unrealistic (P. 52).*

Some teachers expressed annoyance at changes made, following the standardisation process, to grades they had awarded to their students and one expressed regret that school historical data were not used in the moderation process:

*It was very disappointing that 60% of my class were dropped one grade (two grades in one case) from their predicted grade through the standardisation system. It was very disheartening as I strongly believe that this system let them down. The grade they received did not match the effort that they put in over two very difficult years. It was very tough seeing some students miss out on courses by just 3, 4 and 5 points. If they received the grade that they were predicted, they would be in a much different situation currently. Therefore, I am overall disappointed in the whole process as I feel as though my evidence of their work and their effort was not taken into consideration enough (P.48).*

*After all of the stress, professional judgement and cooperation with the process, of my students the ■ who did not sit an exam were moved up at least one grade (some even more) as part of the department alignment. This included students who I had pushed into the next grade band (ex. A student I had given 42%; came out with an O4!!). On top of this, the ■ students in class who sat the actual exam, all maintained the same grade as I had awarded - surely this shows that my judgments were accurate and flies in the face of the others being moved up. I feel these students were actually worse off having sat the exam (P. 65).*

*I am lucky that I am an experienced teacher who has two colleagues in my subject who I have worked with for many years and have a very good working relationship with. I didn't enjoy the process of accredited grades. I felt I was on the tough side of fair with my students but when alignment came in nationally I feel my students were punished by my level of fairness where clearly teachers elsewhere had been excessively generous. I am long enough at teaching not to dwell on this but I feel my relationship with the past pupils from the two years of accredited grades is damaged which is disappointing (P.18).*

*The major problem with accredited grades is the absence of proper oversight and moderation based on historical data (P. 72).*

Despite acknowledging that his/her students benefited from the AG process, one respondent was adamant that marks or grades awarded by teachers needed to be moderated due to variation in how judgements are made:

*The questionnaire didn't ask about teachers' ability to mark fairly and accurately, in general. My experience as an examiner and advising examiner with the SEC has taught me that teachers need a lot of guidance and a prescriptive marking scheme, AND someone to oversee their work in order to mark accurately. Even with those things in place, what one teacher will*



*accept as a valid answer or a good standard of answering varies MASSIVELY from teacher to teacher. ANY form of teacher assessment without the same level of oversight (or more oversight, were it possible) from an advising examiner will not result in fairly marked exams nor fairly awarded grades. Unsupervised grading should not be allowed to form any part of student grades going forward, if we want fair results for everyone. I say that as someone whose students undoubtedly benefitted from the unfairness of the process (P.74).*

Another was of the view that the process had the potential to be engaging for teachers if certain safeguards were put in place:

*For me, the entire process could be very interesting and engaging if teachers weren't scrambling to save their students from performing badly. Teachers in my previous school (2021) grossly overestimated student achievement and as I was a new member of staff, I felt I could not voice my concerns (P. 14).*

#### **Theme 4: Teacher-student relationship and student engagement**

The negative impact the introduction of the dual system of AG had on students' engagement in teaching and learning and, as alluded to previously, student-teacher relationships when teachers' shifted roles from that of coach and mentor to that of assessor for accreditation, was raised quite often:

*As soon as it became apparent that I would be the one awarding a grade to my students the classroom dynamic completely changed. Some stopped asking questions fearing that I would form the opinion that they did not understand and hence downgrade them. My role as their coach, their mentor evaporated and the remaining weeks were extremely stressful on all but especially the [REDACTED] sitting in front of me every day wondering what I was thinking of them. I NEVER again want to be in this position. As a point of interest my own [REDACTED] was in this group and [REDACTED] obtained the same grade exactly in the accredited grade as the exam however it was a further horrendous layer of added pressure and stress. There was no real discussion at the alignment meetings as colleagues are NOT about to question the professionalism of each other. I conducted the accredited grades process because we were in an emergency but were it not for my 20 years' experience with The State Exams I would not have had any confidence to do it (P. 7).*

*Students expected the teacher to give them good grades even when the evidence of their poor performance (formative and summative and high absentee rates from in-class teaching indicated otherwise). Students take it really personally and in a DEIS school, relationships and encouragement are vital to maintaining student engagement and retention. Many students opted out of class early knowing that they had no exam. Students blamed certain teachers for not giving them the grade, (a hard marker/ an easy marker) and comparisons were made between teachers in the school and teachers in other schools. There is also pressure to not let your school results be worse than other schools. Some students took marking of assessments really personally, attributing the result to "you don't like me" and no amount of evidence from the marking -scheme could change their minds. If they had sat the exam, they would have accepted the grade they got. I think in many cases their grade was inflated. Assessing*



*students changes the relationship in the classroom for the worst. I failed students where I thought that even with the changes to the paper, they would not have passed. I wonder would new teachers to a school be able to face a principal with confidence in their decision to fail a student (P. 55).*

As reported, the impact of introducing student choice as part of the dual assessment system (opt to sit an exam only, opt for continuous assessment only or opt for a combination of both and take the higher grade awarded) was visible in student motivation and engagement in class as well as school attendance:

*Some students put on a bit of a show during the accredited grading period and it did complicate the assessment marking (P. 53).*

*Students became obsessed with class tests to the point that it was counter-productive. They spent more time stressing about it than working on the subject. If they had a test in another subject coming up they switched off my subject (P. 54).*

*There was an incredible amount of stress brought about by the introduction of the accredited grades during the middle of the school year, which was completely unfair on the students. I don't know if this would have been as obvious if it had been spread out across the year but I do not think that it would be. Some students also clearly switched off once the 3 pieces of work were completed as they were confident that they had done enough to achieve the grades that they wanted to achieve (P. 79).*

*Teaching and learning in the classroom in last term was defined by the 3 summative assessments. Very difficult to teach 2 groups in classroom i.e. accredited grades only and both (P. 62).*

The challenge of maintaining student motivation across different subjects and in the absence of any experience of sitting mock examinations was also underlined:

*Every subject is different - comparing a practical subject to a language is impossible - language learning peaks at the end of 6th year, work undertaken in 5th year cannot be assessed at the same level - a limit of 3 assessments resulted in many students switching off for some subjects after the 3rd assessment had taken place, leading to a divide among students taking AG only, versus those sitting the exam (P. 12).*

*The lack of mock exams made the accredited grade process in 2021 significantly harder versus 2020. Having 3 exams prior to May 14th motivated and comforted students. They were significantly less stressed as they had marks in the bag. At the same time some students relaxed and performed less well in the LC as a result of having a strong idea that they would do well / achieve a certain grade. This is especially the case for HL maths. It appears that there was no standardisation of my accredited grades. I expected this to happen - but it didn't. Maybe I didn't read the literature correctly (P. 69).*



## Theme 5: Teacher assessment literacy and professional development

One sub-set of respondents made specific reference to formative and/or summative assessment. In this context, they elaborated on a number of related issues including teacher assessment literacy, guidance provided by the DE to support teacher engagement in the AG process and the need for teacher professional development. Comments point to an overarching concern about the need to ensure fairness and validity in the use of both assessment modes:

*Formative assessment is of great value but teachers need to be trained in how to assess fairly. A number of teachers awarded high grades to boost their own ego as a teacher. This is very unprofessional and unfair to the system. I work a lot with the SEC and understand the importance of fairness and professionalism when grading students. Although it is summative I also work a lot with formative assessment as SSE coordinator in my school. But teachers need clear guidelines on how to assess formatively (P. 15).*

*Teachers need more guidance if the system is to be fair across all departments and all schools (P.59).*

*The varied experience of teachers on the use of assessment models hugely impacted the awarding of grades between schools (P. 77).*

Another suggested that the survey aimed to elicit a particular response from teachers regarding the accredited grades process. S/he highlighted that teacher assessment of their students for certification is not new, and pointed to the DE instruction that online assessment should not be used in AG, the need for teacher professional development in assessment was reiterated:

*I have taught [REDACTED]. Both have involved teachers assessing students for certification. The process of teachers assessing their own students is not new. We were instructed that online material could not be used as it could not be established that it was the students own work and not all students had equal access to online assessment. There should be a standardised approach to senior cycle assessment across 5th and 6th years. Formative assessment materials were not considered adequate for a summative judgement. Students found the ongoing nature of assessment counting for certification very stressful. I don't see any element of professional development enshrined in the accredited grades process. This survey is tilting answers towards a conclusion that makes presumptions about the accredited grades process. The question I felt were very weighed (P.34).*

*Teachers are over worked and what is expected of them is completely unrealistic. Many will leave the profession if the new Leaving Cert requires more of them in terms of administration and assessment. An external exam, where there is no possibility of bias from within schools, still has much merit. The Accredited Grades process quite frankly contributed very little to my professional development in assessment. The assessments were the same as always, it just fell to the teacher to carry them out, grade them and then have a number of meetings to ensure that the process for Accredited Grades was carried out correctly (P. 57).*



The case was made that, in addition to guidance and clear marking criteria, moderation and external oversight are essential elements of a fairness and equitable system:

*...I feel that AG process was extremely challenging due to the vast range of teachers and their levels of experience. My 16 years as an Examiner at various levels bore no weight when technically on equal footing in a meeting with younger, inexperienced colleagues. Who am I to question their judgement? I found that often candidates I did not teach at LC, but who I would have taught in earlier years, were being over-rewarded by less experienced teachers. This, I felt, meant that students I marked down in my own class, but who were better than these other students, were suffering because of this unequal process. Nothing beats experience. As for how preparing for both AG and Examinations affected T&L in my classroom - it posed a slight problem as students who had opted for AG only were difficult to engage in the closing months (P. 49).*

*I have many years' teaching experience at all levels and as an examiner for SEC. Without any doubt at all, the grades in my school were inflated beyond belief, particularly this academic year compared to the predicated grades the previous year. Many teachers did not read the guidelines given; other teachers had very little experience of teaching or assessing and were still required to produce accredited grades. My own daughter, in her 2nd year PME had to help with accredited grades. I know the training teachers receive year on year in Athlone to prepare for assessment and also the support of advising examiners. Obviously, there was no way that this could be replicated in a school situation. No extra time was given in school for consideration of grades or for alignment meetings, considering the extra pressure and workload. Poor leadership in my school and other schools where I have colleagues, in terms of direction and support during this time. We were "left to it". I am genuinely concerned about assessment standards for certification if the new senior cycle is changed in this way (P.32).*

The issue of trying to adjudicate marks in particular subject areas was also highlighted, e.g., in the context of a school piloting a new leaving certificate subject. In this case, adjudicating between higher and ordinary level work without recourse to past examination papers was identified as problematic with the respondent signalling the importance of student coursework to the decision-making process:

*I answered these questions based on my teaching of the new leaving certificate computer science course. We are a pilot school. This subject was not in your list of subjects to choose from so I chose the closest subject to it. There were no past papers to base grades on and our school didn't have the JC short course of coding to help matters either. We had no guidance as to the difference in standard expected between higher and ordinary level. Certainly nothing to indicate how to distinguish between H1 and H2 etc. The amount of choice given in the exam due to Covid would mean I could expect students all to walk out of that exam with 100%. So the only thing distinguishing one student from another was their coursework. The first exam year of the pilot scheme was 2020, with a late exam at higher level only, not ordinary and no coursework at either level. So again no experience to base our grades on (P. 20).*

The quote that follows not only highlights the professional development issue, but also links to other themes (teacher/student stress, standardisation) discussed earlier:



*The process was very stressful due to lack of proper training, too much disparity between teachers and schools. Students felt constantly assessed. It changed the teacher student relationship. They did not want the teacher to see any failure or weakness, so students felt more alone during the process. Greatly favour external certification following this process (P. 73).*

## **Theme 6: Continuous assessment and LC reform**

Some diversity of opinion was noticeable in terms of what respondents said about their experiences with continuous assessment or about possible changes to assessment for the LC. Some respondents indicated that it was unrealistic to expect fair grades from continuous assessment when principals were under such pressure to maintain standards and/or when schools were located in small communities:

*It is impossible for the students to receive fair grades from the continuous assessment process as there is too much pressure and accountability being put on principals. There are historic relationships at play in school and they have an impact on the grades and results (P. 44).*

*I am now convinced that a continuous assessment model is not the way. Students do too many subjects at LC. Constant testing led to a very stressful atmosphere. Students were exhausted (P. 19).*

*Students who like their subject and work hard want to sit an exam. They want to show-off their knowledge and ability to develop a well-structured essay with appropriate content that demonstrates lateral thinking and comparative analysis. Let students sit exams. Our country and school communities are too small to accommodate Continuous Assessment as part of a reformed LC programme (P. 56).*

However, others were more positive, pointing to the possibility of some kind of dual assessment system being maintained:

*A combination of assessment is best. Would be great to see the dual system continue. Definitely a project or continuous assessment part in EVERY subject and programme (P. 1).*

*It was good given the amount endured by this cohort that they had both options. I marked and wondered why some had done the exam at all (P. 47).*

*Combined approach like 2021 is the way to go moving forward (P. 11).*

More generally, some respondents highlighted problems with the LC with one suggesting that attention should be given less to teachers' role in assessment and more to the processes involved and to teachers' feelings:



*The system employed to date has major flaws (P. 76).*

*Predicted grades have broken an already broken system. We have lost a generation of young people by state neglect in not providing for the necessary infrastructure in computer technology (P. 51).*

*I think a key issue is how teachers feel about the process overall, and how grades were adjusted by the SEC, rather than our place in it (P. 40).*

## Epilogue

The decision by the Minister for Education to offer the LC class of 2021 the choice of taking an AG and/or sitting an exam in each subject was momentous in the history of Irish post-primary education. The initiative also proved to be unique in terms of how other countries addressed the challenges of conducting certification exams in the face of a global pandemic. As it transpired, large numbers of students decided to take both options for at least one LC subject in the secure knowledge that they would not be disadvantaged if one of the grades awarded to them was lower than the other. Data published by the SEC revealed that just over 52% of AGs awarded were higher than the equivalent exam grade, with 31% the same and 16% lower (SEC, 2022). Data also revealed a set of overall results higher than those achieved by any previous cohort in the almost 100-year history of the LC examination in Ireland.

The survey at the heart of this report set out to capture the voice of teachers involved in arrangements put in place to ensure that the LC class of 2021 could progress in their education and/or into the workplace. The questionnaire instrument was designed primarily to provide quantitative data on their assessment experiences of working independently and in collaboration with school colleagues to estimate a LC subject mark for their students. Participating teachers also had the opportunity to comment freely on the AG process and on the more general issue of assessment reform at Senior Cycle. Their comments, insights, feelings and beliefs are important given the exceptional assessment experience they have been through.

At the time of writing, LC2022 students are currently preparing to sit exams in June, with an alternative set of exams taking place shortly afterwards to facilitate those who may not be able to participate in the first examination period. In February, the Minister for Education announced that the exams will have a “familiar” structure but, in order to account for loss of learning time in school due to disruptions caused by COVID-19, students are to be given more choice and will be required to answer fewer questions. The Minister has also promised that measures will be in place to ensure that, for the class



of 2022, “the overall set of results in the aggregate will be no lower than last year” (see, <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/4ac43-minister-foley-confirms-arrangements-for-state-examinations-2022/>).

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the Minister launched *Equity and Excellence for All* (DE, 2022). Describing it as, “an ambitious programme of reform” for Senior Cycle education in Ireland, the Minister highlighted three underlying tenets and guiding principles: (1) empowerment of students to meet the challenges of the 21st century, (2) enrichment of the student experience and building on what is strong in the Irish system currently and, (3) embedding wellbeing and reducing student stress levels. Also launched by the Minister on the day was the *Advisory Report on the Review of Senior Cycle* by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2022) – a document based on extensive research and sustained consultation with key stakeholders within and across the education sector and wider society undertaken between 2016 and 2020.

Looking ahead, a Senior Cycle Delivery Board to oversee the implementation of plans announced by the Minister for Education is to be established with the NCCA tasked to set up a number of “network schools” that will engage initially with the proposed curriculum and assessment reforms. In light of these very significant and potentially far-reaching developments, our hope is that the research findings shared in this report and in the earlier one on the LC2020 CG process as well as in the associated peer-reviewed papers will contribute meaningfully towards the achievement of the best possible outcomes for assessment, learning and teaching at Senior Cycle in Ireland.



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## Appendix 1: The Questionnaire Instrument



### Leaving Certificate 2021 Accredited Grades Teachers' Reflections on the Process and on Assessment

Dear Colleague,

We thank you for taking the time to read this document and we hope you and yours are well.

Covid-19 brought a lot of changes and challenges not least for schools and teachers. Following on from Calculated Grades in 2020, the decision to run an Accredited Grades process in parallel to the traditional Leaving Certificate Examination in 2021 was an unprecedented event in Irish education that had very significant implications for you and your students. We are eager to capture your reflections on the process of estimating marks for your students and how you see your role in assessment. **Given your recent experiences, your voice needs to be heard now in the context of current debates about Senior Cycle assessment reform.**

In the documentation sent to schools, the Department of Education (DE) made it clear that an Accredited Grade should result from the combination of two data sets:

1. A school-based estimation of an overall percentage mark to be awarded to a student in a particular subject
2. Data on past performance of students in each school and nationally (the standardisation process).

**As far as possible, for the purposes of this survey, we would ask you to focus on what happened during the creation of the first data set (i.e. the estimation of percentage marks) in your school rather than on what happened during the subsequent standardisation or appeals stages.**

***The questionnaire is in four parts and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete.***

**Part 1** asks questions about you, your school and the subject(s) for which you estimated marks for the Leaving Certificate Established 2021.

**Part 2** invites you to reflect on the process of estimating marks for your students prior to the alignment meetings in your school.

**Part 3** focuses on your experiences of, and reflections on, the alignment meeting(s) in which you participated with your colleagues.

**Part 4** asks you to consider how engagement in the process has influenced both your perceptions of assessment and your role as a teacher.

Be assured that all of the information you provide will be stored securely and treated in the strictest confidence as per GDPR guidelines and DCU's Ethical Standards. Participating teachers and their schools will not be identifiable in any publication, conference paper or presentation generated using these data. A plain language statement for this study that includes further details about data use and storage is available at: [https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/leaving-certificate-2021-accredited-grades-plain-language-statement-for-teachers\\_0.pdf](https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/inline-files/leaving-certificate-2021-accredited-grades-plain-language-statement-for-teachers_0.pdf)

If you wish to liaise with an independent person about this study, please contact The Secretary, DCU Research Ethics Committee at [rec@dcu.ie](mailto:rec@dcu.ie). If you have data related concerns you should contact Mr. Martin Ward (DCU Data Protection Officer) at [data.protection@dcu.ie](mailto:data.protection@dcu.ie)

Thank you, in advance, for engaging with this survey. We hope you will take the opportunity to have your voice heard at this important time in Irish education. Please note that information on how to access findings from the survey will be available at [www.dcu.ie/carpe](http://www.dcu.ie/carpe) during the Spring of 2022.

**PLEASE RESPOND BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2021.**

Le gach dea-ghuíf,

Audrey Doyle, Zita Lysaght and Michael O'Leary



**Respondent Consent:** I understand the purpose of this research study and I know where to access further information about it. I am aware that my participation in the study is voluntary and I freely consent to take part in it.

- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
- 

Before you begin this survey in relation to Accredited Grades 2021, we would like you to respond to the following three questions.

**Question A.** Did you take part in the Leaving Certificate 2020 Calculated Grades process?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Question B.** In November/December 2020, we invited post-primary teachers to participate in an online survey of their experiences of involvement in the 2020 Calculated Grades process. Did you participate in that research?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**Question C.** If you were leading Senior Cycle Reform, what changes, if any, would you make to assessment at Senior Cycle? Using numbered bullet points, please list your recommendations in order of priority.



## **SECTION 1: BIOGRAPHICAL AND SCHOOL INFORMATION**

### **About you**

**Q1a. Please indicate your gender.**

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

**Q1b. Please indicate the number of years you have been teaching.**

	0-1	2-5	6-10	11-20	>20
In your current school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In total	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q1c. Please indicate the number of classes you prepared for the traditional Leaving Cert Established (Including LCVP but omitting any LC Applied classes) prior to 2020.**

- ☐ None
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2-5
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 11+

**Q1d. In addition to being a classroom teacher, please specify any other position(s) you hold in the school. You can select multiple options**

- ☐ Teaching Principal
- ☐ Deputy Principal
- ☐ Assistant Principal
- ☐ LC Year Head
- ☐ Guidance Counsellor
- ☐ Chaplain
- ☐ Subject/Dept. Head
- ☐ SEN Coordinator
- ☐ Accredited Grades Coordinator

Other \_\_\_\_\_



## About your school

**Q2a. Please indicate the gender of the students who attend your school.**

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Mixed

**Q2b. Please use the drop-down menu to indicate your school status.**

- ▼ DEIS

Non-DEIS

Fee-Paying

**Q2c. Please indicate the size of your school in terms of student numbers.**

- ☐ <100
- ☐ 100-299
- ☐ 300-599
- ☐ 600-999
- ☐ 1000+

**Q2d. Please indicate the main language of instruction used in your school.**

- ☐ English
- ☐ Gaeilge
- ☐ Other

**Q2e. Please select the option that best described where your school is located.**

- ☐ Rural/Village (population  $\leq$  2,000)
- ☐ Small Town (population  $>$  2,000 and  $\leq$  5,000)
- ☐ Mid-size Town (population  $>$  5,000 and  $\leq$  15,000)
- ☐ Large Town (population  $>$  15,000 and  $\leq$  50,000)
- ☐ City (population  $>$  50,000)



### Your involvement in LC 2021 (Established)

**Q3a. Please identify all the LC Established Subject(s) for which you submitted estimated marks in 2021. Select all that apply.**

☐ Accounting .... Technology

**Q3b. If you selected two or more subject in Q3a, we would like you to focus on ONE only when responding to all of the remaining questions. You can decide on whatever one subject you wish. Please use the drop down menu to identify your subject choice.**

▼ Accounting ... Technology

**Q3c. In respect of your chosen subject, please choose one level at which you taught the subject in the last academic year, 2020-2021. Please focus on this level for the remainder of the questionnaire.**

- ☐ Higher
- ☐ Ordinary
- ☐ Foundation

**Please remain focused on the particular subject/level you selected in response to Question 3b and 3c as you progress through this survey.**

**Q3d. Please indicate how many of your students took the following options for LC2021. Use NUMERALS only.**

- ☐ Accredited Grades only
- ☐ Examination only
- ☐ Both

**Q3e. Including yourself, how many teachers in your school submitted estimated marks for students in your chosen subject and level.**

- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5+



## SECTION 2: YOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS OF CALCULATING MARKS FOR YOUR STUDENTS PRIOR TO THE ALIGNMENT MEETINGS

Please continue to focus on your subject/level of choice as you respond to the questions in this section of the survey.

**Q4a. When estimating your students' marks for the LC Established subject/level you listed in Q3b/c, how important were each of the following?**


	Not important at all	Relatively unimportant	Important	Very important	Not applicable
Junior Cert Result for the subject listed in Q3b	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall Junior Cert Results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5th Year exams (Christmas, Summer, monthly etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5th Year continuous assessments (assignments, projects, experiments etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5th Year in-class/online class formative assessments (e.g. observation, questioning, discussions, self-assessments etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5th Year engagement within class/online class (include diligence, work ethic, effort rather than personal behaviour)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5th Year engagement with learning outside of class/school (e.g. homework, clubs societies etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year exams Sept. to Dec. 2020 (Christmas, monthly etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year exams as per Department of Education guidelines i.e. a maximum of three class tests, each one lesson in duration, administered up to May 14, 2021	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Additional 6th Year exams January to May 2021 (including tests involving past LC papers/questions, oral exams etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year continuous assessments (exclude Leaving Cert course work components here – these are listed below - but include short tests, assignments, projects etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year in-class/online class formative assessments (e.g. observation, questioning, discussions, self-assessments etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year engagement within class/online class (include diligence, work ethic, effort rather than personal behaviour)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year engagement with learning outside of class/school (e.g. homework, clubs, societies etc.) (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leaving Cert course work components	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leaving Cert mock examinations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your knowledge of how students you taught in previous LC classes performed in the LC (including your own tracking data/assessment records and your familiarity with LC marking guides)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your knowledge of how students in <b>other</b> LC classes in the school performed in previous LCs (including tracking data/assessment records your school)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your experience of marking/examining for the State Examinations Commission (SEC)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Q4b. In the Department of Education (DE) guidelines on Accredited Grades issued to schools in February 2021 it is stated:**

**"It is important in the period leading up to the determination of estimated percentage marks that over-assessment is avoided and that an appropriate balance is achieved between formative and summative assessment" p.14.**

**Using the slider below, please indicate the overall balance you struck between the use of formative and summative assessment data when estimating marks for your class.**

	Formative Assessment Data	Summative Assessment Data
		



**Q5. Please read each of the statements below and, with respect to the subject/level you are focusing on, indicate the percentage of students for whom the statement is true.**

**Respond to the statements in terms of your work **PRIOR** to the alignment meeting(s) in your school.**

	Percentage of students for whom the statement is true						
	None	About 5%	About 10%	About 25%	About 50%	About 75%	90%+
Estimating a mark was easy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Estimating a mark was difficult	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I applied the DE guidelines strictly when estimating the student mark	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had plenty of evidence to estimate a mark	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had just about enough evidence to estimate a mark	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I gave the student a mark I believed was fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I should have given the student a failing mark but didn't	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I gave the student the benefit of the doubt and awarded a mark that moved him/her above a grade boundary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I gave a mark that left a student just below a grade boundary	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC due to my knowledge of the student's challenging circumstances outside of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I knew the student needed a particular grade (e.g. to access a particular course or job)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I thought other teachers <b>in my school</b> would mark leniently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I thought other teachers <b>in other schools</b> would mark leniently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I awarded a higher mark than I felt the student would have achieved in the LC because I thought the national standardisation process might bring the student's grade down	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Q6. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements pertaining to the process of estimating marks for your students PRIOR to the alignment meeting(s).**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided/ NA
The process of estimating marks for my students was overly time-consuming (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When estimating a mark, I found it difficult to reconcile inconsistencies (peaks and troughs) in my students' performance throughout 6th year (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it difficult to maintain an unbiased position when marking my students (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My experience of SLARs at Junior Cycle was helpful to me during the process (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt good about the marking decisions I made (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt guilty about the marking decisions I made (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt uncomfortable during the process at the prospect of my students learning how I had marked them (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt confident when exercising my professional judgement during the process (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt stressed during the process (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My experience of involvement in the 2020 Calculated Grades process made the Accredited Grades process in 2021 easier for me (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**We acknowledge that this is a long questionnaire, and we really appreciate the effort you are making. You will be glad to know that you are more than 2/3 of the way through.**

**Please keep going!**

### **SECTION 3: YOUR EXPERIENCES OF, AND REFLECTIONS ON, THE ALIGNMENT MEETING(S) IN WHICH YOU PARTICIPATED WITH YOUR SCHOOL COLLEAGUES**

**Q7. Please specify the number of alignment meetings you attended in your school.**

- ☐ One
- ☐ Two
- ☐ Three+



**NOTE: If you attended multiple meetings, please share your overall impression of these meetings.**

**Q8b. Reflecting on your engagement in your school's alignment meeting(s) this year, to what extent do you think it/they contributed to your overall professional development in assessment? Please use the slider provided.**





## SECTION 4: YOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPACT OF HAVING BEEN INVOLVED IN THE ACCREDITED GRADES PROCESS IN YOUR SCHOOL

**Q9. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.**

As a result of having been involved in the 2021 Accredited Grades process in my school...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided
I feel <b>less</b> confident in the validity of the judgements I make about my students' work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that my professionalism as a teacher has been enhanced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more enthusiastic about expanding my repertoire of assessment approaches in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel <b>less</b> supportive of efforts being made to reform the LC programme and examination	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more positively disposed to being involved directly in assessing my students for certification purposes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel more convinced about the importance of assessment for informing teaching and learning throughout the LC programme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q10. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided
I believe that my involvement in the Accredited Grades process led to fairer outcomes for the students <b>in my class</b> than if the LC 2021 exam only had taken place	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that students <b>in my class</b> were disadvantaged in terms of the grades they got by having a dual system of Accredited Grades and Examinations applied in 2021	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification purposes would lead to fairer outcomes for the students <b>in my school</b> (than if they were not involved)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification purposes would motivate students <b>in my school</b> to engage more actively in learning from the beginning of 6th year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification purposes would improve student attendance <b>in my school</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification purposes would undermine student/teacher relationships <b>in my school</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**Q11. If there is any final comment you wish to add, please do so here.**

For instance, you might like to comment on:

- The overall balance you struck between the use of formative and summative assessment data when estimating marks for your class
- The extent to which engagement in the Accredited Grades process contributed to your overall professional development in assessment
- How preparation of students for both the Accredited Grades and/or Examinations affected teaching and learning in your classroom.

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**We really appreciate the time you have taken to complete this questionnaire.  
Thank you!**

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**If you would like to participate in a follow-up interview about your experiences with Assessment during the LC2021 Accredited Grades process, please contact [audrey.doyle@dcu.ie](mailto:audrey.doyle@dcu.ie)**

**And please remember to check the CARPE website during the Spring of 2022 for information on the outcomes of the survey - <https://www.dcu.ie/carpe>**



## Appendix 2

### All Responses to the Survey's Final Open-Ended Question (Q11)

ID	Comments
1.	A combination of assessment is best. Would be great to see the dual system continue. Definitely a project or continuous assessment part in EVERY subject and programme.
2.	Accredited grades and assessed grades had very negative impacts on teaching, learning and professional practice.
3.	Accredited/Calculated grades should NEVER BE DONE AGAIN.
4.	After examining students' final piece of work, I feel that students who sat the final exam in June received a lower overall grade.
5.	Arriving at a mark was difficult for music considering the practical aspect is worth 50%. I would not like to have to complete the process again, while it did benefit my students I don't feel it is best practice for the future.
6.	As a very experienced teacher and school manager I found it difficult to accept the exorbitant Leaving Cert points received by the 2021 cohort of students. I worry about the impact it is having and will have on the class of 2022.
7.	As soon as it became apparent that I would be the one awarding a grade to my students the classroom dynamic completely changed. Some stopped asking questions fearing that I would form the opinion that they did not understand and hence downgrade them. My role as their coach, their mentor evaporated and the remaining weeks were extremely stressful on all but especially the [REDACTED] sitting in front of me every day wondering what I was thinking of them. I NEVER again want to be in this position. As a point of interest, my [REDACTED] was in this group and [REDACTED] obtained the same grade exactly in the accredited grade as the exam however it was a further horrendous layer of added pressure and stress. There was no real discussion at the alignment meetings as colleagues are NOT about to question the professionalism of each other. I conducted the accredited grades process because we were in an emergency but were it not for my 20 years' experience with The State Exams I would not have had any confidence to do it.
8.	At the end of the day, the students had to produce a portfolio of work for the LCVP (Link Modules) Exam so this supported the accredited grades process. It is an impossible process to "predict" grades as performance on the day of the exam depends on so many factors. Some students are excellent exam candidates and others who do well in class tests will never perform as well in a terminal exam. I trained in England and have huge understand of teacher led assessment for examination certification but this process did not contribute anything. The students felt overly pressured and the entire process just added to already heightened stress and anxiety levels.



9. Being the sole teacher of the subject in a small rural school made the process difficult as there was no opportunity for alignment meetings. No option in survey to indicate this.
10. Brill students will do very well, average students will do average and poor students will do poorly. How u award or indeed assess will not change this fact in the slightest. Anybody that believes it will, has clearly never taught.
11. Combined approach like 2021 is the way to go moving forward.
12. Every subject is different - comparing a practical subject to a language is impossible - language learning peaks at the end of 6th year, work undertaken in 5th year cannot be assessed at the same level - a limit of 3 assessments resulted in many students switching off for some subjects after the 3rd assessment had taken place, leading to a divide among students taking AG only, versus those sitting the exam.
13. Fairness stems from external assessment. What is fair about the Leaving Cert is that everyone is a number and has their work assessed on its merits only. Teachers assessing students cannot be objective or fair.
14. For me, the entire process could be very interesting and engaging if teachers weren't scrambling to save their students from performing badly. Teachers in my previous school (2021) grossly overestimated student achievement and as I was a new member of staff, I felt I could not voice my concerns. I would also like to clarify that I only took part in the 2021 accredited grades, I believe I may have selected some answers for 2020 in error.
15. Formative assessment is of great value but teachers need to be trained in how to assess fairly. A number of teachers awarded high grades to boost their own ego as a teacher. This is very unprofessional and unfair to the system. I work a lot with the SEC and understand the importance of fairness and professionalism when grading students. Although it is summative, I also work a lot with formative assessment as SSE coordinator in my school. But teachers need clear guidelines on how to assess formatively.
16. Grade inflation has not been mentioned in this survey and I feel that regardless of the opinions about the merits of Accredited Grades, grade inflation is a verifiable and unwelcome outcome of this process.
17. Homework: 20%, Tests: 30%, Continuous Assessment 50%
18. I am lucky that I am an experienced teacher who has two colleagues in my subject who I have worked with for many years and have a very good working relationship with. I didn't enjoy the process of accredited grades. I felt I was on the tough side of fair with my students but when alignment game in nationally I feel my students were punished by my level of fairness where clearly teachers elsewhere had been excessively generous. I am long enough at teaching not to dwell on this but I feel my relationship with the past pupils from the two years of accredited grades is damaged which is disappointing.
19. I am now convinced that a continuous assessment model is not the way. Students do too many subject at LC. Constant testing led to a very stressful atmosphere. Students were exhausted



- 
20. I answered these questions based on my teaching of the new leaving certificate computer science course. We are a pilot school. This subject was not in your list of subjects to choose from so I chose the closest subject to it. There were no past papers to base grades on and our school didn't have the JC short course of coding to help matters either. We had no guidance as to the difference in standard expected between higher and ordinary level. Certainly nothing to indicate how to distinguish between H1 and H2 etc. The amount of choice given in the exam due to Covid would mean I could expect students all to walk out of that exam with 100%. So the only thing distinguishing one student from another was their coursework. The first exam year of the pilot scheme was 2020, with a late exam at higher level only, not ordinary and no coursework at either level. So again no experience to base our grades on.
- 
21. I believe teachers should not be assessing students in their schools except in exceptional circumstances e.g. pandemic. There are too many conflicts of interest for ALL involved. The process is not as fair as the established Leaving Certificate Examinations where students are not known by the correctors and students will not find out what grade their teachers awarded them.
- 
22. I completely disagree with accredited grades. I find it very difficult to accept that the department can change the result I awarded when they knew nothing about my students' ability in my subjects. I believe the fairest system is the traditional exams and teachers should not assess their students in any format.
- 
23. I deeply resent the enforced change in my role from advocate to judge of my students.
- 
24. I feel that I judged my students as fairly as I could, but that many other teachers marked significantly more leniently than me. I tried my best to be professional and fair but my students were disadvantaged by the soft marking of other teacher in my school and other schools.
- 
25. I feel that the students who sat the exams were disadvantaged. As a corrector in the LC, I feel that the accredited credit was higher even by X2 grades (inflated) in some circumstances. I felt some colleagues inflated the grades in other subjects so I felt under pressure to be generous. I also felt under pressure because I live and work in a small rural area/school. Students are doing less work. They have access to google translate. I am in favour of less subjects for LC but an end of year exam is imperative to keep standards.
- 
26. I feel the accredited grades system is open to too much bias.
- 
27. I felt bullied by other more experienced teachers to alter my marks to suit the bell curve.
-



- 
28. I felt having been an examiner for [REDACTED] for the SEC greatly helped me in the assessment for the project work. I found the learning in the classroom was greatly focused on completing tasks in class, participation, completing homework and making sure all assignments were submitted on the due dates. There was a greater focus on students to complete [REDACTED] to a higher standard as they knew I was correcting it and they knew my judgement was final. I found the overall professional development of myself as a teacher was heightened as I had to show the work and grades to another teacher to justify my grades. This gave me great confidence in my teaching. I did not appreciate being questioned on my high grades by the principal at the end of the process which undermined my professional judgement and questioned my own judgment
- 
29. I found it an exceptionally stressful process as we had no reliable data from fifth year. Students also felt under constant pressure in my class (in an academic school) as they felt they were being assessed every single class. They couldn't cope with the pressure at all.
- 
30. I had a concern over the originality of work. Students plagiarised more often as they were more concerned with grades on every assessment and essays.
- 
31. I had an alignment meeting with the deputy principal as the only teacher of a LC subject so the meeting was very different than if it were a group of subject teachers. I would be concerned that work that students submit might not be their own if everything was to be part of their overall assessment.
- 
32. I have many years' teaching experience at all levels and as an examiner for SEC. Without any doubt at all, the grades in my school were inflated beyond belief, particularly this academic year compared to the predicated grades the previous year. Many teachers did not read the guidelines given other teachers had very little experience of teaching or assessing and were still required to produce accredited grades. My [REDACTED] had to help with accredited grades. I know the training teachers receive year on year in Athlone to prepare for assessment and also the support of advising examiners. Obviously, there was no way that this could be replicated in a school situation. No extra time was given in school for consideration of grades or for alignment meetings, considering the extra pressure and workload. Poor leadership in my school and other schools where I have colleagues, in terms of direction and support during this time. We were "left to it". I am genuinely concerned about assessment standards for certification if the new senior cycle is changed in this way.
- 
33. I have professional integrity so I followed procedures and protocols, and made sure to give the fairest grades to all my students. Some colleagues and teacher friends in other schools did not do the same. Many inflated their grades and openly said this. This had an overall impact on the grades of my students due to the implementation of the bell-shaped curve. Furthermore, the LC state exam in maths was extremely dumbed down, the choice was too broad, and the marking was too lenient so there was too much grade inflation. Revert to the old system please.
-



- 
34. I have taught [REDACTED] Both have involved teachers assessing students for certification. The process of teachers assessing their own students is not new. We were instructed that online material could not be used as it could not be established that it was the students own work and not all students had equal access to online assessment. There should be a standardised approach to senior cycle assessment across 5th and 6th years. Formative assessment materials were not considered adequate for a summative judgement. Students found the ongoing nature of assessment counting for certification very stressful. I don't see any element of professional development enshrined in the accredited grades process. This survey is tilting answer towards a conclusion that makes presumptions about the accredited grades process. The question I felt were very weighed.
- 
35. I live in a town small enough to live among my students' families. It was very stressful and even affected my child's friendships. It is highly unfair on a teacher to be placed in this position.
- 
36. I loved how the accredited grades process increased student engagement from the start of 6th year compared to other years!
- 
37. I made an Excel spread sheet that included all of the class tests, Summer exams, participation, etc. Then calculated a grade used weighted percentages of the categories so that it was impartial and fair to everyone.
- 
38. I only taught my class for one year as they had a different teacher in 5th Year. They were a weak group and not very motivated to succeed, skipped assessments, didn't do homework so it was very hard to grade them. I was very fair in the grades I awarded as a class and put a lot of work into it but had to fail [REDACTED] students who had failed to show they could pass the exam. The fail rate dropped from about 8% to 2.3% at OL, so plenty of other teachers must have been generous in their marking, which is frustrating. A colleague who teaches another subject I teach awarded [REDACTED] H1s including a [REDACTED]%, despite the school NEVER receiving a H1 in this subject since it was offered, plus a high number of H2s and H3s too, which completely undermined the whole grade process in that subject in my opinion. There was no alignment meeting for that subject either. I would hate, hate, hate if we had to do this every year, as it really stressed me out. It also showed me (because the grades were so inflated from other years) that a high proportion of teachers cannot be trusted to be 100% impartial and unbiased in the grades they award. The LC needs to be maintained as an anonymously marked exam, where all components are marked externally, in the interest of fairness to all students.
- 
39. I teach wonderful students and the pressure of accredited grades was very challenging on them. But it had to be there because if Covid, the sooner it's gone the better.
- 
40. I think a key issue is how teachers feel about the process overall, and how grades were adjusted by the SEC, rather than our place in it.
- 
41. I think the accredited grades system was a bit farcical really the inflation of grades was ridiculously high. The national statistics show that.
- 
42. I was asked to visit the principal in my school where he asked me to reduce my students' marks as we have an ongoing grievance in operation. I found his conduct deplorable and unethical and I fear more situations like this could develop if the process remained.
-



- 
43. If Accredited Grades are going to be part of the LC going forward the DE should inform schools as soon as possible and don't be leaving it to the last minute.
- 
44. It is impossible for the students to receive fair grades from the continuous assessment process as there is too much pressure and accountability being put on principals. There are historic relationships at play in school and they have an impact on the grades and results.
- 
45. It took the stress off the pupils as they had the cushion of knowing they had a grade. I made sure my H1 students would get a H1 based on what happened the year before. With the greater choice on the paper, some students concentrated on certain subjects and got grades higher in my subject from the exam than they would have got on the traditional leaving cert. I feel with more standardization all these issues could be solved.
- 
46. It was a stressful experience and I hope we do not move to accredited grades or assessing our own pupils. Ireland is too small for this.
- 
47. It was good given the amount endured by this cohort that they had both option. I marked and wondered why some had done the exam at all
- 
48. It was very disappointing that 60% of my class were dropped one grade (two grades in one case) from their predicted grade through the standardisation system. It was very disheartening as I strongly believe that this system let them down. The grade they received did not match the effort that they put in over two very difficult years. It was very tough seeing some students miss out on courses by just 3.4 and 5 points. If they received the grade that they were predicted, they would be in a much different situation currently. Therefore, I am overall disappointed in the whole process as I feel as though my evidence of their work and their effort was not taken into consideration enough.
- 
49. On the first point above, I have no comment. On the second, I feel that AG process was extremely challenging due to the vast range of teachers and their levels of experience. My 16 years as an Examiner at various levels bore no weight when technically on equal footing in a meeting with younger, inexperienced colleagues. Who am I to question their judgement? I found that often candidates I did not teach at LC, but who I would have taught in earlier years, were being over-rewarded by less experienced teachers. This, I felt, meant that students I marked down in my own class, but who were better than these other students, were suffering because of this unequal process. Nothing beats experience. As for how preparing for both AG and Examinations affected T&L in my classroom - it posed a slight problem as students who had opted for AG only were difficult to engage in the closing months.
- 
50. Overall, I felt the accredited grades system eased students' stress levels when it came to the final LC exam. Although, students chose both exam and accredited grades majority decided not to sit the final exam. I feel the accredited grade system benefits students who work consistently throughout the year but may not perform as well in the final exam.
- 
51. Predicted grades have broken an already broken system. We have lost a generation of young people by state neglect in not providing for the necessary infrastructure in computer technology.
-



- 
52. Really enjoyed the process, felt as an experienced Examiner of LCA my experience as an Oral Examiner made this process easier. I had the marking scheme clear in my head. Was also able to advice colleagues. At stages was able to advise if they were being too generous or unrealistic.
- 
53. Some students put on a bit of a show during the accredited grading period and it did complicate the assessment marking.
- 
54. Students became obsessed with class tests to the point that it was counter-productive. They spent more time stressing about it than working on the subject. If they had a test in another subject coming up they switched off my subject.
- 
55. Students expected the teacher to give them good grades even when the evidence of their poor performance (formative and summative and high absentee rates from in-class teaching indicated otherwise). Students take it really personally and in a DEIS school, relationships and encouragement are vital to maintaining student engagement and retention. Many students opted out of class early knowing that they had no exam. Students blamed certain teachers for not giving them the grade, (a hard marker/ an easy marker) and comparisons were made between teachers in the school and teachers in other schools. There is also pressure not to let your school results be worse than other schools. Some students took marking of assessments really personally, attributing the result to " you don't like me" and no amount of evidence from the marking -scheme could change their minds. If they had sat the exam, they would have accepted the grade they got. I think in many cases their grade was inflated. Assessing students changes the relationship in the classroom for the worst. I failed students where I thought that even with the changes to the paper, they would not have passed. I wonder would new teachers to a school be able to face a principal with confidence in their decision to fail a student.
- 
56. Students who like their subject and work hard want to sit an exam. They want to show-off their knowledge and ability to develop a well-structured essay with appropriate content that demonstrates lateral thinking and comparative analysis. Let students sit exams. Our country and school communities are too small to accommodate Continuous Assessment as part of a reformed LC programme.
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57. Teachers are over worked and what is expected of them is completely unrealistic. Many will leave the profession if the new Leaving Cert requires more of them in terms of administration and assessment. An external exam, where there is no possibility of bias from within schools, still has much merit. The Accredited Grades process quite frankly contributed very little to my professional development in assessment. The assessments were the same as always, it just fell to the teacher to carry them out, grade them and then have a number of meetings to ensure that the process for Accredited Grades was carried out correctly.
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58. Teachers grades should not be the only assessment for leaving cert.
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59. Teachers need more guidance if the system is to be fair across all departments and all schools
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60. Teachers should not be assessing their students.
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61. Teachers should not be involved in giving a grade of any kind. This should be external.
62. Teaching and learning in the classroom in last term was defined by the 3 summative assessment. Very difficult to teach 2 groups in classroom i.e. accredited grades only and both.
63. The accredited grades system was a disillusioning experience. I firmly believe that the system of competitive education advantage that operates in Ireland does not marry well with a process whereby teachers grade their own students.
64. The accredited grading system was very stressful and caused a lot of tension in our school. Grading your neighbours and colleague's children was a very stressful process and I hope that I will never have to do that again.
65. The alignment system I feel was thoroughly unfair. Students were not being assessed on the same criteria. Students and teachers were not clear on what data could/could not be applied. Teachers across the board weighted different aspects very differently. The "guidance" and "support" provided loosely by the department was more of a hindrance than any sort of help. After all of the stress, professional judgement and cooperation with the process, of my ■ students the ■ who did not sit an exam were moved up at least one grade (some even more) as part of the department alignment. This included students who I had pushed into the next grade band (ex. A student I had given ■%; came out with an O4!!). On top of this, the ■ students in class who sat the actual exam, all maintained the same grade as I had awarded - surely this shows that my judgments were accurate and flies in the face of the others being moved up. I feel these students actually worse off having sat the exam.
66. The anonymity of the marker is vital to the assessment process within the points system as it stands. Student/teacher/parental relationships are different to third level and influenced by the humanity and the compassion that are involved in teaching a child from the age of 12-18. To say that teachers are not influenced even subconsciously by their interactions with teenagers and young adults under their care for a lengthy time period, is neglecting to witness or acknowledge the roles teachers play in young people's lives and the bonds they form during their formative years in school. Remaining subjective for the purpose of accredited grades is a high expectation and one that will not deliver fair and standardised results.
67. The dynamic of the class completely changed once they knew they were getting accredited grades and not in a positive way. They began to fear asking questions in case they looked stupid, they didn't try hard questions but just got someone else to do it for them so they could hand up work that was 100%, it is not the way to go. They were way more stressed in school as they saw everything as a test and going towards their grade. Horrible situation to be in. I said last year I never want to have to do it again and now have had to do it twice. I definitely do not want this to continue it would have me rethinking teaching as a career.
68. The emphasis on summative assessment from March to May 2021 put some students under immense stress and was extremely unfair to them, having already had approx. 9 weeks out of school. Some Students require more in person teacher time than others!



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69. The lack of mock exams made the accredited grade process in 2021 significantly harder versus 2020. Having 3 exams prior to May 14th motivated and comforted students. They were significantly less stressed as they had marks in the bag. At the same time some students relaxed and performed less well in the LC as a result of having a strong idea that they would do well / achieve a certain grade. This is especially the case for HL maths. It appears that there was no standardisation of my accredited grades. I expected this to happen - but it didn't. Maybe I didn't read the literature correctly.
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70. The lack of understanding of what assessment means from the department negatively impacted my teaching in the run up to the exams.
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71. The Leaving Cert in June is about the only time in the lives of our students when they actually are equal to everyone else in the country. I am principal of a school in a disadvantaged area. What the Accredited Grades brought home to me is how fair, objective and trustworthy the Leaving Cert actually is.
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72. The major problem with accredited grades is the absence of proper oversight and moderation based on historical data.
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73. The process was very stressful due to lack of proper training. too much disparity between teachers and schools. Students felt constantly assessed. It changed the teacher student relationship. They did not want the teacher to see any failure or weakness, so students felt more alone during the process. Greatly favour external certification following this process.
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74. The questionnaire didn't ask about teachers' ability to mark fairly and accurately, in general. My experience as an examiner and advising examiner with the SEC has taught me that teachers need a lot of guidance and a prescriptive marking scheme, AND someone to oversee their work in order to mark accurately. Even with those things in place, what one teacher will accept as a valid answer or a good standard of answering varies MASSIVELY from teacher to teacher. ANY form of teacher assessment without the same level of oversight (or more oversight, were it possible) from an advising examiner will not result in fairly marked exams nor fairly awarded grades. Unsupervised grading should not be allowed to form any part of student grades going forward, if we want fair results for everyone. I say that as someone whose students undoubtedly benefitted from the unfairness of the process.
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75. The stress placed on students wishing to "impress" their class teacher in tandem with preparing for the State Examinations was clear. One option should have been chosen by students so they could focus on their path.
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76. The system employed to date has major flaws
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77. The varied experience of teachers on the use of assessment models hugely impacted the awarding of grades between schools
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78. There should be a partly agree option. For a number of questions, I didn't fully agree or disagree. I partly agreed.
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79. There was an incredible amount of stress brought about by the introduction of the accredited grades during the middle of the school year, which was completely unfair on the students. I don't know if this would have been as obvious if it had been spread out across the year but I do not think that it would be. Some students also clearly switched off once the 3 pieces of work were completed as they were confident that they had done enough to achieve the grades that they wanted to achieve.
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80. We cannot have teachers assessing their own students, it is not objective, the present LC may be unfair but it's unfair to everyone.
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81. When I heard the number/ percent of students in other schools getting 625 I was very disheartened and felt that other schools took advantage of the accredited grades system, which put my high achieving students on the back foot, since we as a school were extremely fair in the grades we gave. If the accredited grades were to be repeated, I don't think that it would be fair on students as all schools will just start giving their students higher grades than they should because other schools have done it in the past.
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82. You may not like to hear this but the alignment process in my school was farcical. There was not even an attempt at meeting the bell curve for grades. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] he did not want students to be disappointed with their grades, if the algorithm brought grades down then school would not be blamed. So the grades were totally inflated. [REDACTED] students in English got a H1 and [REDACTED] H2; in 2019, we had [REDACTED] H1 and [REDACTED] H2. Management have promoted these inflated grades in our open night enrolment and promotion. I felt the 2021 results are not accurate and are actually unfair to students in the long run. Also I think Q5 on this survey is difficult to answer and is badly formulated / confusing no offence but it just is
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The use of Accredited Grades (AG), as well as traditional examination grades for the Leaving Certificate (LC) in 2021, was an historical event in Irish post-primary education and, in global terms, a unique response to the cancellation of certificate exams due to Covid-19. During the month of May 2021, post-primary teachers in schools across Ireland worked individually and in collaboration with school colleagues to generate an estimated mark for their students. Data from all schools were then submitted for a national standardisation to the State Examinations Commission. The majority of the LC2021 class opted to receive an Accredited Grade and sit an exam in the secure knowledge that, in the event they got two different grades, they would be awarded the higher one.

Following the publication of LC results, and completion of the appeals process, an online questionnaire survey of post-primary teachers was conducted in the closing months of 2021. The purpose of the survey was two-fold: (i) to investigate how teachers engaged with the AG process in their schools and, (ii), to determine if this experience impacted their perceptions of their role as assessors. The survey was also designed as a follow-up to the study conducted by the researchers on the LC Calculated Grades (CG) process in 2020. This report presents preliminary findings from the 2021 research study.

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ISBN: 978-1-911669-36-4