

Preliminary Findings from a Survey of Post-Primary Teachers Involved in the Leaving Certificate 2020 Calculated Grades Process in Ireland



Audrey Doyle, Zita Lysaght and Michael O'Leary

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

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Policy and Practice in Education**

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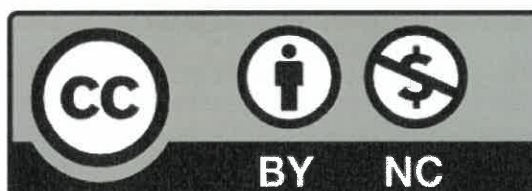
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Executive Summary

Cancellation of the Leaving Certificate (LC) examinations in 2020 as a result of COVID-19 and the subsequent involvement of post-primary teachers in estimating marks and ranks for their own students as part of the Calculated Grades (CG) process were unique events in the history of Irish education. 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 2020 that investigated how this cohort of teachers engaged with the process of CG in their schools and if this experience has impacted how they perceive their role as assessors. Data from 713 teacher respondents are presented in this report with minimum interpretation and, as a consequence, the findings should be considered preliminary; complementary research papers by the authors based on more in-depth analysis of the data are either in press (Doyle, Lysaght & O’Leary, 2021) or the subject of peer-review currently.

As reported, data revealed that the teachers surveyed used a wide range of assessment information when estimating marks and ranks for their students. Not surprisingly the outcomes from 5th and 6th year exams, as well as the mock exams, were particularly important in informing teachers’ judgements. In commentary, respondents also highlighted the importance of other sources of information including their professional knowledge and expertise in State Examinations, the use of in-school tracking and assessment records, the use of school historical State Examination performance data, as well as student characteristics such as application to their work. Challenges identified by many respondents when estimating marks and ranks for their students included issues relating to decision-making around grade boundaries, combining qualitative and quantitative assessment data, reconciling inconsistencies in student performance, maintaining an unbiased position with respect to individual students and voicing concerns about how school colleagues arrived at their decisions. Overall, however, the majority of teachers indicated that they felt the alignment meetings worked well and expressed confidence in their professional judgements. Almost all felt that they were fair to their students.

Although the questionnaire contained closed-ended questions primarily, a large volume of data was received in answer to an open-ended question at the end of the survey. For the sake of parsimony, an indicative sample of comments are included in the main body of this report. A full record of all 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. The pressure felt from members of the school’s community, as well as the stress caused by having to engage in the process, were clearly articulated by many. Decisions around the release of rank order data to students caused many to express very strong feelings of annoyance and disappointment. A large number of comments focused on issues of fairness related to conscious and unconscious bias, approaches adopted by colleagues, the application of the DES guidelines, the use of school historical data and the impact of the national standardisation process on the grades awarded to students. While many were adamant that they would not engage in a calculated grades process in the future, some took a more nuanced view indicating overall satisfaction with the process in the context of exceptional circumstances and highlighting the potential benefits it offered some students. Opinion was divided on the extent to which the CG experience would inform efforts to reform Senior Cycle.

Data from the survey provide much food for thought and are timely given the decision to offer students a choice of taking Calculated Grades (now called Accredited Grades) in 2021.

Research Overview

In Ireland, as in countries all over the world, Covid-19 resulted in unprecedented challenges for many sectors of society, not least the education sector. The decision to cancel the traditional Leaving Certificate (LC) examination and replace it with a Calculated Grades (CG) process was an historic event in Irish education that had very significant implications for policy-makers, teachers and students alike. In May 2020, following cancellation of the LC examination, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) issued guidelines to schools outlining how a student's calculated grade for each subject would result from the combination of two data sets:

- A school-based estimation of an overall percentage mark and ranking to be awarded to a student in a particular subject
- Data on the past performance of students in each school and nationally - the standardisation process (DES, 2020).

Accordingly, over the course of the following number of weeks, teachers engaged initially in marking/ranking their individual students and subsequently in school-based moderation with colleagues. School data were then submitted to the DES by June 19. There followed a standardisation process undertaken by the DES which spawned much public discussion and debate regarding the procedures employed, especially the use of schools' prior performance in the LC – referred to as *school historical data* (e.g. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40229468.html>). In contrast, there was a notable silence about teachers' experiences of engagement in the estimation of marks/ranks in their individual schools, a lacuna this study sought to address in posing two overarching questions:

1. How did post-primary teachers engage with the process of Calculated Grades in their schools?
2. How did the process impact how they view their role as assessors?

Research Strategy

Following receipt of ethical approval to conduct the research from DCU's Research Ethics Committee (Oct 2nd, 2020; DCUREC/2020/189), a questionnaire survey containing predominantly multiple-choice and Likert-type items was designed and piloted with the support, initially, of three post-primary teachers who had participated in the CG process and, later, a group of nine teachers. The final version of the questionnaire instrument was organised in four parts and was focused specifically on the LC Established programme rather than on the LC Vocational or LC Applied programmes (see Appendix 1):

- Part 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 LC2020
- Part 2 invited teachers to reflect on the process of estimating marks and ranks for their students prior to attending the alignment meetings in their schools
- Part 3 focused teachers' attention on their experiences of, and reflections on, the alignment meetings they attended with school colleagues
- Part 4 asked respondents to consider how engagement in the process had influenced their perceptions of assessment and their identity/role as teacher assessors.

The survey, which was administered over a two-month period in November/December 2020 using the *SurveyHero* platform, employed three forms of volunteer sampling:

1. Principals known personally to the researchers were contacted and asked to bring the research and the *SurveyHero* 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

A total of 946 teachers responded to the survey. Of these, 233 provided biographical or school data only and did not respond to any of the substantive questions about the CGs process per se. In light of this, it was decided that data analysis should focus on the responses of the remaining 713 participants of whom 569 participants (80%) addressed all of the survey questions.

Structure of the Report and Approach to Data Presentation

Following the organisational structure of the questionnaire, the survey data are presented in four parts in this report; 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 percents*) rather than on the total number of respondents (713); response numbers

are listed at the foot of each table and figure. Although the questionnaire contained closed-ended questions primarily, a large volume of data was received in answer to two open-ended questions. In light of this and for the sake of parsimony, a representative sample of the comments are included in the body of the report with the full commentary included in Appendix 2. In both cases, save for correcting typographical errors or redacting material that could identify individual teachers, individual teachers' comments are detailed 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. Complementing this report are a number of research articles written by the authors to provide more in-depth analyses and interpretation of the survey data including analysis of data by subject taught, years of experience, school type, etc. These are currently in press (Doyle, Lysaght & O'Leary, 2021) or in review for peer-reviewed journals.

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 LC 2020.

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

Gender	Years teaching		In current school		In total		Number of LC Classes taught		Role in school (alphabetical)	
		%		%		%		%		%
Female	67		0 to 1	5	1		None	3	Assistant Principal	27
Male	33		2 to 5	23	10		1	31	Cal. Grades Coordinator	4
Other	<1		6 to 10	19	18		2 to 5	21	Chaplain	1
			11 to 20	28	33		6 to 10	10	Deputy Principal	3
			>20	25	37		11+	35	Guidance Counsellor	2
									LC Year Head	6
									SEN Coordinator	3
									Subject/Dept. Head	49
									Teaching Principal	1

n = 713

The ratio of females to males was 2:1 reflecting the gender split among Irish second level teachers nationally. In terms of experience, half the cohort indicated that they had been teaching for 11 years

or more with a further 19% teaching between 6 and 10 years. Not surprisingly given the focus on LC teachers, less than 1% indicated that they were in their first year of teaching. Most respondents (70%) had over 10 years teaching experience in total. Almost three quarters of respondents had been in their schools for six years or more.

About a third of respondents could be considered very experienced Senior Cycle teachers with 35% saying that they had taught LC classes eleven times or more. Conversely, 31% were very inexperienced having taught an exam class for the LC just once. One in five (21%) had experience of bringing students through the LC exams on between two and five occasions with a further 10% of respondents indicating that they had taught LC classes between six and ten times.

As well as being subject teachers, other roles played by respondents in their schools were subject/department head (49%), assistant/deputy principal (30%), LC year head (56%) and Calculated Grades coordinator (4%). Between one and three percent of respondents were either SEN coordinators, guidance counsellors, chaplains or teaching principals.

Table 2. School data (Q2a-d)

Student gender		Status		Size		Language of instruction	
	%		%		%		%
Female	26	DEIS	25	<100	<1	English	94
Male	16	Non-DEIS	64	100-299	12	Gaeilge	6
Mixed	59	Fee-Paying	12	300-599	35		
				600-999	41		
				1000+	12		

n =713

As the data in Table 2 indicate, most respondents worked in mixed gender, non-disadvantaged (DEIS), schools with between 600 and 999 students where English was the language of instruction. The proportion of respondents working in DEIS schools is roughly equivalent to the percentage of DEIS schools in the post-primary system (circa 27%). While 12% 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, 53% 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 (94%) reflects the proportion of such schools in the system (all national statistics taken from DES, Statistical Bulletin, 2020).

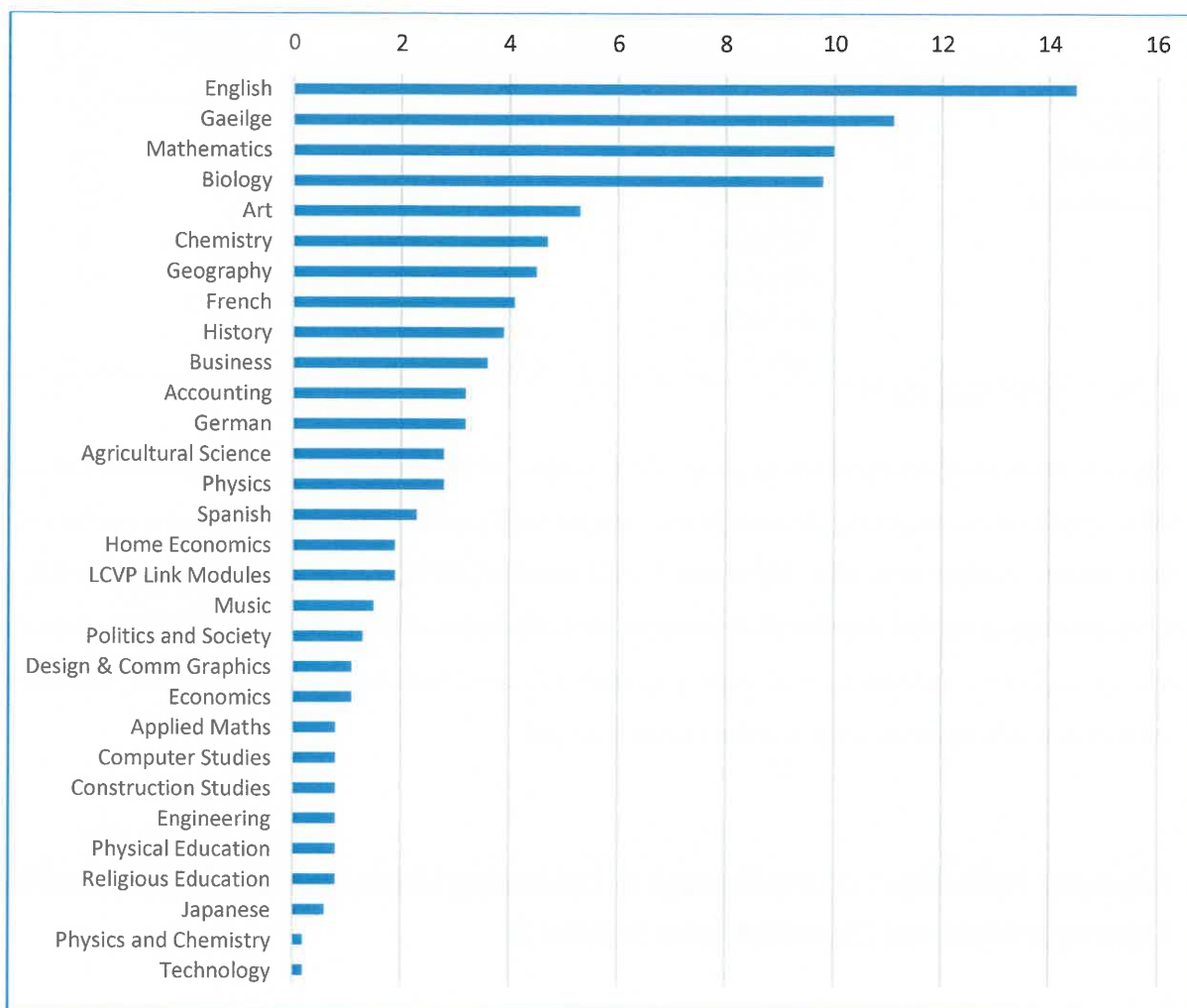


Figure 1. Leaving Certificate subjects chosen by respondents as a focus for the survey (Q3b)
n = 713

While respondents were asked to list all of the subjects for which they submitted estimated marks/ranks, 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 29 of the 36 LC (established) subjects responded to the survey. In all, about one third of the respondents were either English (15%), Gaeilge (11%) or Maths (10%) teachers.

Table 3. Subject level and numbers of students and teachers involved (Q3c-e)

Chosen subject level*	Number of students for whom marks/ranks were submitted in the chosen subject**		Number of teachers in total in the school involved in the Calculated Grades process for the chosen subject**	
	%		%	
Higher	85	1 to 5	3	One
Ordinary	14	6 to 10	12	Two
Foundation	1	11 to 20	42	Three
		21 to 30	38	Four
		31 to 40	3	Five or more
		41 to 50	2	
		50+	<1	

n = 701*, 707** and 704**

The vast majority of teachers (85%) taught their subject at higher level. Most (80%) submitted data for between eleven and thirty students in their school, with just 6% involved in estimating marks/ranks for a greater number than that. About one third of teachers (37%) worked alone in their subject area while estimating marks/ranks for their students, with approximately another third (37%) 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.

Teachers' Reflections on the Process of Estimating Marks/Ranks 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/ranks for their students **prior** to attending alignment meetings. It should be noted that many of the items listed in Table 4 were taken from the Calculated Grades guidelines document sent to schools (see DES, 2020, p. 13).

Data in Table 4 reveal that a wide range of assessment information was considered by teachers to be important when estimating marks/ranks for their students. Not surprisingly, the outcomes from exams in 5th and 6th year, as well as the mock exams, provided important information for the vast majority (87%+) of respondents. Respondents also indicated that valued the information they had amassed from continuous assessments and/or in-class formative assessments from 5th and 6th 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.

Table 4. Evidence used to estimate marks/ranks in order of importance (Q4)*

	Important**	Unimportant***	Undecided/NA
	%	%	%
6th Year exams prior to lockdown (Christmas, monthly etc.)	98	2	0
6th Year continuous assessments prior to lockdown (excluding Leaving Cert coursework components.)	92	5	3
5th Year exams (Christmas, Summer, monthly etc.)	92	8	0
6th Year in-class formative assessments prior to lockdown (e.g. observation, questioning, discussions, self-assessments etc.)	88	12	1
Leaving Cert mock examinations	87	12	1
6th Year - engagement within class prior to lockdown	83	17	1
5th Year continuous assessments (assignments, projects, experiments etc.)	82	14	4
5th Year in-class formative assessments (e.g. observation, questioning, discussions, self-assessments etc.)	80	19	1
Your knowledge of how students you had taught in previous LC classes had performed in the LC	80	16	4
5th Year - engagement within class	68	31	1
Leaving Cert coursework components	60	9	31
6th Year - engagement with learning outside of class prior to lockdown	56	41	3
Your experience of marking for the State Examinations Commission (SEC)	51	16	33
Your knowledge of how students in other LC classes in the school had performed in previous LCs	47	45	8
5th Year - engagement with learning outside of class (e.g. homework, clubs, societies etc.)	37	58	5
Junior Cert Result for the subject listed in Q3b	29	63	8
Overall Junior Cert Results	17	76	8

The number of responses to each element ranged from 690 to 706

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

**Combined percentage: *Very Important and Important*

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

It is noteworthy that just 47% 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/ranks with 45% reporting that historical data of this kind was unimportant. While engagement within class, especially in 6th year, was considered to be important, about half or less of the respondents indicated they felt engagement outside of class was of value in the semesters before and after the Christmas holidays (prior to lockdown). The vast majority of teachers who taught a subject with a course-work component indicated that this information was important (just 9% taking the opposite view). Most of teachers who had experience of marking for the State Examinations Commission (SEC) indicated that this was an important factor in their decision-making with just 16% of this group indicating that it was unimportant. Not surprisingly given DES guidelines, Junior Certificate results were not considered to be important sources of information for most respondents.

Open-ended Data from Question 4

In addition to rating the importance of a list of factors in estimating marks/ranks for their students (as detailed in Table 4), an *Other? Please specify* option was included as part of Question 4 (see Appendix 1). A total 71 qualitative comments were received in response to this. Open coding of these data led to the identification of a number of themes relating to (1) professional knowledge and expertise in state exams, (2) use of in-school tracking and assessment records, (3) use of school historical State Examinations performance data, (4) student characteristics and (5) challenges and frustrations with the process. All comments are included in this section of the report under one of the themes identified.

1. Professional knowledge and expertise in State Examinations

Reflecting the quantitative data, a number of respondents highlighted the professional knowledge they gained as teachers and/or examiners - some with the SEC - as informing the estimation of marks/ranks for their students:

- *I work as an Oral Examiner for the S.E.C.*
- *I conducted a large number of Irish oral examinations with my class - 4 in total in 5th year and 5 in total in 6th year therefore I had good solid evidence regarding student improvement and productivity. Also as I'm an experienced oral examiner I could indicate how they would do in their orals*
- *I am a written and oral examiner for leaving cert higher level Irish. I am an appeals examiner at Leaving Certificate for the SEC too. This informed my opinion, none of the other teachers in my subject have any experience working with the SEC or grading to a national standard*

- *5 years as a written examiner in LC HL [REDACTED] helped me*
- *As an SEC examiner I feel I knew exactly how the majority of my students would do. At times during the process this put my class at a disadvantage as I felt others were being over generous. The integrity of the SEC is paramount and the fairest system we have due to anonymity*
- *Years as a practical and composition Examiner for the SEC made it easier for me*
- *Special provisions and knowledge of how these are applied in exams I have marked or seen marked in the past was extremely important*
- *Years of experience teaching subject at LC level (in excess of 20 years), professional experience, in-depth knowledge of subject and requirements of exam components*
- *"Nous" - the categories above blend into the 'thin slicing' of experience of young people's abilities and tendencies - might not work all that well during two years but is the type of person that will "pull out the stops when the time comes" etc.*
- *My knowledge of how students of similar ability and work ethic had performed in previous years*
- *Plus, professional judgement - how child would have performed on the day.*

Other teachers pointed to experience teaching internationally as informing their decisions:

- *My experience teaching internationally the IB, IGCSE and GCSE curricula*
- *Previous teaching experience in [REDACTED] where they already have predicted grades made this process easier for me.*

2. Use of in-school tracking and assessment records

The qualitative data provide some understanding of the extent to which teachers relied on student assessment data, amassed in the years and months preceding the process of calculating marks/ranks, to inform their decision-making:

- *I have always prepared, for my own records, estimated grades based on the students' averages across 6th Yr. I've found them to be quite accurate and as such I was comfortable enough predicting what I thought students would get. There are always outliers, of course, a student who goes up or down a grade are more than you think for any number of reasons where an exam is focused on one day, but generally the averages are very accurate*
- *I knew/know every result in my subject for my students for many years. I am nearly 40 years at this job. I know precisely what to expect*

- *My experience was personal to me. I had a top higher level [REDACTED] class, I had taught these students from 2nd year, this made the process easier for me. A different set of circumstances would have made the whole process more difficult*
- *Personally, I feel very competent in assigning the predicted grades to my LC students in 2020 since I had assessed their performance in detail over a 2-year period. I had not previously taught any student [REDACTED] at Junior cert level so they were basically starting a new subject where they were assessed continuously over this period in addition to both term and end of year exams. Each exam/ portfolio/homework was assigned a weighting and a record of their performance updated to our Schoology platform. Students could readily assess their own progress over this period and all this data enabled a solid predicted grade for each student*
- *I also focused on the ranking of each student in each assessment carried out for all assessments completed since 5th year*
- *Having kept detailed records of assessment of all elements of their work since 5th year, I found it useful in estimating their grades*
- *Each student had to submit a hand written 1,000-word essay at the end of each topic, i.e. Poet, Theme, Genre, Shakespeare etc. I corrected all their work succinctly, following departmental guidelines of P. C. L. M. I also gave feedback on all work, advising how to improve and reach potential. As I had diarised all their marks, it was simple and fair to evaluate their grades, and class placement*
- *Monthly assessment results Oral ability*
- *Tracking of student criteria for success in various repeated tasks to determine improvements (or not) in the various skills required to do well in this subject in an examination*
- *In our school, because of the range of students and teachers available, it is rare that one would teach the same class from 1st-6th Year. The assessment of grades was based solely on their work at Senior Cycle, as it included a number of students who may have chosen to take Ordinary Level Junior Cert English, but needed to do Higher Level at this stage*
- *We have a process of systematic tracking of students' performance in each subject. We also compared performance in 2020 mock exams relative to previous years to gauge their relative strength*
- *I looked at the previous 3-4 years ' exam results at all levels. I calculated the average increase from mocks to leaving cert. This also helped me to determine the levels the students should be at*
- *We agreed a common template for all the maths classes at 6th year. We agreed to focus on the formal end of term assessments that would be reported home and analyse those. We also used our opinion of how we felt they would do in the final few months, the final section was how we felt they would do on the day if they were to sit the exam.*

Teachers' comments also signalled that they had consulted with colleagues with prior knowledge of the students:

- *Other teachers' assessment of students in previous years*
- *Consulted with teachers who had previously taught class before me to gather data but did not disclose this information.*

As reported, teachers' judgements were also informed by students' performance on in-school tests, past LC papers and mock exams undertaken prior to the lockdown:

- *5th and 6th Year Common Christmas Exam*
- *Tests they had done on past paper style questions were the most relevant*
- *I give many class tests over the two-year period, all based on past higher biology papers. In fact, my students sat over 20 [REDACTED] tests in two years and this gave me a very clear idea of their abilities and how they perform in an exam situation. This was vital to my predictive grades*

The internal assessment decisions taken in individual schools and how knowledge of the Leaving Certificate marking system informed approaches to school-based assessment was commented on also:

- *It was important to use their work from senior level. The percentage of each component was the same for each student and this was in regards to how the leaving cert art marks were usually accounted for.*

Remarking on the mock orals, teachers' commentary underscored the value they attributed to working with external examiners:

- *How well prepared students were for the LC [REDACTED] Oral, given that it was due to be held immediately after the Easter holidays. We had already held Mock Orals with an external examiner and almost all students had done that oral exam. This was a good indicator of level at that time*
- *Mock Oral exams completed at the end of February, marked by an external examiner, were also very important.*

3. Use of school historical State Examinations performance data

The qualitative data provide insight too into the nature and extent of the use made of historical data and results in the subject from LC previous years by teachers in calculating their students' marks/ranks:

- *The school's Leaving certificate results in the subject from previous years I thought was very important*
- *Comparison of School's past performance in chosen subject in comparison to national averages*
- *Historical data from 2017, 18 and 19 for each subject department was used to moderate results*
- *My knowledge of how previous students performed in LC in my subject wasn't used as a factor as such however I was cognisant of number of H1s, H2s awarded to my school in this subject in previous years*
- *Good judgement on previous years*
- *As a department, we very much followed the guidelines of the calculated grade process sent out by the Department of Education and Science sent out at the beginning of the process. e.g. we examined our results over the last few years to identify average number of H1s, H2s etc. and kept our calculated results in line with these results. E.g. Similar number of H1s were given out as in previous years and only to do those students deemed exceptional based on their progress over two years of work. Each teacher collated information of previous results over the Leaving Cert cycle and used our professional judgment of what students are likely to achieve rather than what we would wish for them. As a result, there was no one class group with much higher grades than another etc. JC result was taken into account more so with students who were borderline but main emphasis was on LC results.*

Commentary on the use of Junior Certificate Examination (JCE) data signalled that school practices differed. In some cases, although it was acknowledged that the data weren't supposed to be used in calculating marks and ranks, it is evident that teachers used them nonetheless, citing a range of reasons:

- *JC results were not included as we were specifically told they were not to be taken into consideration, a lot can change for students between 3rd and 6th year*
- *I know we weren't supposed to use information from junior cycle, but I inherited the class early in the first term of 6th year, so I chose to use all available information in the grading process.*

A number of observations were made regarding how the JCE data were factored into the standardisation process with some stating that they (schools and teachers) should have been informed of the decision to use JCE data. Others focused on the fairness of the process and results opining that *the essays students produced at Leaving Cert higher level over one and a half years nullified any recourse to Junior Cert*. Reference was also made to the Transition Year and how its introduction in a particular school negated their use of JCE data in estimating marks/ranks:

- *We were specifically told/advised not to take into account JC results. However, they were used and we should have been informed of this. The guidelines we were given were not the ones used*
- *When the instructions first came from the DES we were told not to use the JC results however it turned out it could have been important when standardising the results*
- *At the time we were told not to include their previous Junior Cert/Cycle result - we were unaware how much they would be factored into the calculated grade. This information should be more obvious to teachers. Again it is very difficult to factor student engagement into a calculated grade mark*
- *Although I did not consider the Junior Cert exams as it was not asked of us in the guidelines I can see why they were useful in the algorithm as they were competing against their own results as opposed to school profiling based on previous years. Previous students' results in my opinion had no bearing on this particular group. All in all, my students kept their grades, weren't brought down so I believe although not something I would relish doing again, it was the fairest result we could hope for under the circumstances*
- *As this cohort were the first class to have had a TY experience in the school, looking at Junior Cert results or previous school results in the established LC would not have been justified given the claims about TY experience.*

4. Student characteristics

Respondents also highlighted that student characteristics, including teachers' observations of the extent to which students applied themselves to their work and their belief that many students improve in the months before the LC examination, influenced their estimations of marks/ranks:

- *Student work ethic and focus and willingness to take feedback from assignments and formative assessments on board in order to improve*
- *Engagement and participation in field trip. Attitude, application, effort. Focus of student. Assess who would hugely improve their grade upon taking on my advice and guidance in the normal exam preparation in weeks before exam. I could judge who would take advice on board and improve their potential grade had they had, 12 more weeks of teaching*

- *Work ethic and attitude towards the subject. For example, "it's my 7th subject so I may not be counting it"*
- *My knowledge of how my students had worked during lockdown and my knowledge of how much their standard would have improved from the mock examinations to enable them to get a higher grade in June. The opposite could also have been true, but in general, I found that it wasn't. We were to give a grade based on what we thought an individual student would achieve if the exam had taken place in June, so I felt it extremely necessary to take into account how much my students' standards would have improved between March and June. I think that it would have been unfair and foolish to base their results solely on past experience and previous exam results. A lot of them worked extremely hard during lockdown and their standard of [REDACTED] did improve. This enabled me to predict what I thought would have been an accurate result*
- *Mostly based on observed application and diligence of student (and hence hopeful/anticipated result), and any related measured performance (as a moderating corroboration) - perhaps overall towards the optimistic and somewhat subjective, and inevitably influenced by peer pressure (unfortunately not categorically objective)*
- *Patterns established by student in terms of timing of work/effort for exams*
- *Potential to improve between March and June - Important, almost all students improve in the last few months*
- *Ours is a small school so I would have a very good knowledge of the student's ability and level of work*
- *Knowing which students had accessed the mock papers prior to sitting them*
- *Grades calculated according to how we viewed the students perform on the day irrespective of attendance and homework*
- *Each student was treated as an individual based on their own results and capabilities*
- *I teach a number of native or near native speakers. This was also an important determining factor in my predictions*
- *Students' trajectory - average grades for students weren't applicable in this subject.*

Reference was made also to student engagement outside the school. While one respondent said that s/he ...wouldn't take any account of engagement with work outside of the school with outside agencies..., another noted how student experience of transition year and ...work in other projects like BT young Scientist, John Hooper Medal and Scientist... influenced their marking and ranking judgements. One reference was made to students attending DEIS schools:

- *Various factors needed to be considered due to DEIS status. A lack of attendance due to mental health issues may impact as stated above on previous examinations such as Christmas and 5th year and project work.*

5. Challenges and frustrations with the process

Teachers highlighted a number of challenges that confounded the process of estimating student marks/ranks particularly in relation to new exam subjects:

- *This was the first year group I had taught for Politics and Society. Lack of detailed marking schemes, worked examples and general information were solely lacking. NCCA's curriculum specification is not fit for purpose*
- *As PE was the first year of the subject with no previous standards to compare to I had been giving continuous tests since the beginning of senior cycle. From this I was able to give an average score of what each student should be attaining in their LC exam. I have also taught in the UK and understand how assessment for projects work. After the results I saw a few of the surrounding schools' projects which I felt were well below standard and did not meet aspects of the requirements for the project. However, these projects were marked a lot higher than mine*
- *This was the first year for computer science leaving certificate. We were a pilot school. There were no past papers, no junior cert subject. One sample paper, no marking scheme. No mock exams etc. No guidelines on what a H1 looked like or a h8 for that matter. Speaking with other teachers from other pilot schools we had an impression our students were generally weaker. This feeling is all we had to judge by*
- *LCPE was given no specific help on how to grade written exams and project work. Left to make it up for yourself. An injustice to students and teachers alike*
- *It was very difficult to calculate grades in a subject that had no previous leaving cert exam or exam papers to work from. It was also difficult to mark a project when no marking scheme had been issued*
- *Very difficult process as other years I would guess a grade a student would receive in the LC but then would be dumbfounded by their achieved grade.*

A degree of frustration with the process was communicated by some, linked with perceptions that ...the goalposts kept changing or were moved... leaving teachers feeling undermined as professionals:

- *I was frustrated at the process - importance of the Junior Cert results carried a much greater weighting in the final grade than what we were led to believe in June - frustrating when the goalposts kept changing*
- *Approximate predicted grades were calculated and a class list generated based on predictions and these were rigorously compared to averages from the assessments outlined above as 'very important'. In this case JC results were completely irrelevant. The final predictions took this*

and previous school data into account as this is what teachers were told the criteria would be in the first place before the goal posts were moved

- *Being undermined by a computer is dreadful. The irony of doing an online survey.... Our students work continuously in class and we have always achieved a high standard in Art in our school at LC level. We maintained our standard in school and SEC brought every one of our student grades down. (bar one). Some who achieved 96% went to 86%. Their work is of a very high standard. The Leaving Cert works as it is anonymous, I will never do predictive grading again. My professionalism, which I take very seriously, was greatly undermined. We spent a long time fairly grading our students' work, from workbooks and preparatory work for LC. Proof of high standard.*

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

Question 5 in Section 2 of the questionnaire instrument invited teachers to read seventeen statements describing different challenges they may have faced when estimating marks/ranks 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 DES guidelines. Each list 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 5).

Table 5. Challenges faced by teachers with respect to individual students when estimating marks/ranks 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
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1. Application of guidelines							
a) I applied the DES guidelines strictly when estimating the student mark	77	16	3	1	1	1	2
b) I applied the DES guidelines strictly when estimating the student rank	76	14	4	2	1	1	2

2. Difficulty of the estimation tasks

a) Estimating a rank order was easy	22	27	21	10	8	8	5
b) Estimating a mark was easy	17	34	20	9	8	5	6
c) Estimating a rank order was difficult	14	13	21	18	12	13	10
d) Estimating a mark was difficult	11	10	20	25	15	13	6

3. Availability of evidence

a) I had plenty of evidence to estimate a mark	62	25	9	2	1	0	1
b) I had just about enough evidence to estimate a mark	7	7	7	11	14	23	31

4. Decisions made about estimated marks

a) I gave the student the benefit of the doubt and awarded a mark that moved him/her above a grade boundary	4	3	7	10	16	22	39
b) I gave a mark that left a student just below a grade boundary	1	1	4	12	17	22	44
c) I should have given the student a failing mark but didn't	0	1	0	1	2	17	79
d) 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	1	0	1	1	2	3	93
e) 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	2	0	1	2	4	4	88
f) 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	4	3	4	6	8	9	66
g) 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	1	2	3	3	8	82
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	0	0	1	1	3	94

5. Fairness of estimated marks

a) I gave the student a mark I believed was fair	92	5	1	0	1	1	0
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The number of responses to each statement ranged from 618 to 639

*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 DES guidelines strictly when estimating the student mark*, was true in the case of 90% or more of their students. A very small percentage of respondents (10% or less) indicated that applying the guidelines strictly was problematic for more than half the students in their class (Item 1b).

In general, the data in the table are consistent across the percentages of teachers finding the estimation of marks/ranks easy or difficult (Items 2a-c). For example, about one in two respondents (shaded in yellow) indicated that estimating marks/ranks was easy for about 75% or more of their students. Conversely, roughly half the respondents said these were difficult tasks for about 25% or less of their students (shaded in blue). The percentages of teachers indicating the tasks were difficult for nearly all of their students (90%+), or for none of them, are relatively small (ranging from 6% to 14% - data in bold font (Items 2c-d).

Almost two out of every three teachers (62%) indicated that they had plenty of evidence to estimate a mark for the vast majority of the LC students in their subject area. Another 25% said they had sufficient evidence for 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 21%.

As the data in Table 5 indicate, some issues arose for teachers with respect to grade boundaries (Items 4a-c), specifically, the extent to which their marking reflected standards implemented by others (Items 4d-f) and the extent to which their judgements were influenced by factors beyond their students' achievement (Items g-h). For example, 61% 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), with 21% saying that they should have awarded a failing mark but didn't (Item 4c). While most teachers indicated that they were not influenced by the marks they thought other teachers in their school or other schools might give (see Items 4d and 4e), one third of respondents 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 4f). While 19% 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 4g), knowing that some students needed a particular grade for a particular course or job was not a factor in awarding higher grades for the vast majority (94%) (see Item 4h).

However, 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).

Questionnaire Section 2: Question 6 (Time spent on the process)

Table 6 contains data on the time it took respondents to complete the various tasks involved in the Calculated Grades process in their schools.

Table 6. Time spent per individual class, on activities related to the process of estimating marks/ranks (Q6)*

	4 hours+	About 3 hours	About 2 hours	About 1 hour	About ½ hour	Not applicable
	%	%	%	%	%	%
a) Deciding on marks/percentages	51	17	17	11	4	0
b) Collating assessment data	51	16	17	11	5	0
c) Reviewing assessment data	33	20	23	17	6	1
d) Deciding on class rankings	28	15	25	21	12	0
e) Reading or consulting DES guidance/documents/video	23	20	31	20	5	1
f) Attending Calculated Grades alignment meetings	17	15	34	23	7	4
g) Consulting with the Principal or Deputy Principal	5	4	8	30	32	21

The number of responses to each element ranged from 596 to 598

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

Over half the respondents said they spent four hours or more deciding on marks (Item 6a) and collating assessment data (Item 6b), with one in three spending the equivalent time reviewing the data they collated (Item 6c). It is also evident that decisions about class rankings (Item 6d) took up less time on average than decisions about marks. The data also show that the amount of time respondents spent reading the DES support materials (Item 6e) varied considerably: about one in three teachers said they spent about three hours or more attending alignment meetings with 57% spending about one or two hours on the process. Just under 80% of teachers spent at least some time consulting with their school principal. The fact that between 4% and 12% of respondents said they spent as little as half an hour on the various activities is somewhat unusual and worthy of further exploration. It may be explained for example, by the fact that some teachers were dealing with very small numbers of students or other factors may have been at play which invite further investigation.

Questionnaire Section 2: Question 7 (Reflections on the process of estimating marks/ranks)

Data in Table 7 pertain to teachers' levels of agreement with statements describing different experiences they may have had during the process of estimating marks/ranks for their students prior to attending alignment meetings.

Table 7. Reflections on the process of estimating marks/ranks for students prior to attending alignment meetings (Q7)*

	Agree** %	Disagree*** %	Undecided %
1. Feelings during the estimation process			
a) I felt confident when exercising my professional judgement during the process	87	12	2
b) I felt stressed during the process	81	18	2
c) I felt uncomfortable during the process at the prospect of my students learning how I had ranked them	73	25	3
d) I felt good about the marking and ranking decisions I made	71	26	3
e) I felt guilty about the marking and ranking decisions I made	32	64	4
2. Challenges during the process			
a) I found it easy to combine qualitative (e.g. classroom observations) and quantitative (e.g. exam marks) assessment data when marking/ranking my students	70	28	2
b) When estimating a mark/rank, I found it difficult to reconcile inconsistencies (peaks and troughs) in my students' performance in the period leading up to the lockdown	51	44	5
c) I found it difficult to maintain an unbiased position when marking/ranking my students	38	60	2
d) My experience of SLARs at Junior Cycle was helpful to me during the process	31	49	20
3. Evaluation of support materials from the DES			
a) The Guide for Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks and Class Rank Orderings was helpful to me	73	23	4
b) I found the DES instructional video on the process of arriving at an estimated mark and class rank order for each student useful	64	30	6
c) I found the DES instructional video providing supplementary guidance on the avoidance of unconscious bias and interpreting the evidence of achievement in the case of students with disabilities useful	60	29	11

The number of responses to each statement ranged from 594 to 598

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

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

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

The statements are grouped under three 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.

What is most noteworthy about the findings in Table 7 is the very large percentage of teachers (87%) expressing confidence in the professional judgement they exercised during the Calculated Grades process (Item 1a). However, it should be noted that it was also stressful for many (81%) (Item 1b) with three out of four saying that they felt uncomfortable about the prospect of their students having access to their rank order data (Item 1c). Further, about one in three said they felt guilty about the decisions they had made (Item 1e).

Amongst the challenges teachers agreed they faced during the process of estimating marks/ranks for their students were combining qualitative and quantitative assessment data (28% disagreeing with the statement that it was easy - Item 2a), inconsistencies in their students' performance over time (51% agreeing – Item 2b) and maintaining an unbiased position (38% agreeing – Item 2c). About one in three agreed that their prior involvement in Junior Cycle SLARS had been helpful to them (Item 3d).

Three out of every four teachers agreed that the DES guidelines document for schools was helpful (Item 3a), with approximately two out of every three agreeing the video produced by the DES was helpful (Items 3b and 3c).

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 8 in the survey (see Appendix 1) revealed that the vast majority of teachers (n= 577) attended either one (46%) or two (35%) alignment meetings. About one in five (19%) attended three or more.

Section 3: Question 9 (Reflections on the alignment meetings)

Data in Table 8 are derived from Question 9 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/ranks 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 8. Reflections on the alignment meetings (Q9)*

	Agree** %	Disagree*** %	Undecided %
1. Opinions on working with colleagues during alignment meetings			
a) I found it easy to justify my marks and/or class ranks to colleagues	89	8	3
b) I found it easy to work with my colleagues during the alignment meetings	86	12	2
c) I found the alignment meetings stressful	35	62	4
d) I found it hard to voice my concerns about how colleagues arrived at their marks and/or class ranks	23	68	10
2. Opinion on the outcomes of the alignment meetings			
a) The way in which marks and class ranks were estimated differed among teachers in my school	38	45	17
b) I awarded a higher mark than I felt students would have achieved in the LC following discussions with colleagues during alignment meetings	26	72	3
c) I awarded a lower mark than I felt students would have achieved in the LC following discussions with colleagues during alignment meetings	17	80	3
d) My students would have received a higher mark than I gave if they had been in a colleague's class	13	73	14
3. Overall evaluation of alignment process			
a) Overall the alignment process worked well	73	19	7
b) The DES guidance around the alignment process was helpful to me	68	27	6
c) I would have preferred a different process for aligning grades	36	43	22
d) I needed more guidance on how to resolve disagreements during alignment meetings	21	67	12

The number of responses to each statement ranged from 569-573

*Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number

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

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

Data in Table 8 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 1d) with almost a quarter of the respondents indicating that they found it hard to voice concerns about how their colleagues arrived at their decisions (Item 1f).

Respondents were divided on whether the estimation of marks/ranks differed among teachers in their school with 38% agreeing that it did and 45% disagreeing (Item 2a). The data indicate that the marks initially awarded by some teachers changed following the alignment meetings with 26% agreeing they awarded a higher mark (Item 2b) and 17% a lower mark (Item 2c). Very few teachers (13%) 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 73% agreeing and just 19% disagreeing (Item 3a). Consistent with other findings about the DES support materials for schools, the majority of respondents (68%) found guidance in relation to the alignment process helpful (Item 3b). However, it should be noted that 36% indicated that they would have preferred a different process for aligning grades (Item 3c), with one in five saying they needed more guidance in relation to resolving disagreements during the process (Item 3d).

Teachers' Reflections on the Impact of having been Involved in the Calculated Grades Process in their Schools (Questionnaire Section 4)

Data that speak to how engagement in the CG process impacted on teachers' feelings and beliefs about assessment and their role in the assessment process going forward were also collected (see Appendix 1, Questions 10 and 11). Findings with respect to these data are being reported separately in a paper that is currently the subject of peer-review.

Moving to the final question of the survey (see Appendix 1, Question 12), participants were invited to comment freely on their experiences during the process of estimating marks/ranks for the students in their schools. Approximately one in three of the 731 respondents added commentary of varying length from a single sentence to multiple paragraphs. An analysis of background data for this sub-set of teachers (n=251) 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 to those who did not respond to Question 12.

Engagement in iterative cycles of open coding of these qualitative data led to the identification of a rich multi-dimensional framework of seven themes as listed:

1. Pressure (from the community, school management, politicians, the media)
2. Stress (caused by the process and consequences of having to mark and rank their own students)
3. A mix of emotions (including annoyance, upset, and disappointment)
4. A breach of trust (related to the release of rank order data in particular)
5. Fairness (with respect to bias, the work of colleagues, the application of DES guidelines, grade inflation, the national standardisation, grading one's own students)
6. Future involvement in Calculated Grades
7. Leaving Certificate reform.

A range of comments, indicative of those received, is included in this section of the report. To preserve the authenticity and voice of each teacher, the responses are presented with minimal interpretation or analysis. To aid the reader, the data are organised thematically with subheadings to aid engagement and understanding. As noted previously, Appendix 2 includes a full record of all comments received. Throughout this report, teacher comments are presented without editing save for addressing typographical errors and redacting/omitting text to protect the identity of the writer.

1. Pressure (from the community, school management, politicians, the media)

An overarching theme arising from the qualitative data is that, because Ireland is a small country, a system of calculated grades creates unnecessary stress and pressure, particularly in rural and small towns where teachers live and teach locally:

- *In a small town community, I felt pressure when meeting parents out town shopping etc. as some tried to broach the subject of assessment with me some parents have not spoken to me since as they feel I gave a harsh grade and did not reward their child fairly. This is unpleasant to deal with; the government made fools of us by not sticking to the guidelines that they published. We were told in May that class ranking would not be made available to students and it was very unfair (to change this) and would make me very suspicious of any other attempts at calculated grades*
- *I believe that while it would be ok for more teacher involvement in urban centres, the nature of rural and small town Ireland made the entire process very uncomfortable and I am sure that teachers will feel the rippling exponential impact of this for some time.*

A number of comments pointed to pressure exerted internally in schools, e.g., pressure principals exerted on teachers and *subtle interference on behalf of management* with one respondent opining that in his/her school integrity was compromised while others pointed to conflicts of interest:

- *The integrity of school management and teachers was put to the test in the calculated grades process. In my school management failed the test together with a few teachers*
- *As a one teacher department the most stressful aspect of the whole process was dealing with school management. At times my professional opinion was undermined as there was profound misalignment in terms of expectations and a lack of subject knowledge and understanding*
- *The process in our school was compromised because the Principal included an "extra" one-to-one alignment meeting, not part of the official guidelines, with each teacher, AFTER the alignment meetings, to check the grades they had given each student. This could be seen as Principal putting pressure on teachers to change grades up or down... (part of the comment is omitted to protect the identity of the writer).*

It is evident from the commentary that some respondents thought the process of calculating grades had been undermined in the Irish context by what they described as political pressure/interference and inappropriate coverage by the media:

- *The media and public perception (as a consequence of media engagement) is the greatest challenge and most damaging element of this process and future processes such as this*
- *I was also annoyed by media suggesting teachers over estimated their student grades*
- *To me, the crucial difference is when you are estimating, you are thinking how well a student could potentially do on a good day. You are not going to ask yourself what is the worst they could do, or how would they do if they got a bad paper. This is why grades looked inflated in my opinion. This should have been clarified in the media beforehand as it is completely obvious to anyone with sense*
- *As a teacher in a fee paying school I was disgusted at the way our politicians interfered in the whole process. Getting rid of the school profile was a joke. Some of my calculated grades were reduced while a neighbouring school was the opposite. Calculated grades won't work in Ireland as our politicians will mess it up. I say this as an experienced advising examiner in the leaving certificate. The present system is fit for purpose as it doesn't identify schools so politicians can't discriminate against fee paying and/or high achieving schools.*

2. Stress (caused by the process and consequences of having to mark and rank their own students)

In the context of teaching locally, a number of comments were made about how involvement in the calculated grades process *induced so much stress* linked with pressure from parents and/or unwelcome contacts from parents and/students. The terms *stress* and *stressful* were used repeatedly by teachers in reference, in particular, to ranking their students. This reflects the earlier finding (Table

8) that 73% of teachers *felt uncomfortable* at the prospect of their students being able to access the ranks, with 32% indicating that they felt guilty about marking/ranking decisions they had taken:

- *Calculated Grades was the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my career. I wasn't comfortable doing it and I felt like it ruined the relationship I had with those students. I was fully supported by my school, but I found it very tough. I was contacted online by parents who were unhappy with the grade their child received. I had to keep a low profile when leaving my house as I live close to the school and I would see many students when I went outside. It induced so much stress that I never want to experience again. I also feel like the students would have done much better if they sat the exam, as I had to follow the Bell Curve and rank the students. This led to a lot of students getting a grade much lower than what they would have got if they sat the exam. The process was not fair on anyone involved*
- *It was an extremely stressful process. The class ranking element and being unable to give students the same percentage was unrealistic as you will often have a cohort of 3 or 4 students per class who will achieve the same percentage in formative assessment and class based assessments. It certainly would affect teacher/student relationships if we were to continue assessing in this manner. I would question whether all schools would follow guidelines exactly and not try to improve their school results as a whole if this process were adapted*
- *The stress involved in this process was horrendous, constantly questioning my own ability to think about it fairly leading to a level of anxiety I have never experienced in any other facet of life as I felt that students might miss out on dream courses from the marks I had provided. I understand that this is not necessarily the case but it felt like that. I have also witnessed the stress in current 6th year groups at the idea of predicted grades happening again this year and it is not healthy. It was very difficult as it changed the relationship I had with my students. I was unable to converse with them in the same way I had done previously. I prefer to be impartial so that my students see me as the supportive guide in their learning process rather than judge and jury*
- *I found it the most horrible experience of my teaching career. I am still feeling upset about some of the grades I awarded and feel sick to the stomach at the thought of ever having to do this again.*

Some teachers addressed the stress and pressure felt by their current students as a result of what happened in 2020 and at the prospect of calculated grades in the future:

- *In the current climate it is my observation that stress levels among students and teachers have risen in essence due to the possibility of another situation where calculated grades are required. My students this year have voiced their concerns about continuous assessment and the weight of expectation it places on them. Teacher and student anxieties at an all-time high due to the events of last May/June*
- *I believe it has added greatly to the pressure placed on 5th year students to whom I am assistant year head. Some will place an unsustainable amount of pressure on every class test they do for the next year or so increase this happens again and this is bound to lead to burnout.*

3. A mix of emotions (including annoyance, upset, and disappointment)

In places, it was difficult to categorise comments according to a single overarching theme. This was especially true of teachers' commentary on how the process made them feel. The comments in this section capture some of their emotions:

- *I felt that I was too honest when I was assigning marks to the students. A lot of time and effort went into the ranking and as a result some students that were awarded marks such as 82% or 71% were down-graded as a result. I am aware of teachers that significantly inflated their grades. The system was extremely flawed and I was annoyed with the outcome when the results came out*
- *While I felt confident and used my professional judgement to use and give calculated grades I still did not and do not feel comfortable about it and I don't think there was enough clarity at the outset about pupils being able to view the class rankings*
- *Extremely difficult task. I did not feel fit to grade the leaving cert. It was my first time teaching 6th years. Completely unqualified*
- *Broken hearted by how my students were treated. I estimated fair and accurate grades and marks for my students but they were hugely downgraded. Some were marked down by over 7%. My students would have scored much higher if they had sat the exam. Feel so let down by the process and I regret not over estimating their grades. Grades that my students were awarded by the sec were much, much, lower this year than others. Feel I have let my students down*
- *I found the fact that we could not advise students on what level to take very unfair. If I had them until June they would have realised that they needed to change level. I ended up having to fail 2/3 students which I still feel guilty over as they know I did that to them. I am concerned that this would happen in the future. We need to be able to advise on appropriate levels*
- *I felt extremely disappointed having given my all to the calculations process, only to find that the Department altered the grades in a terrible and skewed manner. I cannot understand why we as teachers were asked to participate in the process if the Department did not intend to respect our professionalism and expertise and intentionally disregarded same. I was disappointed for my students who did not receive the grade I had calculated for them (fairly and after many long hours carefully following the process as outlined by DES) as that was the grade they in truth deserved.*

4. A breach of trust (related to the release of rank order data in particular)

While some teachers acknowledged that the unprecedented circumstances necessitated the use of calculated grades, the decision to share class rankings was cited as a breach of trust by the DES with many respondents expressing deep disappointment and anger at the decision. At the time of writing,

the authors of this report were unable to identify documentation detailing what was agreed between the DES and the Teacher Unions with respect to the release of teacher generated student marks and ranks. The extent to which General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation made the release of such data inevitable should also be borne in mind when reading the following comments:

- *1) Overall it was very stressful suddenly becoming my students' judge, having been their teacher for so long. 2) During the process, we suspected that some schools would inflate their grades - suspicions that later turned out to be justified. It put us in a difficult position - do we disadvantage our students by being totally professional and giving the grades we truly think they would get, or do we inflate their grades so that they are on a level playing field with students from other schools? This would be even more of an issue if we were to go through this process again. 3) The government changed the agreement that the unions signed up to. i.e., that standardisation would take place based on historical school data etc.*
- *The publication of the estimated grades given by teachers, despite assurances that this would not happen, was a massive breach of trust and led to a huge spike in stress among staff in early September. Ireland is too small, and teachers too accessible to successfully protect teachers from unpleasant reactions from disappointed parents and students. If estimated grades were to be used again I believe this would have an extremely detrimental effect on the process. The role placed on school management was also extremely onerous, and the supports put in place for them were inadequate, to the point of insulting at times. In particular, the Department's practice of issuing new guidance last thing on a Friday evening, making it impossible for it to be acted on in a timely fashion. As a Manager I was extremely impressed at the integrity and concern shown by teachers at all stages of the process, and the degree of soul searching that went on in an effort to ensure that students received the fairest possible mark. However, I think the Department failed in their duty to protect teachers by fully informing parents of the process in a meaningful way, which meant that schools were inundated with phone calls following the release of the results asking for the school to appeal/ explain/ adjust results, something that was not in their power to do*
- *Teacher anxiety and mental health was disregarded in this process. We were abandoned by the Department and made false promises about the anonymity of our marks and rankings.*

There was reference also to damaged relationships within schools arising from inconsistencies in how marks were awarded in one case, and the erosion of the collective efforts over many years by staff in a DEIS school to encourage student engagement and participation, in another:

- *From working in a DEIS school, where pastoral care is absolutely of the utmost importance, I feel this process really negatively affected the 5 years of work that we as a staff had put into our students. In this school, we put so much time and effort into building relationships in order to keep our students in school and in trying to get them to believe in themselves, that to be then put into a situation where we were the ones being asked to make the decisions to 'chop' our students down at the end of 5 years of hard work, was completely unfair. I feel also in our DEIS schools, from looking at the data, we were more honest with our grades than other schools were. So the inequalities in Irish society were further magnified using this system. I feel this is not the system that should take the place of the current LC, we should not be put into this situation again. There is far more to teaching than walking into a classroom and covering a course, especially with schools being expected to deal with more of society's problems during the school day. Education is more than an exam, it is more than just a piece of paper with*

results, let's not devalue and potentially destroy all the other work that is done in schools and relationships that are created, by employing this system ever again

- *The damage the Department of Education by breaching their promise on rank order has totally destroyed anything like this in the future. I have become too familiar with the aftermath of carnage this process has left in schools where pupils of the staff members were being assessed by fellow staff members as teachers, SNAs, caretakers, and management personnel. Some perfectly sound relationships have been destroyed forever and some fraught staff relationships have worsened considerably some reverting to the law for justice or resolution. I am not just speaking of my own school but have many due to my union involvement. Some school managers behaved appallingly especially to pre CID teachers and vulnerable teachers.*

6. Fairness (with respect to bias, the work of colleagues, the application of DES guidelines, grade inflation, the national standardisation, grading one's own students)

The issue of fairness was an issue highlighted by a large number of those who responded to this question. In some instances, fairness was linked to efforts to remain unbiased, while in others it was implied in observations on how teaching colleagues approached the calculated grades process either individually or at alignment meetings. Many complained about guidelines not being followed and about grade inflation. Considerable attention was also focused on the impact of national standardisation on the grades awarded by teachers and the decision not to use school historical data.

As noted in discussion of the data presented in Table 8, 38% of respondents agreed that they found it difficult to maintain an unbiased position when marking/ranking their students. Commenting on the issue of bias, some respondents distinguished between conscious and unconscious bias arguing that it is not possible for teachers to be impartial when assessing their own students' work. A number of teachers highlighted efforts made within their own schools to minimise bias when estimating their students' marks/ranks, observing that they were proud of the processes they engaged in with colleagues to arrive at fair grades:

- *The aim to remove unconscious bias was extremely flawed. Regardless of awareness being brought to unconscious bias, it does not eliminate it in any way. By virtue of the fact that the bias is unconscious it cannot be brought to awareness. Furthermore, the idea that a video is enough to remove 6 years of knowledge of a student, their circumstances, their goals, is ludicrous. The bottom line is, the entire process was unfair and unreasonable. Greater efforts should have been made by the Department of Education, in the time from school closure until June, to come up with a better solution*
- *It is very difficult for teachers to not be biased, and more so, the worst teachers (will) take advantage of calculated grades to boost their image/status and hide their own inadequacies in teaching. The other major issue with 2019/20's calculated grades is that the Department of Education changed the goal posts after the event - we were told that our assigned calculated percentage grades would be moderated with respect to the schools past performance/achievements, but then they were not - in effect we were duped into giving*

calculated grades/percentages under false pretences (I believe that the DoE should have stuck to its original plan, and rightly applied some algorithmic moderation; the DoE reneged on its plan, unnecessarily, as students still had the option to sit the Leaving Cert if they so wished). Several teachers in my school, whether sensing the inevitable impossibility of moderating downwards or otherwise, assigned grades which were wishful thinking - during the alignment process/meetings this was evident, with teachers constantly (and unfortunately accurately) commenting/prefacing with (I feel ... / I think that Johnny will / etc., and bear in mind that, as in any profession, there is a tendency to think 'I am the best teacher in the world') - overall, more often than not the contrary approach to what was intended occurred. Unfortunately, 'calculated grades' were not 'calculated', or perhaps were 'loosely calculated', but rather were coloured by, and, too often and too much, based on feelings and wishful thinking, and the perhaps innate desire of teachers to do the best for their students. If calculated grades are to be continued, there needs to be a much more rigorous framework, and there must be external/independent power to moderate - with of course the impartial provision that any student may choose to sit the exam if they want to. The 2019/20's calculated grades advantaged the worst students and disadvantaged the best students (and likewise, advantaged the worst teachers and disadvantaged the best teachers), and overall many results were fabricated and grossly unfair

- *Calculating mean and median of house exam grades over the 2 years was 90% of students' final grade. This left no room for bias. Alignment meeting within Department didn't change grades. We were lucky as all science teachers knew students for the 2 years. Can see problems would arise where teachers didn't teach them for the 2 years as a principal could take advantage of this and increase grades to make school look good. Teachers should have all been told to calculate grades as we did. Fair playing ground for all.*

There were repeated references to the importance of moderation and alignment meetings in supporting teachers to make informed, unbiased decisions, albeit the process was described as stressful and very demanding. Again, comments here broadly reflect the quantitative findings (Table 9) in that some respondents found the alignment meetings stressful (35%) and/or difficult to voice concerns about how colleagues came to their grading decisions (23%) and/or would have welcomed guidance on how to resolve disagreements that arose during the calculated grades process (21%):

- *I feel it was an unfair process from the start. Despite my best attempts to ensure fairness for my students having used every result I had for them, which was proved to be utterly pointless when another teacher in my own department admitted to adding an extra 15% to all students grades across the board because that's how much he improved in his own exams after the mocks. It was a horrible position to be put in at the time, and it has damaged professional relationships as a result. The system devised by the DES was flawed and unfair from the start*
- *Yes, after submitting the grades I became very concerned when I learned through the grapevine how other students of my subject had been graded. In particular, those taking the subject outside of school where the experience of the teachers concerned is often limited and the oversight mechanism was different. Luckily for me, my class in my own school this year were not very academic and so they weren't impacted by what I felt could have led to very unfair competition for the highest grades during the alignment process. You can share this*

comment anonymously but please do not link it to my subject. Another big (and related) issue was how students who had dropped out of school or out of classes or subjects were graded. Even in normal years 6th year students stop attending school or classes due to health concerns and/or stress as well as general disengagement with education. Some of these students actually sit, some don't, some don't sit all subjects. There was little guidance provided on grading these students and I heard cases of schools and teachers treating similar situations completely differently (some giving students the benefit of the doubt, grades given out of sympathy, versus others sticking to a principle of giving no grade or a failing grade due to lack of evidence)

- *Given the situation that was, it was as fair as it could be. However, in a small town, the position that teachers are put in - directly giving grades, is compromising and uneasy. The Subject Department meetings were of great support and afforded transparency too - this stage of the process I felt was not highlighted enough in the media/by the DES. Thank you for this opportunity to reflect and be of some input.*

There was also reference also to internal difficulties between experienced and inexperienced teaching colleagues:

- *There were two colleagues that really didn't understand how the Leaving Certificate is marked. They are beginning teachers. They 'defended' their position rather than listening and learning from their more experienced colleagues. The rest of our department were very faithful to the process and their experience of LC results.*

Others questioned the fairness/accuracy of grades awarded by teachers whose students were getting grinds and the concern this raised for parents locally:

- *Some students - not in my school - need to have grinds in certain subjects and in this instance it would have been unfair if the class teacher was marking them, as they may not be a particularly good teacher (hence warranting the grind). In this case, had the student been able to complete the course with a grind teacher, they probably would have secured a higher mark than that which their subject teacher assigned. This observation is made from personal circumstances and has nothing to do whatsoever with my school but comes from concerns from parents in other communities.*

In a number of very detailed statements, teachers raised concerns about bias arising from inappropriate processes/practices employed by their teaching colleagues in the calculation of marks/ranks that resulted in grade inflation. These findings tally with those previously reported (Table 9) that opinion was divided as to whether marks and ranks did (38%) or didn't (45%) differ among teachers in their own schools:

- *My experience of the process was extremely negative. There were grotesque levels of grade inflation in my Department which was not then sufficiently moderated by the Department of Education. This led to an appalling experience for the more professional members of the Department who followed the Departmental criteria strictly. We were aware our students'*

*fairer grades would suffer due to the inflation elsewhere in the school but could not in good conscience mark our students up in anticipation of this process as it would undermine the entire assessment process nationally. There were unconscionable interventions on behalf of school management to juice the numbers too - teachers were asked to 'find grades' that could be moved up. Nothing was moved down *sigh**

- *I feel our school were very honest and diligent about assessing our students and our grades fitted in perfectly with the bell curves for the past three years. However, we feel hard done by after hearing that a lot of other schools gave higher grades to their students than their schools would ordinarily receive and our students have been negatively impacted by this dishonesty. Formal, anonymous marking as in the traditional Leaving Certificate is a much fairer approach for all students.*

Despite the fact that 87% of teachers expressed confidence in the professional judgements they exercised during the calculated grades process, the downgrading of results arising from the national standardisation process and the fact that school historical data were not used evoked very strong reaction from teachers who described the process of estimating grades as *a waste of time*:

- *The whole process was a waste of time as SEC changed results, in essence the message the public received once the grades came out was that teachers lie and are not professional. I took the assessment and ranking very seriously, in fact I was unable to sleep worried that I was being too harsh. As a subject team we applied the SEC percentages of years passed, to ensure there would be no red flags. Our assigned grades were within the bands assigned by SEC in our subject in all previous years. The final grades were a real kick in the teeth to us as professionals. It has further worsened the image the general public have of teachers: wasters and liars. I feel very disheartened*
- *This process worked for students in the middle of the bell curve. Those on either of the extremes, low or high ability, were hugely disadvantaged by the standardising of their grades*
- *I am very annoyed that my students' results were based on a national average rather than a school average. We normally get results three times higher than the national average but this year many were downgraded! I am angry that such an injustice was done to the class of 2020 who had worked so hard! I live in the town that I teach in and find it very difficult now to look my students in the eye as I feel they deserved better grades. I am relieved that at least they know I gave them a fair grade! It was so difficult to predict grades and I just hope I will not be in this position again!*
- *Ultimately, I do not think the process was fair due to the absence of school profiling. I appreciate this is not the main focus of this research but the fact that there was a decision to remove profiling meant that students whose teachers inflated their grades did better than mine, due to my honesty. If this occurred again, I would have to think for a long time about whether or not to inflate the grades of my own students to ensure parity with their peers across the country. Plus, the lack of profiling meant the results for 2020 massively disadvantages the class of 2021 as students with points from 2020 know they have more points than a counterpart who is going to sit the exam this year. This will undoubtedly affect the entries to University for this year's group.*

Reflecting on the downgrading of the marks/grades they had awarded their students, a number of respondents signalled that they regretting the grades/ranks they awarded and would intentionally inflate their students' results in the future, should the situation arise again. In another case, a respondent referred to the *social engineering* engaged in by the Government to improve the grades of disadvantaged students as something that would encourage his/her departure from the teaching profession:

- *I gave a very fair and honest judgement of what my students would have achieved if they had sat the LC and my students were downgraded because other teachers inflated their grades. If this happens again I would have to inflate my grades too so as not to drive disadvantage my students!*
- *If I were to calculate grades again I would award higher grades to all my students as █% were downgraded. I made sure I had similar number of H1s and H2s to previous years (as mentioned in guidelines) but many were downgraded and as a result of national standardisation the average number of H1s and H2s was lower than in previous 5 years. I am annoyed that I didn't inflate the grades as obviously other teachers in the country were doing this. I feel my students were unfairly disadvantaged and I feel very disappointed for them*
- *The leaving cert students of 2020 were sold badly short by this process. It's a disgrace that it happened, and it's a disgrace that the government at the time didn't have the backbone to stand up to a social media campaign from students, for the good of the students. The students are either children, or barely adults. They do not know what's best for them, when it comes to their exams. They do not know how the process works (but then again, neither do many teachers). The exams should have gone ahead, and many, many students were cheated out of the grades they deserved, both because the process was inherently flawed anyway, and also because the government engaged in social engineering to improve the grades of disadvantaged students (which included my own students) beyond what they would actually earn in a real exam, rather than treat everyone fairly. I was thinking of leaving teaching anyway, but this is only encouraging me to do so, and if we're going to continue like this, we might as well abolish exams altogether, and assessment of any kind, for that matter.*

These final three comments encapsulate a range of issues that the writers argue led to an unfair system – one even describing the CG process as posing ethical challenges:

- *I found it the most ethically challenging task I have ever had to do. Some students lost out based on this method who would have performed much better in a once off exam as they had excellent exam technique. I found it impossible to apply all the criteria suggested by DES. If I took notional factors into consideration, I would be favouring one student over another so I based my ranking on 4 sets of term tests over 2 years and their performance in their LC █ project. Best of luck with survey; it's so important that you are doing this for future direction. Well done*
- *We were provided with statistics relating to how students in our school fared in the past 4 years. We were also provided with the % grade increases between Mocks and LC. This was to highlight how much our students improved in the final 3 months before the LC. We were asked to keep this strongly in our minds when providing grades. In my case students on average improved by 10-30%. This was very difficult to apply to my students and caused me a lot of*

stress. We were also reminded that students would not know the grades we gave. In my case I am glad that I gave students the benefit of the doubt when I did. I believe the Department of Education let me down in allowing my results to be seen. I believe that it was unfair of the Department to change the rules during the process and not allow for past school results. I believe that it was unfair to ask teachers to grade students on work that they had not done/based on what they would have done. I believe it was unfair that we were not paid for this extra work. I believe that the training was inadequate. I believe that students could have been awarded places in college based on their CAO applications and that teachers could have awarded the LC grades but that this would not have been used for college places in Ireland

- I approached the process very analytically. There were two main reasons for this. I had upwards of 25 data points for each candidate which allowed me complete a full statistical analysis of each student and how they performed against their classmates over their time at senior cycle... (part of the comment is omitted to protect the identity of the writer). I wanted to ensure when I presented my data for alignment that there was complete transparency in relation to the data I used to determine the final estimated grade. I found that calculating an average rank for each of my students was extremely helpful in determining the final marks I estimated. I consulted with other [REDACTED] teachers in my school to discuss their approaches to the process. I found that the methods employed to arrive at an estimated mark varied greatly. I found this very unsettling. While some teachers were as analytical as I was, albeit using different methods, others simply estimated a mark using their professional judgement without any rigorous statistical analysis of their students' performance. As a result of the calculated grades process I had a discussion with my current leaving certificate classes when we returned to school in September. I usually employ a system of academic tracking for my students where they plot their scores in assessments undertaken. They also reflect on areas where improvements should be made along with acknowledging their strengths in particular areas (this put me at ease when estimating marks for last year's cohort as they had a documented pattern of attainment in my subject). My current Leaving Certificate students have now asked for their ranking in each assessment carried out which I found interesting. However, I am not seeing an increase in achievement in-line with this. In other words, they are not treating current assessments as a potential decider in their final mark in this subject. I understand this survey relates specifically to the process involved in generating estimated grades for LC2020. However, I would like to voice the anger and frustration felt when a school's previous performance in a subject was removed from the design of the algorithm used to generate the final calculated grade. While this did not have a huge impact on the results obtained by my class group, reference to previous year's performance in a subject was a cornerstone of the process used to generate the estimated mark (to protect the identity of the writer).... While it seems that the majority of candidates are content with the outcome of this system, removal of the school's attainment as a predictor of attainment of this year's cohort was unsatisfactory.*

7. Future involvement in Calculated Grades

As a consequence of what many perceived to be a lack of fairness in 2020, some respondents vociferous that they would not participate in a system of calculated grades again:

- I was hugely disappointed that at a later date the DES decided to remove the school standardization as I had used that to calculate grades (which we were instructed to do). My subject Ag Science usually scores way above national standard (Vast majority of students from*

a farming background) which meant that 50-60% of my students were actually brought down a grade when a national standardization was applied. Very disappointing process overall and one I would NEVER involve myself in again

- *I never want to go through the process of predicted grades again. Despite being told time and time again by the DES that our professional judgement as teachers would be trusted and respected one third of my 26 Leaving Cert students were marked down a grade. I felt totally demotivated and low the day the predicted grades came out, and contemplated what other careers I could do instead of teaching! I did not inflate my students' grades in any way but after seeing the predicted results for my students for 2020 I feel I should have!*
- *The process was deemed essential, in a crisis. Teachers were mandated to calculate grades. Calculated grades was and is the least favoured option of assessment from teachers' perspective*
- *Undervalued, opinion of no/little importance, stressed, lied to, let down.... among a few words to describe how the DES and SEC valued my opinion/treated my professional opinion If asked again next year, I am strongly inclined to refuse or give everyone a H1 as profession and experienced opinion obviously didn't matter in the end and let the DES decide. In a nutshell, a disaster from start to finish.*

In contrast with the overwhelmingly negative comments reported thus far, a number of respondents expressed more nuanced and/or positive views about elements of the process and how it might be improved:

- *The initial feedback from teachers in my school after going through the calculated grades process was very positive, however, this was subsequently undermined by three things: 1) the DES made the school based marks and ranking available to students via the portal. We had initially been told that this would only be available if they put in a data request application, now all students had access to it via the portal. There was no issue with the mark but teachers felt that the ranking should not have been so easily released as it revealed subjective judgements about students in comparison to other students in the class. 2) The problems with the algorithms. 3) The fact that some excellent students who fully deserved the marks assigned by their teachers were marked down because they did not fit the bell curve. Teachers used their best professional judgement to assign a mark they genuinely believed a student deserved but then this was marked down, not due to any information about the individual students or their proficiency in that subject, but for statistical standardisation*
- *I was happy to do this under the circumstances we found ourselves in. I found it very difficult and stressful to rank my students. The alignment process gave me more confidence and reassurance in the grades I had set and rankings. My colleagues support and advice were invaluable. I would not be happy to go through this process again in the future were teachers' predictions were worth 100% of the grade*
- *In a traditionally high achieving academic school, the process of awarding grades was relatively easy and reflective of what they likely WOULD have got in the LC exams. What most of them ACTUALLY got was BELOW what they would have achieved, and hence this particular system failed our/my cohort of students. I personally enjoyed the process and commend all*

parties involved in their efforts in attempting to come up with a system that was never going to please everyone

- *Each of my students received the mark that I allocated to them and I was happy with the process*
- *I assessed my class perfectly according to the ranking within the class. I gave everyone about 5 to 10% more than I thought they would get in the belief that standardisation would bring them down. To my surprise the marks were unchanged and the students delighted.*

8. Leaving Certificate reform

Looking to the future of assessment in senior cycle, opinion was divided. A number of respondents were adamantly opposed to any changes to the traditional LC on the basis that, in their view, it offers an objective assessment of student learning:

- *The traditional LC is a rigorous and unbiased system that is the envy of the world. Continuous assessment and/or teachers grading students for official certification must be resisted at all costs. CGs fiasco undermined teacher professionalism to an embarrassing degree. I never want to be forced to take part in a process like that ever again. I'm deeply angry about the CGs fiasco*
- *I believe the system as it is, that is the Leaving Certificate Examination, is the fairest way for students to achieve the grades they want. It's the most uncorrupt system and gives each student an equal chance in the exam. It's the resources that can be accessed before the leaving cert is the part that makes it unequal. For example, access to grinds or extra tuition, access to Studyclix or similar websites*
- *The link between College entry and the Leaving Certificate should be cut completely*
- *We are advocates for our students and should never have to judge them. The State Examinations Commission provide an excellent exam system. They are independent and fair. No system is perfect but the current Leaving Certificate is the best possible system; this year's calculated grades system highlighted this for me.*

Others expressed more equivocal views suggesting that the LC might be spread out over a 2-year period, possibly supplemented by some form of continuous assessment to offset the challenges that a high-stakes, summative, assessment such as the LC presents. However, concerns about bias were again foregrounded in the context of *the highly competitive nature of the Irish education system* as was the stress that CA places on students and the need for transparency and consistency in DES messaging if reform is to be introduced:

- *There was and will ever be only one fair way of assessment, that being full external, neutral assessment for state certification purposes. There is a strong argument for ongoing assessment as part of the overall final result but ALL pieces of such material need to be externally assessed as part of the final calculation of grade*

- *I agree with continuous assessment of my students and that this would motivate most and increase attendance for some but the correction of the work must be external not by the teachers themselves in the schools. This will maintain the integrity of the certification. I would like to see the exams in three stages over the leaving cert to incorporate project work in all subjects*
- *I have no problem with being involved in the assessment of my students. I believe that the grades I provide throughout are accurate. However, the exam practise that takes place in the months approaching tends to gain students an extra 5%+ on what their average is, in my experience. The standard the student is operating at the end of the two years is much higher than where they began. The skills they have developed are significant and an average may not recognise that. I would think that in terms of continuous assessment some form of coursework would be best but that it might be that this work would not be done or submitted until 6th Yr. Or final drafts, at least. I see problems with continuous assessment but I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, most likely. Especially in my subject [REDACTED], where a time-pressured exam makes a mockery of the writing and editing skills we are supposed to emphasise*
- *More projects for LC. Not fair having all riding in the outcome of one exam testing two year's study.*

Comment was also made on the extended pressure that would be felt by teachers in the event that continuous assessment becomes a more dominant feature at senior cycle:

- *If you are involved in the CBA or SLAR process, you know that there will be an entire overhaul to the system before teachers will be giving grades as parts of continuous assessment. The current educational climate is unwilling to let any student fail so all the teachers are helping them to complete all in class material whether it is projects, or assessment tasks. I am not helping more than is outlined but I have corrected 30 scripts in a row that all have the same cut and paste. And I am aware this is due on the majority to parent pressure. Until that is removed from the equation then students will be awarded the highest marks by teachers. Even like a pen-pal system. Teachers swap with another local school, no idea who is correcting yours and who you are correcting. With a very strict marking scheme so you don't have discrepancies*
- *Leaving cert exam is fair and objective, there is huge pressure on teachers to award grades particularly if they know the students. This year wasn't a fair model, if teachers were assessing their own students they would have a paper trail and students and parents would have a realistic idea of what to expect and how the grade was arrived at. Also as calculated grades co-ordinator, it was difficult to enter a grade that you knew has serious repercussions for a student e.g., a student getting 500 points and failing Ordinary level Irish therefore unable to take up a lot of University courses. Parents and student did challenge me and the Principal on how I could let this happen and were not happy that I just had an administrative role in submitting the grades.*

Specific concern was raised about the quality and usability of formative assessment data to inform the awarding of marks/ranks in modern and foreign language (MFL) teaching in particular. The potential for a washback effect, including student overload and fatigue, arising from ongoing CBA used to inform calculated grades, was also highlighted. Attention was drawn too to the plight of students facing the LC in 2022:

- *I found the whole process extremely stressful. In previous subject inspections we were told to provide formative feedback in the form of comments and recommendations for specific areas for improvement for each student. These comments were not recorded and a simple word in the teachers' journal (excellent, good etc.) was the only record for many pieces of written work. This caused a difficulty in language subjects where it is not appropriate to grade every task with a percentage. In some cases, students had scored highly in easier exam questions set in class or for homework and had not submitted the harder written pieces. This led to some difficulty in trying to calculate where those students really were in terms of their learning. Another difficulty was that the process did not allow for the tremendous improvement made in LC MFL once students have finished their oral. Written work tends to improve greatly after the intense preparation for the oral and some students can really improve their grade in those final 8 weeks or so of term. This was very hard to calculate and I felt I had to really rely on past experience to calculate the trajectory that some students were on. If a student had a teacher who was new to teaching then they may have been unfairly disadvantaged due to that teacher's lack of experience, where the teacher had to rely solely on recorded grades. The knock on effect for this year's 6th years and my concern about the LC reform, is that it makes every single task seem like a 'high stakes' task. Students may resort to using translation apps to ensure written work is perfect, to attain a short term high mark that will go on their record. However, this hinders true learning as students do not learn from their mistakes or learn the craft of putting a sentence together correctly when they are using translation services. If LC reform in MFL is to take place, there must be consultation with MFL teachers as it is not the same as gathering data in other subjects. Learning a language is a gradual process and students cannot be assessed using the same criteria at the start of 5th year and the end of 6th year. As a teacher and a parent of a LC 2021 student, I would be very concerned that the role of the teacher moves from advocate and cheerleader to judge, jury and executioner in LC reform. There must be investment from the SEC to carry out independent assessment if we are to move to a continuous assessment system*
- *I think there ought to be an acknowledgement of the stress and tension currently being experienced by the students of 2021 who feel as if they are too facing uncharted territory. In terms of student voice, in our school we are hearing reports of many students facing more stress, pressure and anxiety as their teachers may be over assessing "just in case the same thing happens again".*

A minority indicated that they favoured more radical reform including more extensive use of a calculated grading system and greater flexibility in the assessment process for state certification particularly for vulnerable groups (e.g., students suffering a bereavement), albeit DES motives for seeking reform were questioned (as were the motives behind the survey question):

- *I found the whole process very interesting. If this was rolled out across the country going forward, it would promote student motivation*
- *I think it would benefit students enormously to have greater flexibility in the assessment process for state certification. In one sense our school does very well in that we have continuous assessment throughout 5th and 6th year. On the other hand, there are some very informal practices in regard to SLAR meetings in the subject I teach... (part of the comment is omitted to protect the identity of the writer). I attended a SLAR meeting in another school I worked in and it was an extremely positive experience, because everybody was well prepared and we discussed examples of work in detail. It was probably the best example of collaboration*

that I have experienced teaching in an Irish post-primary school. (I also taught in Scotland, where collaboration among subject teachers is embedded in the school structure, including in a timetabled weekly meeting of all same subject teachers.) I'd love to see teachers assessing pupils' work for certification, but unfortunately it failed to be acceptable for Junior Cycle. Pity teachers' unions are so resistant.

Epilogue

The decision by the Minister for Education and Skills in May 2020 to cancel the 2020 Leaving Certificate (LC) examination and replace it with a system of Calculated Grades was a momentous one in the history of post-primary education in Ireland. For the first time in the almost 100-year history of the LC, teachers were obligated to directly assess their own students for certification purposes. The survey that informed this report set out to capture the experiences and voice of this cohort of teachers, specifically in relation to their experiences of estimating subject marks and class ranks, initially independently and, subsequently, collaboratively, in the context of school-based moderation meetings. Owing to the volume and richness of the teachers' responses to an invitation to comment on these experiences, this report also provides detailed, unfettered, insight into teachers' perceptions of what transpired following the submission of their school data to the DES for standardisation. In forthcoming research papers, the totality of the survey data is mined to support more detailed, in-depth analyses and interpretation of the preliminary findings presented here. Of particular import is an exploration of how the CG process impacted teachers' feelings and beliefs about the role they play as assessors. At this point in time, in light of the decision to offer students the choice of taking Calculated Grades in 2021 (now called Accredited Grades), this report provides much food for thought and opportunity for reflection.

References

- Department of Education and Skills. (2020). *Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate 2020: Guide for Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks and Class Rank Orderings*. Dublin: DES. Accessed January 7, 2021. https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0037_2020.pdf
- Department of Education and Skills. (2020). *Statistical Bulletin – July 2020. Overview of Education 1999 – 2019*. Accessed January 20, 2021. <https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Statistical-Reports/statistical-bulletin-2020-overview-of-education-1999-2019.pdf> .
- Doyle, A., Lysaght, Z., & O'Leary, M. (2021, in press). High stakes assessment policy implementation in the time of COVID-19: The case of calculated grades in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, 40.

Appendix 1

The Questionnaire Instrument



Leaving Certificate 2020 Calculated Grades: Teachers' Experiences and Reflections 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 has brought a lot of changes and challenges not least for schools and teachers. The decision to cancel the traditional Leaving Certificate Examination and replace it with a Calculated Grades process was an historic and unprecedented event in Irish education that had very significant implications for you and your students. As educational researchers with a particular interest in assessment, we are keen to capture your reflections on estimating marks/ranks for your students while these experiences are still fresh in your mind. We are also interested in your reflections on the role you play in assessment.

In the documentation sent to schools, the DES made it clear that a Calculated Grade should result from the combination of two data sets:

1. A school-based estimation of an overall percentage mark and ranking 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 marks/ranks) in your school rather than on what happened during the subsequent standardisation or appeals stage.

The questionnaire is in four parts and will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete.

Part 1 asks questions about you, your school and the subject(s) for which you estimated marks and ranks for the Leaving Certificate Established 2020.

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

Part 3 focuses on your experiences of, and reflections on, the alignment meetings 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. We are interested in knowing, for example, if there has been any change in the way in which you view assessment and how you might approach assessment in the future.

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/lc2020calculated-grades_plain-language-statement.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. If you have data related concerns you should contact Mr. Martin Ward (DCU Data Protection Officer) at data.protection@dcu.ie

Please note that information on how to access findings from the survey will be available at <https://www.dcu.ie/carpe> during the Spring of 2021.

PLEASE COMPLETE AND RETURN BY 18/12/2020

Le gach dea-ghuí,
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

SECTION 1: BIOGRAPHICAL AND SCHOOL INFORMATION

About You

Q1a. Please indicate your gender

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ 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 (omitting any LC Applied classes) prior to 2020

☐ None

☐ 1

☐ 2-5

☐ 6-10

☐ 11+

Q1d. Please specify your current role(s) 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

☐ Calculated Grades Coordinator

☐ Other

About Your School

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

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Mixed

Q2b. Please indicate your school status

DEIS ▼

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

☐ Gaelge

☐ Other

Your Involvement in LC2020 (Established)

Q3a. Please identify all the **LC Established Subject(s)** for which you submitted estimated marks/ranks in 2020.
Select all that apply.

☐ Accounting

☐ Agricultural Science

☐ Ancient Greek

☐ Applied Maths

☐ Arabic

☐ Art

☐ Biology

☐ Business

☐ Chemistry

☐ Classical Studies

☐ Computer Studies

☐ Construction Studies

☐ Design and Communication Graphics

☐ Economics

☐ English

☐ Engineering

☐ French

☐ Gaeilge

☐ German

☐ Geography

☐ Hebrew Studies

☐ History

☐ Home Economics

☐ Italian

☐ Japanese

☐ Latin

☐ LCVP Link Modules

☐ Mathematics

☐ Music

☐ Other Language

☐ Physical Education

☐ Physics

☐ Physics and Chemistry

☐ Politics and Society

☐ Religious Education

☐ Russian

☐ Spanish

☐ 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.

Please choose...



Q3c. In respect of your chosen subject, please choose one level at which you taught the subject in the last academic year. 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 the number of students for whom you submitted estimated marks/ranks in your subject of choice

☐ 1-5

☐ 6-10

☐ 11-20

☐ 21-30

☐ 31-40

☐ 41-50

☐ 50+

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

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5+

SECTION 2: YOUR REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS OF CALCULATING MARKS AND RANKS - 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

Q4. When estimating your students' marks/ranks for the LC Established subject/level you listed in Q3b/c, how important were each of the following?

Please respond to each row

	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 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	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5th Year - engagement with learning outside of class (e.g. homework, clubs, societies etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year exams prior to lockdown (Christmas, monthly etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year continuous assessments prior to lockdown (exclude Leaving Cert course work components here – these are listed below - but include short tests, assignments, projects, experiments etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year in-class formative assessments prior to lockdown (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 prior to lockdown	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6th Year - engagement with learning outside of class prior to lockdown	<input type="radio"/>	<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 had taught in previous LC classes had performed in the LC	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your knowledge of how students in other LC classes in the school had performed in previous LCs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Your experience of marking for the State Examinations Commission (SEC)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other? Please specify

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 meetings 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"/>
Estimating a rank order 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 rank order 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 DES 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 applied the DES guidelines strictly when estimating the student rank	<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 in **my school** would mark leniently ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

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 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

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 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Q6. Focusing on the particular subject you have chosen, please estimate the total amount of time you spent, per individual class, on activities related to the process of estimating marks/ranks

	N/A	About ½ hour	About 1 hour	About 2 hours	About 3 hours	4 hours or more
Collating assessment data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deciding on class rankings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deciding on marks/ percentages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading or consulting DES guidance/documents/video	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reviewing assessment data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending calculated grades alignment meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consulting with the Principal or Deputy Principal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements pertaining to the process of estimating marks and ranks for your students **PRIOR to the alignment meetings**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided/ Not Applicable
The <i>Guide for Schools on Providing Estimated Percentage Marks and Class Rank Orderings</i> was helpful to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the DES instructional video on the process of arriving at an estimated mark and class rank order for each student useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the DES instructional video providing supplementary guidance on the avoidance of unconscious bias and interpreting the evidence of achievement in the case of students with disabilities useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When estimating a mark/rank, I found it difficult to reconcile inconsistencies (peaks and troughs) in my students' performance in the period leading up to the lockdown	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it easy to combine qualitative (e.g. classroom observations) and quantitative (e.g. exam marks) assessment data when marking/ranking my students	<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/ranking my students	<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	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt good about the marking and ranking decisions I made	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt guilty about the marking and ranking decisions I made	<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 ranked them	<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	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I felt stressed during the process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thank you for completing Section 2 of this Questionnaire

SECTION 3: YOUR EXPERIENCES OF, AND REFLECTIONS ON, THE ALIGNMENT MEETINGS IN WHICH YOU PARTICIPATED WITH YOUR SCHOOL COLLEAGUES

Q8. Please specify the number of alignment meetings you attended in your school?

☐ One

☐ Two

☐ Three+

Q9. Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements pertaining to the alignment meetings

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

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided
The DES guidance around the alignment process was helpful to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it easy to work with my colleagues during the alignment meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I awarded a higher mark than I felt students would have achieved in the LC following discussions with colleagues during alignment meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I awarded a lower mark than I felt students would have achieved in the LC following discussions with colleagues during alignment meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My students would have received a higher mark than I gave if they had been in a colleague's class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The way in which marks and class ranks were estimated differed among teachers in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the alignment meetings stressful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it easy to justify my marks and/or class ranks to colleagues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found it hard to voice my concerns about how colleagues arrived at their marks and/or class ranks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I needed more guidance on how to resolve disagreements during alignment meetings

☐☐☐☐☐

Overall the alignment process worked well

☐☐☐☐☐

I would have preferred a different process for aligning grades

☐☐☐☐☐

Thank you for completing Section 3 of this Questionnaire. One more section to go!

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

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

As a result of having been involved in the calculated grades process in my school:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Undecided
I feel less 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 less 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"/>

Q11. 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 calculated grades process in 2020 led to fairer outcomes for the students in my class than if they had taken the LC exam in June 2020	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that students in my class were disadvantaged in terms of the grades they got by not being able to sit the LC exam in June 2020	<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 in my school (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 in my school to engage more actively in learning from the beginning of 6th year

☐☐☐☐☐

I believe that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification purposes would improve student attendance in my school

☐☐☐☐☐

I believe that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification purposes would undermine student/teacher relationships in my school

☐☐☐☐☐

Q12. In this questionnaire we asked you to focus on your experiences with assessment during the process of estimating marks and ranks for your students in your school. If there is any additional comment you would like to make, please use the space provided below.

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

And please remember to check the CARPE website during the Spring of 2021 for information on the outcomes of the survey. <https://www.dcu.ie/carpe>

Appendix 2

A Record of All Comments Received in Response to the Survey's Final (Open-Ended) Question

©You may not share and/or adapt the material in Appendix 2

In the final question of the survey (see Appendix 1, Question 12), participants were invited to comment freely on their experiences during the process of estimating marks/ranks for the students in their schools. Approximately one in three of the 731 respondents added commentary, varying in length from a single sentence to multiple paragraphs. An analysis of background data for this sub-set of teachers (n=251) 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 to those who did not respond to Question 12.

Engagement in iterative cycles of open coding of these qualitative data led to the identification of a rich multi-dimensional framework of seven themes as listed:

1. Pressure (from the community, school management, politicians, the media)
2. Stress (caused by the process and consequences of having to mark and rank their own students)
3. A mix of emotions (including annoyance, upset, and disappointment)
4. A breach of trust (related to the release of rank order data in particular)
5. Fairness (with respect to bias, the work of colleagues, the application of DES guidelines, grade inflation, the national standardisation, grading one's own students)
6. Future involvement in Calculated Grades
7. Leaving Certificate reform.

Given the volume of responses, subheadings within the themes are used as an aid to the reader. In an effort to preserve the authenticity and voice of each respondent, the comments are reproduced here exactly as received with minimal interpretation. In a small number of cases, parts of comments are omitted or text redacted to protect the identity of the writer.

1. Pressure (from the community, school management, politicians, the media)

An overarching theme arising from the qualitative data is that, because Ireland is a small country, a system of calculated grades creates unnecessary stress and pressure, particularly in rural and small towns where teachers live and teach locally:

- *In a small town community, I felt pressure when meeting parents out town shopping etc. as some tried to broach the subject of assessment with me some parents have not spoken to me since as they feel I gave a harsh grade and did not reward their child fairly. This is unpleasant to deal with; the government made fools of us by not sticking to the guidelines that they*

published we were told in May that class ranking would not be made available to students and it was very unfair (to change this) and would make me very suspicious of any other attempts at calculated grades

- *I believe that while it would be ok for more teacher involvement in urban centres, the nature of rural and small town Ireland made the entire process very uncomfortable and I am sure that teachers will feel the rippling exponential impact of this for some time*
- *I feel Ireland is too parochial for this to work going forward. This year was okay due to exceptional circumstances, but I have in the past taught family members and neighbours, several of my colleagues were harassed in the community during the calculated grades process. I also believe the way the parameters kept changing (by both ministers) and leaving everything until the last minute (at which point they flooded us with information, much of it repetitive or useless) made the process more stressful and less fair on the students*
- *I would like to say how much I disagreed with the whole progress of calculated grades - it put all teachers in a position that they never wanted or expected to be in. None of us were treated fairly in the process really. I teach in a small rural school and it was difficult on both my colleagues and I as many of us live locally - it put people in very awkward positions, teachers were avoiding going to the shop etc. in case they would meet leaving certificate students or parents and they may be perceived in the wrong way etc. I had a lovely group of students who I got on with extremely well and I hated the way my relationship changed with them overnight - I felt very cold not replying to their messages of thanks and goodbye. Lockdown/Covid was a very stressful time for all teachers but calculated grades put more stress on teachers - essentially we were asked to write down grades that could affect our students' whole futures. This was a huge responsibility that was put on teachers. How with a large degree of accuracy could any teacher predict what a candidate would actually get on a given day??? I felt that while some guidance was given more guidance should have been teachers. Also the DES should have been upfront and honest with what information could be released to candidates after the progress - I was under the understanding that students wouldn't know the mark I gave or their ranking. Many teachers were really hurt and betrayed by this still. In terms of mental health of candidates - what benefit is it for a candidate to know that they were ranking bottom in their class especially if they didn't even go do the road of appeals? Also what I myself was happy with the way I applied the guidelines and feel that I gave all students a fair grade - I was an unbiased as I could be; I question how fair other teachers were - how inflated were grades? Were my students penalised because of my fairness and honesty? I was the calculated grade examination aide in my schools and my grades that were submitted my colleagues seemed to be inflated. In my opinion the whole thing could have been avoided and the leaving certificate could have run with more examination centres as the Junior Certificate had been scrapped. We have candidates who are currently sitting their written examinations currently so even with calculated grades the saga of Leaving Certificate 2020 is not over them.*

A number of comments pointed to pressure exerted internally in schools, e.g., pressure principals exerted on teachers and *subtle interference on behalf of management* with one respondent opining that in his/her school integrity was compromised while others pointed to conflicts of interest:

- *The integrity of school management and teachers was put to the test in the calculated grades process. In my school management failed the test together with a few teachers*

- As a one teacher department the most stressful aspect of the whole process was dealing with school management. At times my professional opinion was undermined as there was profound misalignment in terms of expectations and a lack of subject knowledge and understanding
- The process in our school was compromised because the Principal included an "extra" one-to-one alignment meeting, not part of the official guidelines, with each teacher, AFTER the alignment meetings, to check the grades they had given each student. This could be seen as Principal putting pressure on teachers to change grades up or down... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer)
- You did not ask specifically about the involvement and pressure principals exerted on teachers. Our principal encouraged us to not be afraid to give higher grades as "we are competing with other schools for numbers" and don't want to hear down town that "we are not looking after our students"
- In my school I felt there was subtle interference on behalf of management not to be over generous with marks as they felt that the whole school would somehow be punished for being over generous. This had an impact on the marks given to students. I felt my initial grades were eroded by colleagues who had been influenced indirectly by management. I was not directly communicated with but more 'suggestible' colleagues were. Colleagues wished to give the same % of grades given in other years. I felt that no student should have been judged by the work ethic (or lack thereof) of other students, that it was somehow immoral. It was not an easy process made more difficult by not being face to face
- The online classes seem to affect student's engagement and thus affect the process. In my school there was great team work and open communication whereas in other departments they did not cooperate as well. Also another factor in this process was which affects the integrity of the process is when students' results were downgraded by the Department
- In a one-person department I don't think the DP should have been involved in the alignment process; they effectively had two roles and compromised their position. I would have been at a loss if I had not been in other alignment meetings and had a release for my anxiety and was able to openly discuss rankings and grading process there and effectively clarified my own rankings in my own subject area
- It was a very stressful experience, even though I was dealing with very small numbers... (part of the comment omitted) ...and I am the only person in my school teaching any of them. As the higher level **maths** teacher, I found the **no ns** alignment meeting extremely stressful, as the ordinary level teacher (one person) had clearly not followed the department video or instructions (e.g., had 2 students on exactly the same mark - no decimal, and only 22 in class, so lots of values available to spread them, even without decimals answers also did not have a rank order prepared for the meeting). I ensured the Deputy Principal was also present, as I was afraid of what would happen if I disagreed with the other teacher and it became a two-person difference of opinion. I also felt, having graded 3 subjects for my own groups, that I also had to have a lot of input for the ordinary level group- (and I am not the head of the department either). Being brutally honest, I also resented the fact that I was online teaching from March and then had the Predicted Grades for leaving certs, while other staff members had very little online teaching and NO predicted grades (and some of them never have exam classes in any school year, even though they are qualified to teach exam subjects)
- Principal teacher bias in my experience of receiving direct phone calls from parents and communication through the school, who then asked teachers to change grades of specific students upwards was common, some instances even after the subject alignment meeting had been concluded. The principal did not ask for another subject alignment meeting, just for

specific student grades as they would not sign off on the oversight process, even though the initial deadline had passed. Principals only used quantitative data of grades and percentages to mark students, if they saw inconsistencies in the quantitative data compared to pre exam results. The principal challenged the teacher to move students up a grade, never down. They engaged with teachers singly and not through the proper channels of attending the subject alignment meeting with the subject teachers. This student was subsequently downgraded by the standardisation process to the original grade the teacher was to give prior to being asked to move the student up a grade. This experience enforced the teachers' original professional judgement as a qualified subject teacher. There was a fear of professional parents and parents involved in law and management regularly referenced the threat of legal action, regardless of the state indemnity for the Chief Solicitor's office reinforced by the teacher unions. This brought bias from management into the professional opinion of teachers in my subject area when we had concluded our subject alignment process. Also when the predicted grades were given, showing each subject teacher the grades and names of students not in their class, the school awarded grades, was damaging to teacher collegial relationships. All teachers were not invited to see this data of the final grades, only some, who are friends of the leadership and management team mostly

- The whole process was a nightmare, from the mishandling of the dates for the exams, to cancelling them outright The way we were promised that our students would not see our grades and then they were published was a total betrayal of every professional in the education system in this country. Principals and deputy principals put undue and unnecessary pressure on teachers to bring up grades and "Pass" everyone, even when there was lots of data to the contrary. The algorithm is a complete mystery and I teach HL maths, how could a student at 32% be up graded to a pass? Never again would I willingly take part in this process. The DES are a disgrace!

It is evident from the commentary that some respondents thought the process of calculating grades had been undermined in the Irish context by what they described as political pressure/interference and inappropriate coverage by the media:

- The media and public perception (as a consequence of media engagement) is the greatest challenge and most damaging element of this process and future processes such as this
- I was also annoyed by media suggesting teachers over estimated their student grades
- To me, the crucial difference is when you are estimating, you are thinking how well a student could potentially do on a good day. You are not going to ask yourself what is the worst they could do, or how would they do if they got a bad paper. This is why grades looked inflated in my opinion. This should have been clarified in the media beforehand as it is completely obvious to anyone with sense
- As a teacher in a fee paying school I was disgusted at the way our politicians interfered in the whole process. Getting rid of the school profile was a joke. Some of my calculated grades were reduced while a neighbouring school was the opposite. Calculated grades won't work in Ireland as our politicians will mess it up. I say this as an experienced advising examiner in the leaving certificate. The present system is fit for purpose as it doesn't identify schools so politicians can't discriminate against fee paying and/or high achieving schools
- Media made it all difficult and stressful!

- *The changing methods of calculating and the unhelpful media leaks prior to any teacher / school management being aware of expectations on them made it difficult to have confidence in process. The scrapping of including school historical LC data showed lack of commitment to process on part of Department of Education. I felt media and public relations were being pleased rather than sticking with the process teachers / schools signed up to. Also a promise was given that students would not see grades given by teachers which was not in spirit kept since students had access to the school grades given.*

2. Stress (caused by the process and consequences of having to mark and rank their own students)

In the context of teaching locally, a number of comments were made about how involvement in the calculated grades process *induced so much stress* linked with pressure from parents and/or unwelcome contacts from parents and/students. The terms *stress* and *stressful* were used repeatedly by teachers in reference, in particular, to ranking their students. This reflects the earlier finding (Table 8) that 73% of teachers *felt uncomfortable* at the prospect of their students being able to access the ranks, with 32% indicating that they felt guilty about marking/ranking decisions they had taken:

- *Calculated Grades was the hardest thing I have ever had to do in my career. I wasn't comfortable doing it and I felt like it ruined the relationship I had with those students. I was fully supported by my school, but I found it very tough. I was contacted online by parents who were unhappy with the grade their child received. I had to keep a low profile when leaving my house as I live close to the school and I would see many students when I went outside. It induced so much stress that I never want to experience again. I also feel like the students would have done much better if they sat the exam, as I had to follow the Bell Curve and rank the students. This led to a lot of students getting a grade much lower than what they would have got if they sat the exam. The process was not fair on anyone involved*
- *It was an extremely stressful process. The class ranking element and being unable to give students the same percentage was unrealistic as you will often have a cohort of 3 or 4 students per class who will achieve the same percentage in formative assessment and class based assessments. It certainly would affect teacher/student relationships if we were to continue assessing in this manner. I would question whether all schools would follow guidelines exactly and not try to improve their school results as a whole if this process were adapted*
- *The stress involved in this process was horrendous, constantly questioning my own ability to think about it fairly leading to a level of anxiety I have never experienced in any other facet of life as I felt that students might miss out on dream courses from the marks I had provided. I understand that this is not necessarily the case but it felt like that. I have also witnessed the stress in current 6th year groups at the idea of predicted grades happening again this year and it is not healthy. It was very difficult as it changed the relationship I had with my students. I was unable to converse with them in the same way I had done previously. I prefer to be impartial so that my students see me as the supportive guide in their learning process rather than judge and jury*

- *I found it the most horrible experience of my teaching career. I am still feeling upset about some of the grades I awarded and feel sick to the stomach at the thought of ever having to do this again*
- *It was a stressful experience but I was confident with my final decisions and happy knowing that I was as unbiased as possible and gave each student the grade I thought they would get, not what I would have liked them to get. However, I felt betrayed and disappointed when we found out later in the summer that our grades and rankings would be made readily available to students. That was not what we were told when we agreed to give the predicted grades, and even though I stand by the grades I gave, I felt like we were lied to and taken advantage of.*
- *It's difficult for the teachers who live locally to meet the parents afterwards, particularly if they are not pleased with the result*
- *Being contacted by students who failed was disconcerting*
- *I never again want to decide somebody's future while sitting at my kitchen table. I am still avoiding some parents in town in case someone attacks me re. somehow destroying their child's future as happened to my husband who is a teacher in a nearby school*
- *A lot of fears and concerns of staff based on pressure from parents to award a good grade despite assessment data were deemed to be not as big a concern after the marking process and the grades came out. It's clearer than ever that LC reform is needed to address the issue of a one-day performance compared to a more holistic assessment experience*
- *I was [REDACTED] during the process and the stress of it all brought on... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer). Had I not been involved in the decision and calculated grades process, my doctors strongly believe that... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer)*
- *It is clear that students received higher marks than if they sat the exam, but it is impossible to factor in all the variables associated with students' revision habits and ability to study and attain a mark for the period of March to June. Some would have dropped a mark from 6th Christmas or 5th year marks, but how are we to know which ones? Equally you would expect some students to improve a mark significantly, but how are we to decide which ones will improve. I found the provision of a grade relatively simpler than the task of deciding a specific percentage. This made the class ranking system nearly impossible for separating students who you would expect to achieve similar grades. This was by far one of the hardest tasks that I have had to do as a teacher, and I found the whole process incredibly stressful and time consuming. I found that setting and marking an exam for the class would have taken less time*
- *Assigning calculated grades was a stressful task, but we did it having been promised by the Minister for Education that the ranking form would not be released to the students – this turned out to be false promise. I was dismayed and upset for my students that they might receive a form for me and my colleagues that might have ranked them at the bottom of most or all of their subject classes. This is not information any student needs as they take the next step in their academic career. Not to mention the fact that as a teacher I have lost significant faith in the words and promises of the Minister for Education and their Department*
- *Being a teacher of [REDACTED], which has only had [REDACTED] assessments so far, we were pretty much abandoned to our own devices to "make up" our grades. We have had very*

little insight into how the past exams were graded, therefore the estimated grade process was incredibly stressful

- *Everything out on teachers, who were happy to help but the obscure and constantly changing rules were awful. Teachers were told beforehand that ranks would not be released. Ranking students was a horrible experience, and totally unnecessary given that they were all given marks anyway so a natural ranking could have been easily generated*
- *It was awful. Awful, Awful, Awful. Trying to grade students when we had no idea this was coming was stressful beyond words. The rankings were the worst. How do you rank students who are all basically at the same level? How do you think a student feels when they end up at the bottom of every class? How do you think it feels for a teacher who has built up a relationship with students over the years to have to reduce that relationship to a ranking? And how awful is it for teachers who live in the area they teach in to face people they have ranked unfavourably, and their parents? We were lied to and told we were protected, that was a farce. And after all that, to have the Powers that Be change your results? I gave one H1 to a student that deserved it. They changed it. Why? And don't tell me for one second that all this is not going to be used as an excuse to get teachers to do all the correcting for the LC in the future. And that's not for the students' benefit, but for the Department's pocket. It's all about saving money, not about education. To hell with the teachers. The government will spin it, our useless union will flap, the public will condemn us, and that's how it goes*
- *The process was extremely stressful, and continues to be as students decide whether or not to do the written exam, as this is indicative of dissatisfaction with the teacher's professional opinion. It was, and continues to be a huge source of stress for the students involved. I feel this process was too open to corruption, and that we will never know the extent of potential dishonesty and unfairness that this system allowed. I am aware many countries use continuous assessment and grades allocated by teachers, but I feel these countries could learn from our system where anonymity is a strong feature*
- *I found the whole process very stressful and time consuming. I would have preferred if the exams had have gone ahead. Although not perfect, the exams treat all students equally. It is very difficult for a teacher to fail their own students. Students may perceive bias in the grades they received. I hope we will not have to go through this experience again*
- *I found ranking and estimating the grade (e.g., H1, H2) was straightforward as I had a lot of evidence and knew my students well. However, I found assigning an exact mark was very tricky. I also found it stressful giving a grade to a student whose expectations were not in line with their ability. I worried the students would be disappointed with the grade and I worried about the effect it would have on their CAO points/offer. While it was stressful it did not make me upgrade the results. I relied upon the department guidelines to give me the confidence to stick to my grades/use my professional judgement. I have noticed the stress levels are higher than normal for students in 6th year as they worried LC will be assessed by teachers in 2021. Students currently in 6th year are very stressed about class tests, fear making mistakes and some are not asking questions or asking for help. I feel the Student-Teacher relationship would be detrimentally affected if the LC were to go down the road of being assessed by teachers. For all its faults the LC is objective, based on their work and not subject to bias*
- *Horrible and stressful experience, never want to do it again*
- *It was an extremely stressful time. I thought initially once it was objective I would be fine, however, once there were elements of subjectivity involved I felt less confident*

- *It was one of the most difficult/stressful experiences I have ever encountered in my teaching life. I hope never to have to repeat the process*
- *It was time consuming as it was a new process*
- *It was an extremely stressful process. The class ranking element and being unable to give students the same percentage was unrealistic as you will often have a cohort of 3 or 4 students per class who will achieve the same percentage in formative assessment and class based assessments. It certainly would affect teacher/student relationships if we were to continue assessing in this manner. I would question whether all schools would follow guidelines exactly and not try to improve their school results as a whole if this process were adapted*
- *I found it a very, very, stressful process despite my many years teaching experience. This was due to the fact that we were giving marks (not even just grades!) based on information that was never meant to be used for this purpose and the students didn't know in advance that the information was going to be used in this way. Also despite my being extremely fair in the marks given the students final grades were then downgraded based on presumably, other teachers in the country giving inflated grades which was extremely unfair on my students.*

Some teachers addressed the stress and pressure felt by their current students as a result of what happened in 2020 and at the prospect of calculated grades in the future:

- *In the current climate it is my observation that stress levels among students and teachers have risen in essence due to the possibility of another situation where calculated grades are required. My students this year have voiced their concerns about continuous assessment and the weight of expectation it places on them. Teacher and student anxieties at an all-time high due to the events of last May/June*
- *I believe it has added greatly to the pressure placed on 5th year students to whom I am assistant year head. Some will place an unsustainable amount of pressure on every class test they do for the next year or so increase this happens again and this is bound to lead to burnout*
- *It's having an impact on the current 6th year students as they're concerned we will go to predicted grades again, so they're working more consistently now.*

3. A mix of emotions (including annoyance, upset, and disappointment)

In places, it was difficult to categorise comments according to a single overarching theme. This was especially true of teachers' commentary on how the process made them feel. The comments in this section capture some of their emotions:

- *I felt that I was too honest when I was assigning marks to the students. A lot of time and effort went into the ranking and as a result some students that were awarded marks such as 82% or 71% were down-graded as a result. I am aware of teachers that significantly inflated their grades. The system was extremely flawed and I was annoyed with the outcome when the results came out*

- *While I felt confident and used my professional judgement to use and give calculated grades I still did not and do not feel comfortable about it and I don't think there was enough clarity at the outset about pupils being able to view the class rankings*
- *Extremely difficult task. I did not feel fit to grade the leaving cert. It was my first time teaching 6th years. Completely unqualified*
- *Broken hearted by how my students were treated. I estimated fair and accurate grades and marks for my students but they were hugely downgraded. Some were marked down by over 7%. My students would have scored much higher if they had sat the exam. Feel so let down by the process and I regret not over estimating their grades. Grades that my students were awarded by the sec were much, much, lower this year than others. Feel I have let my students down*
- *I found the fact that we could not advise students on what level to take very unfair. If I had them until June they would have realised that they needed to change level. I ended up having to fail 2/3 students which I still feel guilty over as they know I did that to them. I am concerned that this would happen in the future. We need to be able to advise on appropriate levels*
- *I felt extremely disappointed having given my all to the calculations process, only to find that the Department altered the grades in a terrible and skewed manner. I cannot understand why we as teachers were asked to participate in the process if the Department did not intend to respect our professionalism and expertise and intentionally disregarded same. I was disappointed for my students who did not receive the grade I had calculated for them (fairly and after many long hours carefully following the process as outlined by DES) as that was the grade they in truth deserved*
- *I felt undermined to have so many of my grades brought down. I felt my professional judgment was being disregarded*
- *Was very annoyed as it was my understanding that students would be able to see their class) school ranking only if they applied for recalculation of grade. But this was not what happened*
- *I feel extremely annoyed at the disrespect shown to me as a teacher with ■ years' experience and doing everything to the letter of the law out of respect for the whole difficult situation. I spent days & days at it and spent sleepless nights thinking about it. All of my students, bar two, were lowered and.... (part of the comment omitted) ... a straight A student since Primary. H1 given by his teacher and taken with no explanation nor reason. Discriminatory as far as I'm concerned*
- *I feel it was very unsatisfactory that we had to resort to such a crude way of assessing our students. The exams should have gone ahead in my mind and I hope this does not set precedence for future LC students*
- *I felt my professional judgment was undermined by the DES when our grades were changed. Waste of time! They should have trusted our judgment and leave our predicted grades or just asked us to enter mock exam and Christmas exams grades*

- *I feel some students could have studied hard at the end and achieve a higher mark, but basing the grades on the evidence, raking the students and comparing the numbers and percentages to previous years was not always easy and brought some grades down. I felt we had stronger students this year but we were afraid the DES would bring grades down so during the alignment we have to compromise, it was a difficult process and we tried to be fair and professional*
- *I feel let down by the Department of Education after the publication of the rank order system having said they would not and blatantly lied to teachers*
- *I felt it took a very long time over 25 hours to calculate the grades. I spent many hours reviewing field trips for certain students who had done some work in fifth year but very little in sixth year so my review saw them achieve a higher mark than they would have achieved on their final effort on this field trip. I used about 20 or more parameters to calculate the grade all allocated a percentage including classwork homework school exams class tests mocks effort work in class and at field trip then the allocated 20% for the field trip. My alignment meeting was long and then a further phone call ensuring justice was done for each student*
- *It was most upsetting when extremely weak ordinary level students didn't adhere to my advice and opted to attempt higher level and I had to fail them. Students need to listen early in sixth year and respect the advice of their teachers*
- *I feel the whole process was not fully transparent to us the teachers. We understood that the grade assigned by the teacher would not be visible to the student. Also the ranking of students was extremely difficult*
- *Broken hearted by how my students were treated. I estimated fair and accurate grades and marks for my students but they were hugely downgraded. Some were marked down by over 7%. My students would have scored much higher if they had sat the exam. Feel so let down by the process and I regret not over estimating their grades. Grades that my students were awarded by the sec were much, much, lower this year than others. Feel I have let my students down*
- *I feel we were hung out to dry by the DES. Told not to take JC results into account (useless anyway for the purpose of grading LC). My students were severely disadvantaged by the grades they received. I stand 100% over what I awarded and found it heart breaking when the students got their grades. They definitely didn't get what they deserved. And yes school profile would back that up 100%*
- *I found the whole process extremely difficult and lost much sleep over it as one can never be 100% sure about how students will perform in the LC. Some can actually surprise you and get a much higher result than anticipated*
- *It was the hardest thing to do since I have started to teach. Especially with students who are academically challenged and have no confidence. How is God's name did it make sense for them to see their class rank and know that you failed them, when they came to you for support? On what planet did that make sense after the Department promising us that this was not going to happen*

- *I feel quite disheartened that past grades of a school were not taken into account and as a result my grades this year fell far below that of other years (due to downgrading) even though I had a strong group of students. I feel teachers in other schools inflated their students grades and I don't think this was fair. I had a lot of upset students who worked so hard and were unfairly downgraded which affected their position in getting into college which has led me to have an incredible guilt on my conscience. It just wasn't fair!*
- *Feel teachers were hung out to dry by Department due to Department's lack of planning for Covid. Leaving Cert students treated appallingly. Did not like the way contact with students was abruptly severed. Did not like having to fill in forms with grades and ranks and students' names rather than just anonymous exam numbers. Was verbally abused by some ex-students who were not satisfied by their grades. Was not happy how Department "standardized" grades. Would not like to repeat the process. Alignment meetings were a farce and not like SLAR as no other teacher taught that same class and we weren't using same marking matrix so no teacher could question each other's grades. Essentially alignment meetings are just telling each other the grades given out*
- *I was extremely unhappy that the Link Modules portfolios which had already been submitted to the SEC for correction prior to lockdown were returned unmarked by the SEC with the instruction that we were to predict a grade without correcting them! Absolutely disgusted. The portfolios were worth 60% of the final grade. They should have been graded by the SEC*
- *I am appalled at the duplicitous behaviour of the Department of Education during this process. Teachers and students were told how marks would be awarded; "not on their best day", and using previous averages. Then when results were published, Department officials claimed the opposite in the media, thereby throwing us under the bus. I feel completely betrayed by the Department and if we ever have this situation again I will ignore their guidelines and award my students strong grades.*

4. A breach of trust (related to the release of rank order data in particular)

While some acknowledged that the unprecedented circumstances necessitated the use of calculated grades, the decision to share class rankings was cited as a breach of trust by the DES with many respondents expressing deep disappointment and anger at the decision. At the time of writing, the authors of this report were unable to identify documentation detailing what was agreed between the DES and the Teacher Unions with respect to the release of teacher generated student mark and rank data. The extent to which General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legislation made the release of such data inevitable should also be borne in mind when reading the following comments:

- *1) Overall it was very stressful suddenly becoming my students' judge, having been their teacher for so long. 2) During the process, we suspected that some schools would inflate their grades - suspicions that later turned out to be justified. It put us in a difficult position - do we disadvantage our students by being totally professional and giving the grades we truly think they would get, or do we inflate their grades so that they are on a level playing field with students from other schools? This would be even more of an issue if we were to go through*

this process again. 3) The government changed the agreement that the unions signed up to. i.e., that standardisation would take place based on historical school data etc.

- *The publication of the estimated grades given by teachers, despite assurances that this would not happen, was a massive breach of trust and led to a huge spike in stress among staff in early September. Ireland is too small, and teachers too accessible to successfully protect teachers from unpleasant reactions from disappointed parents and students. If estimated grades were to be used again I believe this would have an extremely detrimental effect on the process. The role placed on school management was also extremely onerous, and the supports put in place for them were inadequate, to the point of insulting at times. In particular, the Department's practice of issuing new guidance last thing on a Friday evening, making it impossible for it to be acted on in a timely fashion. As a Manager I was extremely impressed at the integrity and concern shown by teachers at all stages of the process, and the degree of soul searching that went on in an effort to ensure that students received the fairest possible mark. However, I think the Department failed in their duty to protect teachers by fully informing parents of the process in a meaningful way, which meant that schools were inundated with phone calls following the release of the results asking for the school to appeal/ explain/ adjust results, something that was not in their power to do*
- *Teacher anxiety and mental health was disregarded in this process. We were abandoned by the Department and made false promises about the anonymity of our marks and rankings*
- *These were unprecedented circumstances (which nobody would wish to arise again), and the decision-makers were put in an unenviable position. HOWEVER, I resent the fact that at the start of the process we were told that the grades teachers gave, and the class ranking, would not be released to students, only for the DoE to later do exactly that! This has done a lot of damage to the relationship between the teachers/school and the community we serve*
- *For the first time in my career I had 2 exceptional students in the same class. I awarded both H1 grades, 95% and 94% ranked 1 and 2. The student marked 2 was reduced to H2 by the realignment. I feel this was an absolute disgrace, the system was flawed and I have NO TRUST in the DES. They are a disgrace!*
- *I did not like being put in the position of having to award calculated grades. It is not what I became a teacher for. I want to teach my students and prepare them for the next step in their education, it is not my job to examine them on behalf of the state. We were promised many things by the Department and they reneged on all of them. When we entered into the process we were assured that students would not know what teachers gave them, that was thrown out the window like every other promise the Department and Ministers made. I would have minimal confidence in any statement from the Minister following that*
- *Releasing class rankings after giving assurances that this would not be done, was fundamentally a heinous act. I am disgusted by the actions of the Department of Education. This was a totally unnecessary measure, which would have done great harm to the confidence of many students*
- *We were assured as teachers that students would not be told of the grade or ranking that we gave them, and then that was done. This totally undermines any trust we can have in assurances in the future. We might still be teaching the siblings of last year's LC students and this was a terrible position to put teachers in when they were acting in good faith under difficult and stressful conditions. Every change that was made to the LC whether it was the proposed two week teaching in July or the calculated grades was presented through the media*

and not through our schools to us. I found that to be disrespectful to the Leaving Cert students and their parents as well as to the teachers

- *I was left very annoyed by the whole process when the criteria were changed after submitting our results and rankings. We were explicitly told not to consider their JC grades when calculating students grades and it now seems that it was the piece of data that was most strongly used in determining the students' final calculated grades. I also felt completely tied to the schools past results at the end as this was indicated to us as one of the more important pieces of data for checking grades at the national level. I felt very let down by the whole process. On this final page of the survey we were asked to comment on whether the calculated grades would be a good motivator for 6th year students. I cannot stress how much I disagree with this statement. I have taught in my school for 15 years and the girls always work hard. This year we have had outside agencies contact us about the high levels of anxiety that is present among our 6th years, something that has never happened before. Looking at their results so far this year their data is no different to any other year (i.e. there is no obvious improvement as a result)*
- *I would like to thank the researchers for taking the time to carry out this survey, as a teacher, I am not aware of any effort to consult teachers prior to, during or after the process for any opinions of evidence that might inform the process or inform a review of the process. We put an enormous effort as a school ~~now~~ department to maintain the grade profile in line with what had occurred over the past 4 years, we agreed that we had the same teachers who taught the same way and the students we taught were of a similar ability. We kept the grade profile for 2020 consistent with what we had been achieving consistently over the previous 4 years. Some grade brackets were up but equally some were down, we did not inflate our grade profile. I appreciate this cannot be applied to all subjects and schools. I felt we went about our job in a very professional manner with our students' best interests at heart but equally we respected the process. Our school relies on its academic status as we are small and have little in the way of extras, as a result we make a point of being consistently above the national average as much as we can. We have data from the last 4 years to inform our decisions. We have a fantastic small rural school population and we are able to deliver a very personal education. We got absolutely screwed by the process in our subject department. 40% of our ordinary level students got dropped a grade, 15% of our higher level students got dropped a grade, none at higher or ordinary level got moved up. It was absolutely disgraceful. Personally I was very disillusioned with the whole experience, Educational leaders who by their position in the educational structure, we trust to make the best decision possible at the time. We all know that they were unprecedented times and circumstances. I feel the manner in which the process was revised and revised again after teachers had completed their marking and ranking was a fundamental breach of trust and professionalism and was completely disrespectful to the education system but above all to the individual students who place such trust in us as educators and got shafted for no logical reason. To give one example, a Leaving cert student, hardest working student you are likely to meet, downgraded in 4 higher level subjects missed her chosen course by 6 points. Who has the right to do that to another individual, no point blaming the process, unfortunate and all that, an individual in the department of education stood over the process that allowed that to happen, shocking in our society where we preach equality, fairness and democracy. This was a sham. Educational leaders playing at politics very sad situation. I really hope this report goes on to inform more responsible decision making in the department of education*
- *We were assured as teachers that students would not be told of the grade or ranking that we gave them, and then that was done. This totally undermines any trust we can have in assurances in the future. We might still be teaching the siblings of last year's LC students and*

this was a terrible position to put teachers in when they were acting in good faith under difficult and stressful conditions. Every change that was made to the LC whether it was the proposed two week teaching in July or the calculated grades was presented through the media and not through our schools to us. I found that to be disrespectful to the Leaving Cert students and their parents as well as to the teachers

- *I thought the government let teachers down badly after initially saying students would not see the results we awarded or the class ranking and then giving them that information. I was also upset by the media coverage suggesting that we did not do a good job, or did not mark fairly*
- *I cannot see any good reason why students were allowed to see the class rankings. We were initially assured this would not happen. I felt betrayed when this changed and was targeted by disgruntled students and parents when they were the bottom of the list. For the first time in my career I was the subject of a complaint to the school due to my grading which was a very unpleasant and upsetting experience. It was also very disheartening for some students to see they were 'worst' in the class*
- *I would be unwilling to engage with this process again following the u-turn on making class ranking available to students. When an agreement is entered into, it must be adhered to. Breach of agreement results in no future agreement in this teacher's view. You included no questions regarding attempts of students to canvas their teachers. Is this not an important issue?... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer). None of your questions ask about our experiences with Management regarding pressure to increase our marks. Is this not an important issue regarding our experience with calculated grades? I experienced a 'tone of disapproval' in response to some of my marks. Other colleagues (particularly part-time/no tenure) were told straight that they needed to increase some of their marks. (Section 3 - asks about alignment meetings: I was only teacher of subject so my answers in section 3 relate to conversation with Management regarding my calculated grades, as opposed to meeting with other teaching colleagues)*
- *It was absolutely disgusting that the class ranking was made available to students. We were told this would not be made available unless they appealed. There was also no need to give them their actual %. The majority if teachers were over generous which is understandable but unfair to those of us who know how they would have done. Under NO circumstances should teachers have a role in marking our students for state certification*
- *The initial information which came out about calculated grades was very good and should have been honoured. The Department of Education pulled a very nasty stroke when they changed the goalposts regarding student access to the teacher assigned grade. Also, the removal of school standardization a few weeks before results were released was a catastrophic error which continues to have far reaching consequences. Schools which traditionally have had very high levels of achievement were unfairly punished by moving them in line with national averages. The German school in Dublin is a case in point..... It highlights the fact that we have an excellent system in place to assess school leavers. Any move away from the traditional leaving cert will be to the detriment of second level education in Ireland. I taught in [redacted] for [redacted] years at the start my career and saw first-hand the absolute disaster which is school based assessments. Our system as it stands is rigorous, fair and not open to any kind of corruption. Any reasonable, educated and informed person can see this. I can be reached on the following number if you wish to discuss further*
- *U turn by Department of Education on revealing teacher ranking was a disgrace*

- *I feel it was unfair of the Department to ensure teachers that their grades would not be given to students only to change their mind after we had finished the process. I also believe that the assessment model for the leaving cert is outdated as it stands and that this process might encourage change*
- *I would never want to have to do this process again, as we the teachers were let down. Students should never have had access to ranking. We were led to believe they would not have access*
- *I feel teachers' professionalism and trust was undermined and broken by the Department of Education when it decided to reveal Students rank in class to all students. Department of Education constantly moved the goalposts during the summer months and the entire Calculated Grade system became farcical with errors being made by Department on a regular basis. Unions were left in the dark on numerous occasions and I believe the Department of Education belittled our profession*
- *I feel very let down that the Department allowed the rank order to be seen. This caused great upset to some of my better students. So not being allowed to award the exact same grade to two students in the class was very unfair when all average of all evidence gathered let to the same mark. I don't feel the department supported the teachers enough at all and sincerely hope we never have to do it again*
- *I felt that us teachers were really let down by the whole process. Originally we were told that the students would not find out their ranking, and then this was changed AFTER we had completed the process. I believe there is no benefit to a student's mental health knowing their ranking in the class. We encourage students to not compare themselves and here they were able to find out in black and white. My department and school was very strict on the grading. Firstly, within my department and secondly our principal asked us to bring down the marks as they were not in line with percentages of previous years, which seemed ridiculous to me. They were a whole different cohort. My students suffered and I could not give them the benefit of the doubt at all. I felt very stressed that I might meet my students afterwards and have a confrontation. All in all, I felt very disillusioned and upset by the process and would be very reluctant to believe anything the SEC tells us should we go through it again*
- *This process was all done in good faith by myself and was very stressful. I felt the process that followed it undermined the whole affair and students were wrongly treated as a result adding very unnecessary stress. I also think new and inexperienced teachers had a very difficult time with this system and the grade alignment meetings. I would never like to see this system happening again as teachers have become the centre of a campaign of vilification. Also, we were deceived in the system as we were assured the ranking/ grades would not be released and they were. This system has made me dislike my job for the first time in over 12 years*
- *Changing what was agreed at a later time was very undermining to teachers*
- *It was unfortunate that the goal posts we used to award the estimated grades changed and the outcome in my case was that I strongly believe that the students were disadvantaged. Perhaps they would have been better served if I had awarded them inflated results*

- *(part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer): I didn't think the department should have issued the rank ordering. In fact, I am still not convinced rank ordering should have been part of the process*
- *One major difficulty I had with this process was the Department of Education and Skills u-turn in relation to the publishing of marks and ranking positions. Teachers entered into this process under one set of rules and these were then unilaterally changed - this was very unfair and a betrayal of teachers who entered this process in good faith. The whole debate about standardisation of results and the final outcome was also unsatisfactory in my view. The historic grades achieved by schools should have had some weight in the process. I also had a problem with calculating a specific mark as opposed to a grade. It was a very arbitrary decision to decide on one mark after two years work and an unfair burden on teachers. A final major problem I have with this process is that teachers were explicitly told not to use Junior Cycle grades as a base line for achievement yet this is exactly what the Department did itself later.*

There was reference also to damaged relationships within schools arising from inconsistencies in how marks were awarded in one case, and the erosion of the collective efforts over many years by staff in a DEIS school to encourage student engagement and participation, in another:

- *From working in a DEIS school, where pastoral care is absolutely of the utmost importance, I feel this process really negatively affected the 5 years of work that we as a staff had put into our students. In this school, we put so much time and effort into building relationships in order to keep our students in school and in trying to get them to believe in themselves, that to be then put into a situation where we were the ones being asked to make the decisions to 'chop' our students down at the end of 5 years of hard work, was completely unfair. I feel also in our DEIS schools, from looking at the data, we were more honest with our grades than other schools were. So the inequalities in Irish society were further magnified using this system. I feel this is not the system that should take the place of the current LC, we should not be put into this situation again. There is far more to teaching than walking into a classroom and covering a course, especially with schools being expected to deal with more of society's problems during the school day. Education is more than an exam, it is more than just a piece of paper with results, let's not devalue and potentially destroy all the other work that is done in schools and relationships that are created, by employing this system ever again*
- *The damage the Department of Education by breaching their promise on rank order has totally destroyed anything like this in the future. I have become too familiar with the aftermath of carnage this process has left in schools where pupils of the staff members were being assessed by fellow staff members as teachers, SNAs, caretakers, and management personnel. Some perfectly sound relationships have been destroyed forever and some fraught staff relationships have worsened considerably some reverting to the law for justice or resolution. I am not just speaking of my own school but have many due to my union involvement. Some school managers behaved appallingly especially to pre CID teachers and vulnerable teachers*
- *I would not like to do it again. I had very good relationships with the students in my group. Had there been negative relationships, issues etc. the process may have more difficult. I spent the summer worrying about fallout, students/parents arriving at school on results day. This did not happen, but if there was disputed grade with a student/parents, this could have arisen*
- *It really depends on each individual student-teacher relationship. Some students would see it as a disadvantage if their teacher was involved directly in deciding their grade. Some would*

see it as an advantage. Some students would see no point in trying if they believed a teacher did not like them

- *Teachers grading their own students for the Leaving Cert undermines the relationships built up between student and teacher. Instead of being advocates for our students, we become their judge and jury. This is not good for the overall well-being and trust that students have for their teachers*
- *Students were eager to engage with me over the marking procedures. I was advised not to discuss the calculated grades with them and this led to a very unsatisfactory finish to the year. Whereas I had had a very good relationship with my students, this was somewhat soured by me being the source of their disappointment and at the same time not having a chance to explain to them why I came to the conclusion that I did.*

5. Fairness (with respect to bias, the work of colleagues, the application of DES guidelines, grade inflation, the national standardisation, grading one's own students)

The issue of fairness was an issue highlighted by a large number of those who responded to this question. In some instances, fairness was linked to efforts to remain unbiased, while in others it was implied in observations on how teaching colleagues approached the calculated grades process either individually or at alignment meetings. Many complained about guidelines not being followed and about grade inflation. Considerable attention was also focused on the impact of national standardisation on the grades awarded initially and the decision not to use school historical data.

As noted in discussion of the data presented in Table 8, 38% of respondents agreed that they found it difficult to maintain an unbiased position when marking/ranking their students. Commenting on the issue of bias, some respondents distinguished between conscious and unconscious bias arguing that it is not possible for teachers to be impartial when assessing their own students' work. A number of teachers highlighted efforts made within their own schools to minimise bias when estimating their students' marks/ranks, observing that they were proud of the processes they engaged in with colleagues to arrive at fair grades:

- *The aim to remove unconscious bias was extremely flawed. Regardless of awareness being brought to unconscious bias, it does not eliminate it in any way. By virtue of the fact that the bias is unconscious it cannot be brought to awareness. Furthermore, the idea that a video is enough to remove 6 years of knowledge of a student, their circumstances, their goals, is ludicrous. The bottom line is, the entire process was unfair and unreasonable. Greater efforts should have been made by the Department of Education, in the time from school closure until June, to come up with a better solution*
- *It is very difficult for teachers to not be biased, and more so, the worst teachers (will) take advantage of calculated grades to boost their image/status and hide their own inadequacies in teaching. The other major issue with 2019/20's calculated grades is that the Department of*

Education changed the goal posts after the event - we were told that our assigned calculated percentage grades would be moderated with respect to the schools past performance/achievements, but then they were not - in effect we were duped into giving calculated grades/percentages under false pretences (I believe that the DoE should have stuck to its original plan, and rightly applied some algorithmic moderation; the DoE reneged on its plan, unnecessarily, as students still had the option to sit the Leaving Cert if they so wished). Several teachers in my school, whether sensing the inevitable impossibility of moderating downwards or otherwise, assigned grades which were wishful thinking - during the alignment process/meetings this was evident, with teachers constantly (and unfortunately accurately) commenting/prefacing with (I feel ... / I think that Johnny will / etc., and bear in mind that, as in any profession, there is a tendency to think 'I am the best teacher in the world') - overall, more often than not the contrary approach to what was intended occurred. Unfortunately, 'calculated grades' were not 'calculated', or perhaps were 'loosely calculated', but rather were coloured by, and, too often and too much, based on feelings and wishful thinking, and the perhaps innate desire of teachers to do the best for their students. If calculated grades are to be continued, there needs to be a much more rigorous framework, and there must be external/independent power to moderate - with of course the impartial provision that any student may choose to sit the exam if they want to. The 2019/20's calculated grades advantaged the worst students and disadvantaged the best students (and likewise, advantaged the worst teachers and disadvantaged the best teachers), and overall many results were fabricated and grossly unfair

- Calculating mean and median of house exam grades over the 2 years was 90% of students' final grade. This left no room for bias. Alignment meeting within DES didn't change grades. We were lucky as all science teachers knew students for the 2 years. Can see problems would arise where teachers didn't teach them for the 2 years as a principal could take advantage of this and increase grades to make school look good. Teachers should have all been told to calculate grades as we did. Fair playing ground for all
- I work as an examiner for the SEC and have done so for 20 years. I know how to assess; I've spent many years going into schools assessing [REDACTED] projects. I can stand over my grades. Many teachers cannot do this without bias and will also feel under pressure from parents, students and principals to give higher grades. I fundamentally disagree with teachers grading their own students. It was a complete omnishambles from beginning to end
- The fact that I had kept accurate records over the past two years made it easier to come up with an accurate grade
- I worked extremely hard on this process to be fair and unbiased. I was able to back up every grade with data I had gathered over the two-year course. Every one of my students received a grade that I felt was realistic and fair to be then faced with 70% of my students to be brought down This was so frustrating and disheartening and left me feeling why did I bother at all
- No assessment done by teachers can be unbiased. I for one cannot remove the fact that I know the pupils and their parents personally from the equation
- The meeting with same subject teachers or not was very important to remove any bias and remain grounded about how a student would have achieved for each section of the paper and then make a predicted grade
- Calculating mean and median of house exam grades over the 2 years was 90% of students' final grade. This left no room for bias. Alignment meeting within Department didn't change grades. We were lucky as all science teachers knew students for the 2 years. Can see problems would arise where teachers didn't teach them for the 2 years as a principal could take

advantage of this and increase grades to make school look good. Teachers should have all been told to calculate grades as we did. Fair playing ground for all

- *I tried to be as fair as possible but some students might have done better in the actual exam, but I could only mark them based on the evidence to date*
- *The marks I awarded were not the same as the marks awarded to my students in the Leaving Cert results. Most definitely 1 or more of my students would have benefited from sitting the exams*
- *it was a system that suited the weaker students as they would have struggled to study independently for the remainder of that year*
- *We went to great efforts to align our grades to the previous year's percentage attainment in [redacted] However, [redacted] students that I taught were downgraded, while the other two teachers only had [redacted] students downgraded. How can one teacher be disproportionately affected when all calculated grades should have been standardised using the same process in the same centre?*

There were repeated references to the importance of moderation and alignment meetings in supporting teachers to make informed, unbiased decisions, albeit the process was described as stressful and very demanding. Again, comments here broadly reflect the quantitative findings (Table 9) in that some respondents found the alignment meetings stressful (35%), and/or difficult to voice concerns about how colleagues came to their grading decisions (23%) and/or would have welcomed guidance on how to resolve disagreements that arose during the calculated grades process (21%):

- *I feel it was an unfair process from the start. Despite my best attempts to ensure fairness for my students having used every result I had for them, which was proved to be utterly pointless when another teacher in my own department admitted to adding an extra 15% to all students grades across the board because that's how much he improved in his own exams after the mocks. It was a horrible position to be put in at the time, and it has damaged professional relationships as a result. The system devised by the DES was flawed and unfair from the start*
- *Yes, after submitting the grades I became very concerned when I learned through the grapevine how other students of my subject had been graded. In particular, those taking the subject outside of school where the experience of the teachers concerned is often limited and the oversight mechanism was different. Luckily for me, my class in my own school this year were not very academic and so they weren't impacted by what I felt could have led to very unfair competition for the highest grades during the alignment process. You can share this comment anonymously but please do not link it to my subject. Another big (and related) issue was how students who had dropped out of school or out of classes or subjects were graded. Even in normal years 6th year students stop attending school or classes due to health concerns and/or stress as well as general disengagement with education. Some of these students actually sit, some don't, some don't sit all subjects. There was little guidance provided on grading these students and I heard cases of schools and teachers treating similar situations completely differently (some giving students the benefit of the doubt, grades given out of sympathy, versus others sticking to a principle of giving no grade or a failing grade due to lack of evidence)*

- *Given the situation that was, it was as fair as it could be. However, in a small town, the position that teachers are put in - directly giving grades, is compromising and uneasy. The Subject Department meetings were of great support and afforded transparency too - this stage of the process I felt was not highlighted enough in the media/by the DES. Thank you for this opportunity to reflect and be of some input*
- *I found the discussions with colleagues very stressful. I felt the other teachers were very unfair in their results and gave students quite low grades. I was very worried that the DES would move grades during the alignment phase. The results given were the exact result (sometimes even a little harsh) for the student and I would have hoped they would have done better in the exam. The worry that we will have repeat this coming Summer is stressful to both the teachers and students. Students are over whelmed and not putting in extra effort as was expected by teachers. The teachers are also trying to collect extra data and more class tests are being carried out. This is again adding to the students' stress and anxiety and giving extra work to the teachers. It was an awful experience. I felt horrible having to give students a grade that would affect their future path especially when I had to fail a student. They may have had a really nice paper, they may have worked really hard in the last weeks, they may have on the day just had everything go right for them. It was awful failing them. It was also awful not being able to contact students to once again recommend a level change. They may have opted for a different level on the day and passed that level. I also did not like that we could not include data collected from students during lockdown. I had a good few students whose attitude changed during the break and they were working extra hard. They were studying, submitting work and engaging more than previously in school. Being hidden behind the computer screen made them freer to ask questions and submit answers. It was hard not to consider this when doing the grades*
- *Where are the questions about the coursework? I didn't answer any of those. Most of the issues I had with the alignment meetings were caused by trying to conduct the meeting via zoom - I was on zoom, the other 10 teachers were present in person. So being heard and being persuasive was extremely difficult. I'm only teaching in this school for a few years so I only knew the students 5th year and the bit of 6th year before lockdown. Other teachers felt they knew the students better as they knew them from 1st year. I felt my experience, my professional judgement and first hand in class knowledge was dismissed by my colleagues.*

There was also reference also to internal difficulties between experienced and inexperienced teaching colleagues:

- *There were two colleagues that really didn't understand how the Leaving Certificate is marked. They are beginning teachers. They 'defended' their position rather than listening and learning from their more experienced colleagues. The rest of our department were very faithful to the process and their experience of LC results*
- *(part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer): My management has consistently employed young inexperienced teachers and pushed out older ones. These young inexperienced teachers have a stronger voice than myself and as a result all's were asked even though I felt it was wrong. However, when the final results were issued, all my original grades were justified and given even a fail which I was glad of. I totally disagree with teachers having any part in certification as it completely changes the relationship with the student. However, the "threat" of calculated grades is a very good thing as the students are more prone to work. But my school is different in that many students have given up trying for this year.*

Others questioned the fairness/accuracy of grades awarded by teachers whose students were getting grinds and the concern this raised for parents locally:

- *Some students - not in my school - need to have grinds in certain subjects and in this instance it would have been unfair if the class teacher was marking them, as they may not be a particularly good teacher (hence warranting the grind). In this case, had the student been able to complete the course with a grind teacher, they probably would have secured a higher mark than that which their subject teacher assigned. This observation is made from personal circumstances and has nothing to do whatsoever with my school but comes from concerns from parents in other communities.*

In a number of very detailed statements, teachers raised concerns about bias arising from inappropriate processes/practices employed by their teaching colleagues in the calculation of marks/ranks that resulted in grade inflation. These findings tally with those previously reported (Table 9) that opinion was divided as to whether marks and ranks did (38%) or didn't (45%) differ among teachers in their own schools:

- *My experience of the process was extremely negative. There were grotesque levels of grade inflation in my Department which was not then sufficiently moderated by the Department of Education. This led to an appalling experience for the more professional members of the Department who followed the Departmental criteria strictly. We were aware our students' fairer grades would suffer due to the inflation elsewhere in the school but could not in good conscience mark our students up in anticipation of this process as it would undermine the entire assessment process nationally. There were unconscionable interventions on behalf of school management to juice the numbers too - teachers were asked to 'find grades' that could be moved up. Nothing was moved down. *sigh**
- *I feel our school were very honest and diligent about assessing our students and our grades fitted in perfectly with the bell curves for the past three years. However, we feel hard done by after hearing that a lot of other schools gave higher grades to their students than their schools would ordinarily receive and our students have been negatively impacted by this dishonesty. Formal, anonymous marking as in the traditional Leaving Certificate is a much fairer approach for all students*
- *I feel that my colleagues and I applied the recommendations on assessment strictly and fairly. We closely examined past performance in the school and used it to guide us in our alignment. However, the goal posts were moved subsequent to that which I feel was very unfair to our students. I also feel very aggrieved that while we followed the guidelines, other schools inflated their grades, that this was presided over by principals, and they got away with it. I can see the advantages of in school assessment but in our small country it is much more difficult to carry out fairly without bias or pressure*
- *Marks were inflated. Most teachers do not have experience of correcting exams in the SEC. Teachers gave students what they felt they would get but did not at all take into account the possibility of awkward questions on papers, unlikely questions etc. There was a certain amount of favouritism towards students whose parents were teaching in the school*

- *Calculated grades has put a lot of pressure on present 6th years as they think that every class test is going to be counted. A pity that some teachers didn't stick to the brief and didn't inflate their grades-that caused half the problem with the CAO. Could get very divisive with parents down the line and them demanding certain grades-at least everyone is equal with present system*
- *It's a pity that teachers in some schools exaggerated their students' results. This put our students at a disadvantage for college places. I also feel it's a pity that the DES didn't maintain the school profiling or some other way of being fair*
- *Comparison between the honesty of schools is not part of your questionnaire, that is where the real problem lies. Students in this school have not been disadvantaged by their own teachers but by the overall teaching profession*
- *Overall I found the marking of students difficult. I marked higher than I would have usually as I was afraid the nationalisation process would see them penalised. However, I did not go overboard and feel I was generous but fair. The alignment process went well and I was happy with the outcome I had arrived originally was a just reward for the efforts my pupils had put in over 2 years. I used all their grades, past performances, engagements in class and what I perceived their ability to be.*

Despite the fact that 87% of teachers expressed confidence in the professional judgements they exercised during the calculated grades process, the downgrading of results arising from the national standardisation process and the fact that school historical data were not used evoked very strong reaction from teachers who described the process of estimating grades as a waste of time:

- *The whole process was a waste of time as SEC changed results, in essence the message the public received once the grades came out was that teachers lie and are not professional. I took the assessment and ranking very seriously, in fact I was unable to sleep worried that I was being too harsh. As a subject team we applied the SEC percentages of years passed, to ensure there would be no red flags. Our assigned grades were within the bands assigned by SEC in our subject in all previous years. The final grades were a real kick in the teeth to us as professionals. It has further worsened the image the general public have of teachers: wasters and liars. I feel very disheartened*
- *This process worked for students in the middle of the bell curve. Those on either of the extremes, low or high ability, were hugely disadvantaged by the standardising of their grades*
- *I am very annoyed that my students' results were based on a national average rather than a school average. We normally get results three times higher than the national average but this year many were downgraded! I am angry that such an injustice was done to the class of 2020 who had worked so hard! I live in the town that I teach in and find it very difficult now to look my students in the eye as I feel they deserved better grades. I am relieved that at least they know I gave them a fair grade! It was so difficult to predict grades and I just hope I will not be in this position again!*
- *Ultimately, I do not think the process was fair due to the absence of school profiling. I appreciate this is not the main focus of this research but the fact that there was a decision to*

remove profiling meant that students whose teachers inflated their grades did better than mine, due to my honesty. If this occurred again, I would have to think for a long time about whether or not to inflate the grades of my own students to ensure parity with their peers across the country. Plus, the lack of profiling meant the results for 2020 massively disadvantages the class of 2021 as students with points from 2020 know they have more points than a counterpart who is going to sit the exam this year. This will undoubtedly affect the entries to University for this year's group

- Our assessment and calculated grade was utterly undermined by the steps that followed when [redacted] of my class did not receive the calculated grade from the school. [redacted]% were downgraded
- Very unfair that the DES changed the process for awarding grades after teachers engaged with the process
- With regard to my subject [redacted]. I found it extremely unfair that my estimated grades were mostly ignored and a grade given without seeing any of the student's practical work which was well under way and was worth 50%
- The practice of downgrading marks undermined the whole process - also teachers not being allowed see their individual scores that students actually received when students received all data undermined teacher confidence further
- The entire process is moot as the Department chopped and changed grades to suit their own statistics and bell curve
- Having worked on predicted grades for many years while teaching in the UK, I had no difficulty in giving my time to come to what I believed were the correct predictions for students in my classes, but feel that they were completely let down by the state changing the criteria for moderation at a stage where teachers had no input. There is no doubt that the states direct intervention led to students receiving lower grades that they would have gotten if they sat the exams themselves
- I was very disappointed with the students in my class who were brought down by the standardisation process and I feel as they were in a fee paying school they were penalised. They would have not got the grade they were awarded in my opinion as an examiner and I was very disappointed for them
- I feel the grades awarded to students should not have been lowered as it did a disservice to some students. As students mature in the senior years at school there should be less weighting on Junior Cycle results
- The use of Junior Cycle grades was unfair. Taking the class dynamic into consideration would have helped, the subject I focused this survey on, [redacted], was unfairly marked down. This class contained several high achieving students whom were unfairly marked down to fit a bell curve without considering that this was an exceptionally strong class
- I was very fair to all my students but many were unfairly downgraded. [redacted] of my students won awards for their JC Science results and were invited to take part in the National Science Olympiad. They are all high achievers so I gave them each a H1. However, (part of the comment omitted) ..., it was deemed that I shouldn't get that many H1 marks (despite having received a

higher percentage of H1 grades in previous years) so one of the students was downgraded to a H2. This seems very unfair to me

- At Subject Alignment Meetings, my colleague and I supported the general view of our other colleagues: the year group of 2020, (overall) were conscientious and academically focused. Not all 6th year groups are the same! My grievance in this process is that the DES realigned grades to standardise them after my colleague and I, followed guidelines meticulously
- My assessments were quite accurate but 30% ended up with a higher grade than I had estimated
- As a language teacher I had an issue with full marks being awarded for the oral exam and then removing them. This was an awful decision in particular in the DEIS context. Some students failed to engage from that point on as they felt they had passed
- The last minute decision by the DES to remove the need to consult the historical data of the school was appallingly misjudged. Previous experience of the school's LC experience and grades had furnished quite a lot of thinking and reflecting when it came to [REDACTED] and aggregation. Once again, the Department change the goalposts at the last minute. The video explaining the process was dare I say patronising
- I think it was grossly unfair that the DES removed previous results achieved by the school as a criterion for the final marks. My marks were based on that and it obviously influenced my thinking. To have that removed three months after I submitted my results was wrong. The criteria on which I had marked them had changed and so my results could've been different had I known that from the beginning. The whole process and how it was conducted undoubtedly led to my students suffering and I am very bitter over that
- I engaged fully with the process but felt completely undermined by the decision not to take my school's past performance into account. I tried extremely hard not to inflate my grades but 1/3 of them were downgraded even though I had a very strong Honours group. I felt my work was in vain because of this, and I would be extremely wary of engaging in the process again because I cannot trust the Department. I am not against some form of teacher assessment, but only if the Department keeps its word and does not move the goal posts at the last minute
- In calculating student grades we were specifically told not to include or be influenced by the Junior Cert grades. I was very happy with... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer). We were told not to use Junior Cert grades but the Department of Education used the Junior Cert grades for this cohort as part of the standardising process. This, in my opinion, is a major flaw in the final calculation of their grades. Work done (or not done) 2 or 3 years (in the case of TY students) previous to the Leaving Cert exam should have NO BASIS whatsoever in the calculation of the Leaving Cert grades. The other thing that really annoyed me was that after the hours and hours spent by teachers deliberating to accurately reflect their students grade, then mark and then the rank that they were changed by nameless and faceless people in the Department at the press of a button. As a teacher I felt cheated because tens of thousands of grades were changed. Are teachers needed at all to calculate a grade? In the end the Department "made them up" themselves, hoped for the best and got away with murder again thanks to a compliant press. Best of luck to all 3 of you with this work. It is so important
- I feel that my students were disadvantaged heavily as a result of the Calculated Grades model used for 2020. I believe this because when the results came out [REDACTED] of my [REDACTED] students were

downgraded while only one student in two other higher level classes were downgraded. I felt, at the alignment meeting, that these teachers had overestimated the marks of their students. I had taught some of those students in Junior Cert and there was no way they would've gotten the marks that were awarded to them. I estimated my marks based on the results that I had achieved over the previous years and my marks were broadly in line with what previous students of mine had achieved. I also took into consideration what we, as an English department, had achieved in recent years. I flagged these issues with the Principal before submitting my results and although he took on board my concerns, it appears that there were no major changes (if any at all) to the marks other teachers awarded. I feel my students were penalised because of my honestly held belief on how they would've done in the exam had Covid-19 not happened

- I believe strongly that the level of work that I put in to being fair to the student, was not reflected in the calculated process. This was I assume due to the fact that past performance of the school was not included in the calculation process. As one of the top ranking schools in the country, our students were heavily penalised by this being omitted at a very late stage in the calculation process. It also seemed to me that the Department of Education did not know what they were doing - it seemed that they were making it up as they were going along particularly in August 2020. The whole debacle around the supposedly validated data analytical company using invalid software codes was dreadful. There were plenty of warning bells from the UK - England and Scotland, that our Department should have been able to ensure that their system was fully accountable & validated. I also came away from the whole experience feeling like it didn't matter what grade I gave the student, the calculated grade in many instances did not reflect what I believe was the students' true potential on the day if they sat the LC. I strongly believe that the Department should have held the Leaving Certificate - there were plenty of hotels, sports halls available around the country - the good will of the teachers was there & it would have worked out much better for the student. The students of 2020 were completely left down by our Department of Education and will always be "the class of 2020 that didn't do the LC"
- It was fine however it was unfair that the goalposts were shifted during the process. All factors that were to be taken into account in reaching the calculated grades were not.

Reflecting on the downgrading of the marks/grades they had awarded their students, a number of respondents signalled that they regretted the grades/ranks they awarded and would intentionally inflate their students' results in the future, should the situation arise again. In another case, a respondent referred to the *social engineering* engaged in by the Government to improve the grades of disadvantaged students as something that would encourage his/her departure from the teaching profession:

- I gave a very fair and honest judgement of what my students would have achieved if they had sat the LC and my students were downgraded because other teachers inflated their grades. If this happens again I would have to inflate my grades too so as not to drive disadvantage my students!
- If I were to calculate grades again I would award higher grades to all my students as % were downgraded. I made sure I had similar number of H1s and H2s to previous years (as mentioned

in guidelines) but many were downgraded and as a result of national standardisation the average number of H1s and H2s was lower than in previous 5 years. I am annoyed that I didn't inflate the grades as obviously other teachers in the country were doing this. I feel my students were unfairly disadvantaged and I feel very disappointed for them

- The leaving cert students of 2020 were sold badly short by this process. It's a disgrace that it happened, and it's a disgrace that the government at the time didn't have the backbone to stand up to a social media campaign from students, for the good of the students. The students are either children, or barely adults. They do not know what's best for them, when it comes to their exams. They do not know how the process works (but then again, neither do many teachers). The exams should have gone ahead, and many, many students were cheated out of the grades they deserved, both because the process was inherently flawed anyway, and also because the government engaged in social engineering to improve the grades of disadvantaged students (which included my own students) beyond what they would actually earn in a real exam, rather than treat everyone fairly. I was thinking of leaving teaching anyway, but this is only encouraging me to do so, and if we're going to continue like this, we might as well abolish exams altogether, and assessment of any kind, for that matter
- I did it as honestly as I could. Seeing nationwide inflated grades means if I was doing it again I would give higher marks regardless of evidence I had
- I am a long-standing teacher, but new to my current school, so I had an alignment meeting with the other [REDACTED] teacher, a 2-hour meeting with the DP and a one-hour meeting with their 5th Year teacher. We did our absolute best to come up with the fairest grades for our students and still, some of them were downgraded (unfairly!)
- The process in school was OK and I was reasonably happy with it. What happened afterwards was absolutely unfair. I assessed my students fairly, took hours considering it, worked with colleagues to ensure that this process was as fair as possible. I gave my students an honest grade. We were afraid that if we didn't assess them fairly that the school alignment process would be applied as a blunt instrument and that the students would all have 10% taken off if we appeared to be inflating grades. However, despite our honesty, 50% of my class were downgraded to much lower grades than they would have received had they actually sat the exam! If asked to do this again I would have no choice but to inflate grades unless a different system is used to align between schools
- I was sorry that I marked fairly, I feel I should have awarded higher grades
- Students were hugely marked down in a couple of cases despite giving marks which had a lot of evidence to back them up - this was based on weaker classes in previous years - this class was a far stronger class leaving several students disadvantaged by the department's process where two students were put down by 8-9% at a minimum and possibly more as I did not see the actual mark awarded them in the lower bracket but this made a fool of me and of them and would definitely incline me to give inflated marks next time
- As I mentioned previously, I was strict with how I graded my students under DES advice. Their grades were fair and were in line with previous years and their grade. My student's grades dropped. My students were unfairly treated and the grades that they were pulled down to were not what they would have achieved. I was outraged to be honest. I had an extremely talented class who would have done extremely well. With my professional opinion I gave predicted grades based on the facts I had. Having their grades pulled down undermines my

professional opinion and should this process occur again I would be more lenient with the grades to ensure they will at least get the grade they deserve

- *Any system will work better for some students and worse for others. Given what I now know about what the algorithm did with the grades, I would have been more generous. I gave grades I really believed were fair and wrestled with, and I feel the grades actually awarded were only vaguely based off my hard thought judgements*
- *If we had to do it again I would balloon all my students' results. I'm teaching a few years and I have a fair idea what students will get in an exam and this year my students were marked down because I marked them fairly but teachers in other schools inflated their grades. I'll be adding at least 10-15% in future to ensure they end up with the grade they deserve.*

These final three comments encapsulate a range of issues that the writers argue led to an unfair system – one even describing the CG process as posing ethical challenges:

- *I found it the most ethically challenging task I have ever had to do. Some students lost out based on this method who would have performed much better in a once off exam as they had excellent exam technique. I found it impossible to apply all the criteria suggested by DES. If I took notional factors into consideration, I would be favouring one student over another so I based my ranking on 4 sets of term tests over 2 years and their performance in their LC **Geography** project. Best of luck with survey; it's so important that you are doing this for future direction. Well done*
- *We were provided with statistics relating to how students in our school fared in the past 4 years. We were also provided with the % grade increases between Mocks and LC. This was to highlight how much our students improved in the final 3 months before the LC. We were asked to keep this strongly in our minds when providing grades. In my case students on average improved by 10-30%. This was very difficult to apply to my students and caused me a lot of stress. We were also reminded that students would not know the grades we gave. In my case I am glad that gave students the benefit of the doubt when I did. I believe the Department of Education let me down in allowing my results to be seen. I believe that it was unfair of the Department to change the rules during the process and not allow for past school results. I believe that it was unfair to ask teachers to grade students on work that they had not done/based on what they would have done. I believe it was unfair that we were not paid for this extra work. I believe that the training was inadequate. I believe that students could have been awarded places in college based on their CAO applications and that teachers could have awarded the LC grades but that this would not have been used for college places in Ireland*
- *I approached the process very analytically. There were two main reasons for this. I had upwards of 25 data points for each candidate which allowed me complete a full statistical analysis of each student and how they performed against their classmates over their time at senior cycle... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer). I wanted to ensure when I presented my data for alignment that there was complete transparency in relation to the data I used to determine the final estimated grade. I found that calculating an average rank for each of my students was extremely helpful in determining the final marks I estimated. I consulted with other **science** teachers in my school to discuss their approaches to the process. I found that the methods employed to arrive at an estimated mark varied greatly. I found this very unsettling. While some teachers were as analytical as I was, albeit using different methods, others simply estimated a mark using their professional judgement without*

any rigorous statistical analysis of their students' performance. As a result of the calculated grades process I had a discussion with my current leaving certificate classes when we returned to school in September. I usually employ a system of academic tracking for my students where they plot their scores in assessments undertaken. They also reflect on areas where improvements should be made along with acknowledging their strengths in particular areas (this put me at ease when estimating marks for last year's cohort as they had a documented pattern of attainment in my subject). My current Leaving Certificate students have now asked for their ranking in each assessment carried out which I found interesting. However, I am not seeing an increase in achievement in-line with this. In other words, they are not treating current assessments as a potential decider in their final mark in this subject. I understand this survey relates specifically to the process involved in generating estimated grades for LC2020. However, I would like to voice the anger and frustration felt when a school's previous performance in a subject was removed from the design of the algorithm used to generate the final calculated grade. While this did not have a huge impact on the results obtained by my class group, reference to previous year's performance in a subject was a cornerstone of the process used to generate the estimated mark... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer). While it seems that the majority of candidates are content with the outcome of this system, removal of the school's attainment as a predictor of attainment of this year's cohort was unsatisfactory.

6. Future involvement in Calculated Grades

As a consequence of what many perceived to be a lack of fairness in 2020, some were vociferous that they would not participate in a system of calculated grades again:

- *I was hugely disappointed that at a later date the DES decided to remove the school standardization as I had used that to calculate grades (which we were instructed to do). My subject Ag Science usually scores way above national standard (Vast majority of students from a farming background) which meant that 50-60% of my students were actually brought down a grade when a national standardization was applied. Very disappointing process overall and one I would NEVER involve myself in again*
- *I never want to go through the process of predicted grades again. Despite being told time and time again by the DES that our professional judgement as teachers would be trusted and respected one third of my 26 Leaving Cert students were marked down a grade. I felt totally demotivated and low the day the predicted grades came out, and contemplated what other careers I could do instead of teaching! I did not inflate my students' grades in any way but after seeing the predicted results for my students for 2020 I feel I should have!*
- *The process was deemed essential, in a crisis. Teachers were mandated to calculate grades. Calculated grades was and is the least favoured option of assessment from teachers' perspective*
- *Undervalued, opinion of no/little importance, stressed, lied to, let down.... among a few words to describe how the DES and SEC valued my opinion/treated my professional opinion If asked again next year, I am strongly inclined to refuse or give everyone a H1 as profession and*

experienced opinion obviously didn't matter in the end and let the DES decide. In a nutshell, a disaster from start to finish

- *Never again. Lied to by the DES... rankings were not to be released, only based on FOI requests.... then the DES flip flopped and released them. Nationally there was huge evidence of grade inflation... this was to be expected in a small country where teachers are part of their communities! It was teachers who bore the brunt of "calculated grades" unease locally and nationally, even though principals adjusted grades based on historical school data. Where was the focus on management involvement in this process? This historical data, which restricted fairness in application of grades was then "discounted" with a flawed algorithm.... overall a very bad taste left in teachers' mouths! There was also no leeway in the process for the "exceptional" class group... they were squished into the performance of the last three years' students only! The **syllabus** has been the same since 2004! More data taken into account would have led to even greater statistical reliability in this process. Absolutely no faith in this process or in the DES... too quick to throw teachers under the bus... it just shows that teachers position as "advocates- not judges" for certification purposes must be maintained!*
- *The calculated grades were a sham, a magic trick by the DES to get over a sticky wicket. Now they want research like this to "show" how teachers fell empowered by marking their own students! Pull the other one. The only teachers who support this are those who actually want to be out of the classroom telling others how they should be doing their jobs. WE DO NOT WANT CLASSROOM BASED ASSESSMENTS. Look at the mess that is Junior Cycle, completely dumbed down and impotent as a certified exam. No one cares for the CBAs, not even parents. Don't do the same to the LC. I look forward to seeing this in your research paper!!!*
- *Yes. The process was a joke. It was an insult to the idea of fairness. My students achieved the lowest grades in my subject in my teaching career. All my work and effort in teaching a class to reach a higher than average level of proficiency in **math** was a complete waste of time. I am beyond disgusted at the lack of fairness, broken promises, lies and utter incompetence shown by the DES; I will never participate in such a dishonest charade again. Furthermore, the pall of predicted grades now hangs over current 6th years. They are stressed and it has altered how they behave in relation to me and how they perceive me. I do not want to be the game keeper, I want a professional independent exam that rewards hard work and skill. I do not want to be part of any system that is open to endless legal challenges*
- *I would not want to be involved in this process in future*
- *I would not like to have to estimate grades or rank my students again*
- *I assessed my students fairly based on past results but many of their grades were brought down while grades of other students in other schools were brought up. Disgraceful. I would refuse to do it again*
- *I would under no circumstances take part in such a process again, it breaks the bond between student and teacher. I consider it a disgrace that some officials in the Department of Education and Skills at a Dail committee tried to use the problems associated with the Leaving Cert 2020 to push their agenda of damaging reforms. Reforms that are ill conceived and pushing an outcomes based model of education that is failing all over the world*
- *I feel it was very unfair of the Minister to release the order of merit lists to students. I feel let down by the Department in this regard and feel this could affect relationships between teachers and students adversely. I would be in no hurry to help the Department again as I feel*

they sold us out once we had completed the process for them. I was on sick leave (undergoing chemotherapy) and was called upon to navigate the process with the substitute teacher. It was never acknowledged the time taken or the stress caused until this survey. Eaten bread is soon forgotten! Thanking you

- *Yes - ■ of my ■ students received a grade lower than the one I'd calculated for them. One student, who I awarded an unquestionable 96% to, was brought down to the lower grade. I have no regrets and I stand by my judgements and calculations. Shame on the DES. Thank you*
- *I was utterly disgusted with the failed process of calculated grades. Most of the assertions made to us by the DES turned out to be completely false. We all engaged in good faith, something that was utterly lacking on the other side. Some schools got grades they have never managed before and will never manage again. We were unjustly treated with no right of appeal. Even natural justice was denied. I will NEVER cooperate with any aspect of calculated grades in the future. The DES should be ashamed of themselves.*

In contrast with the overwhelmingly negative comments reported thus far, a number of respondents expressed more nuanced and/or positive views about elements of the process and how it might be improved:

- *The initial feedback from teachers in my school after going through the calculated grades process was very positive, however, this was subsequently undermined by three things: 1) the DES made the school based marks and ranking available to students via the portal. We had initially been told that this would only be available if they put in a data request application, now all students had access to it via the portal. There was no issue with the mark but teachers felt that the ranking should not have been so easily released as it revealed subjective judgements about students in comparison to other students in the class. 2) The problems with the algorithms. 3) The fact that some excellent students who fully deserved the marks assigned by their teachers were marked down because they did not fit the bell curve. Teachers used their best professional judgement to assign a mark they genuinely believed a student deserved but then this was marked down, not due to any information about the individual students or their proficiency in that subject, but for statistical standardisation*
- *I was happy to do this under the circumstances we found ourselves in. I found it very difficult and stressful to rank my students. The alignment process gave me more confidence and reassurance in the grades I had set and rankings. My colleagues support and advice were invaluable. I would not be happy to go through this process again in the future were teachers' predictions were worth 100% of the grade*
- *In a traditionally high achieving academic school, the process of awarding grades was relatively easy and reflective of what they likely WOULD have got in the LC exams. What most of them ACTUALLY got was BELOW what they would have achieved, and hence this particular system failed our/my cohort of students. I personally enjoyed the process and commend all parties involved in their efforts in attempting to come up with a system that was never going to please everyone*
- *Each of my students received the mark that I allocated to them and I was happy with the process*

- *I assessed my class perfectly according to the ranking within the class. I gave everyone about 5 to 10% more than I thought they would get in the belief that standardisation would bring them down. To my surprise the marks were unchanged and the students delighted*
- *While I did find it stressful, and some parts were difficult. I do feel it was the best that was available given the circumstance. I did feel let down by the DES with how the rankings and grade unfolded. I would not like to take part in the process again. I know some of my colleagues gave grades higher than I did, and as a new teacher, it was difficult to question them. In the end, it didn't affect the scores I had given, but could have*
- *The whole process was very new to us and required a lot of work to give each student a fair and unbiased grade. It was stressful but work done to award grade proved very accurate. Thank You*
- *It was a good process but the interference in the late stages and tweaking of the algorithm destroyed the process and shattered any confidence that I would have doing the same process in the future. I heard anecdotal evidence of inflated marks in some schools or subjects, but in most cases I heard reports about fairness. Those exceptions could have been dealt with on an individual basis by the SEC/ DoE, with reference to the three year historical results and the Junior Certificate results. One doubts that the SEC/DoE have entered the ICT age using Data Analytics. Results were in by mid-June; there was plenty of time to hone them. Any savvy teacher would have thought about looking at... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer) ...to ensure that there were not glaring discrepancies. There are approximately 730 schools; not that many for nearly three-month review. I would be happy if it prompted a questioning of the 'Bell curve' process in grading*
- *Calculated grade was a good thing to try as it was marking the whole Senior Cycle educational experience of the student. It was an interesting experiment. I do think the SEC should have let the Teacher's grades stand, do not use a computer to analyse, change or interfere with Teachers Calculated results. Use the Chief Advising Examiners to check the Calculated Results for each subject from each Centre, check those results against previous Centre Reports if it was the same teacher, check the Junior Cert Subject Centre Report from 2017 and 2018. A lot of students did TY. Calculated Results took a lot of time, adding up written work, coursework averages, then applying the same proportion of grades as used in the LC. It took over four days to finalise 22 students Calculated Grades, drawing out spreadsheets in each topic, entering marks for all of 5th and 6th Class work, exams, tests in three different areas, including a day marking exam coursework in school then a second day with another Teacher go back over the coursework grades at an Alignment Meeting. As a past examiner of [redacted] it could possibly take a day to correct 15 candidates. 2020 LC [redacted] was nearly complete and could have been used as a sole indicator of Students work for 50% of grade, discounting previous coursework from 5th Yr. The exam coursework could have even been sent to Athlone for correction. Students should never have been given their Rank Order. In 1992 Junior Cert [redacted] we were told to rank students this soon ended. You could have 4 students on the same line and should not have to choose. It was not good for student's mental health and self-esteem to see their result. It was not a nice end to a - year relationship between teacher and student to rank them and for them to see it. Teachers were betrayed because of a fear of court cases. If parents and students were told it was not good for your self-esteem to see the result perhaps they would have accepted the non-disclosure of rank order. I hope this all makes sense*

- *While I was happy with the grades and rankings I gave my students, I was extremely disappointed in the results they got after the standardisation process. So while my feedback in this survey is very positive, taking the standardisation process into account my feelings on the estimated grade process is completely different. A lot of my students did worse (some dropped 7% to lower grade) than if they sat the exams due to standardisation process so that has negatively affected my view on the estimated grade process*
- *It was an interesting experience to have ONCE but fell far short of assessment by LC examinations + coursework in terms of fair outcomes for students in results and college places secured*
- *I was very annoyed and upset that several students in my class were marked down from H1 to H2 or H2 to H3 by the SEC. These students had worked diligently over a two-year period in order to achieve a high grade required for their future career choice. This was undermined by the SEC awarding them a lower grade despite my assigned grades. If the SEC had asked for further evidence to back up my predicted grades, then I would gladly have submitted them as evidence in my predicted grades. I hope that if predicted grades or some form of assessment is used again, then a student's JC grades should not bear a factor in their final awarded grades*
- *As a teacher of Practical subjects which incorporate various elements – project and practical which add to their final grade, I believe that it left me in a favourable position. I would have consistently been assessing and recording their results since 5th year for each of these elements. This left the calculated grading a more straightforward task for me, as I was able to refer to all the results/data I had recorded*
- *The only problem I had was the total and utter lack of relevance of guidelines and subsequent video of someone reading the guidelines, in case I didn't possess that skill*
- *I would like to know what proportion of the marks we predicted were used and what proportion of JC results was used. What other factors were taken into account?*
- *I think the guidelines were clear and helpful. Having data on prior in class assessments, tests and mocks was very useful. I feel since I had a relatively small number of students in LC compared to other teachers the whole process may have been less stressful for myself*
- *As a one off experience in unprecedented circumstances due to the pandemic I think it was a reasonable process. I however have strong conviction that the written LC exams could have been accommodated in July 2020 by using all the empty post primary-primary and parish halls in the towns and cities*
- *It was a time consuming experience and it took up a degree of mental space/activity as I was inclined to have the students and their calculated grades percolating in my head for some time before I sat down to work through the process. However, once I had done this and sat down to work through the process following the guidelines and advice from the Principal it was a very doable process for about 80% of my students. It was the 20% that I struggled with mostly. However, I am confident that I was very fair to all my students. The alignment meeting with colleagues was very beneficial in reassuring me with my grades*
- *You might consider looking again at the class ranking. The class ranking is decided by the estimated marks (not the other way around), so the class ranking was more of a check to see*

if the “results” felt right. My experience as a LC examiner in my subject means that I was “in the know” whereas the majority of [REDACTED] teachers have not had the experience of examining the written papers. My students may have been disadvantaged because I marked them at the standard I know to be correct

- *I feel that some students were awarded a lower grade by the SEC than the predicted grade awarded by the teacher. The reason I believe this occurred was because a student's JC results was a deciding factor in the overall outcome. This should not have been a valid reason to mark a student down from a H1 to H2 or H2 to H3. Students were awarded a predicted grade based on their continual assessment of work, tests etc. over a two-year period which should carry a greater weighting than a student's Junior Cert result in science*
- *Everything would have been alright had the grades not been changed by curve. Some students feel let down by the system. I answered correctly yet many were changed*
- *I believe the whole process was perhaps a reasonable response to a difficult time. However, the fact that there was no standardisation across schools I feel that this process must not be used again UNTIL there is standardisation. I was extremely stressed throughout the whole process. I know I'm not alone. I do consider myself a professional and believe that some of my calculated grades were a good reflection of the students' work. However, knowing many cram for exams, I felt it very difficult to determine those students' grades. The thought of this happening again without a proper process makes me physically ill*
- *If students knew beforehand then their assessments would be different throughout. It was an impossible situation and so very difficult to measure. Some of my students did great revision and work on projects throughout lockdown and I couldn't take that into account. They were disadvantaged by this in project markings*
- *The only issue I had during the process was the class ranking. We would never rank students so I was disappointed that we had to. Once I had assigned percentages I used that to do the class ranking*
- *Each of my students received the mark that I allocated to them and I was happy with the process*
- *I assessed my class perfectly according to the ranking within the class. I gave everyone about 5 to 10% more than I thought they would get in the belief that standardisation would bring them down. To my surprise the marks were unchanged and the students delighted.*

7. Leaving Certificate reform

Looking to the future of assessment in senior cycle, opinion was divided. A number of respondents were adamantly opposed to any changes to the traditional LC on the basis that, in their view, it offers an objective assessment of student learning:

- *The traditional LC is a rigorous and unbiased system that is the envy of the world. Continuous assessment and/or teachers grading students for official certification must be resisted at all costs. CGs fiasco undermined teacher professionalism to an embarrassing degree. I never want to be forced to take part in a process like that ever again. I'm deeply angry about the CGs fiasco*
- *I believe the system as it is, that is the Leaving Certificate Examination, is the fairest way for students to achieve the grades they want. It's the most uncorrupt system and gives each student an equal chance in the exam. It's the resources that can be accessed before the leaving cert is the part that makes it unequal. For example, access to grinds or extra tuition, access to Studyclix or similar websites*
- *The link between College entry and the Leaving Certificate should be cut completely*
- *We are advocates for our students and should never have to judge them. The State Examinations Commission provide an excellent exam system. They are independent and fair. No system is perfect but the current Leaving Certificate is the best possible system; this year's calculated grades system highlighted this for me*
- *The process works well in a subject like physics. However, in many other subjects I believe inflated grades result from this system. My grading would not have worked had I not experience of the achievements of previous students who sat the LC. I therefore think the LC was important to this process (as were tests and mocks they did) so in a way the exam system is what made it fair in physics and in judging my class. Thus I am not in favour of dropping the current system - while it has its problems and not fair for all it is still 5e best and most independent system that is fair to the majority beyond what other systems are likely to achieve*
- *The process worked well in my school, but I am a strong supporter of the LC exam. In a country where connections and influence still matter too much, the LC exam is a place where hard work and talent reap dividends Whether you are attending [REDACTED] or a nearby DEIS school like my own, you are still just an exam number. The LC exam is universally respected as a true test of student ability, it should not be tampered with by some bureaucrats in Marlborough St just for the sake of change*
- *The LC is brutally fair. Teachers should never have to access their own students*
- *I sincerely hope we will never have to go through that process ever again. A final exam is the only fair method*
- *The predictive grading process confirmed for me that the current leaving certificate is the fairest option for students*
- *We are advocates for our students and should never have to judge them. The State Examinations Commission provide an excellent exam system. They are independent and fair. No system is perfect but the current Leaving Certificate is the best possible system; this year's calculated grades system highlighted this for me*
- *Examinations are necessary, not only to produce grades for students but to provide a clear focus and goal for learners. Good examinations that are externally produced and marked are a positive force in Irish education*
- *The LC is a very fair exam. This is a huge advantage, which we, as parents and teachers (I had a daughter in LC this year), have now been able to witness first hand. Calculated grades was not an effective method of assessing students' ability across a range of subjects. Many students got points they did not deserve (or expect), while others were pulled down and did not receive the recognition they deserved for their years of hard work. Still others who did incredibly well, felt that their results would be forever seen as slightly compromised, which*

indeed they were. If anything, this has shown me that we should NOT be reforming the LC. Fairness is paramount. While some Continuous Assessment may be appropriate, it is essential, that students undergo an unseen, anonymous examination. I feel myself, as a very experienced teacher, that I did a good job for my students under the circumstances. However, I can give hundreds of examples where the results were extremely unfair, both positively and negatively, and where students would have achieved a very different grade in the actual LC. The Calculated Grade system was very hit and miss! Definitely not something to be repeated.

Others expressed more equivocal views, suggesting that the LC might be spread out over a 2-year period, possibly supplemented by some form of continuous assessment to offset the challenges that a high-stakes, summative, assessment such as the LC presents. However, concerns about bias were again foregrounded in the context of *the highly competitive nature of the Irish education system* as was the stress that CA places on students and the need for transparency and consistency in DES messaging if reform is to be introduced:

- *There was and will ever be only one fair way of assessment, that being full external, neutral assessment for state certification purposes. There is a strong argument for ongoing assessment as part of the overall final result but ALL pieces of such material need to be externally assessed as part of the final calculation of grade*
- *I agree with continuous assessment of my students and that this would motivate most and increase attendance for some but the correction of the work must be external not by the teachers themselves in the schools. This will maintain the integrity of the certification. I would like to see the exams in three stages over the leaving cert to incorporate project work in all subjects*
- *I have no problem with being involved in the assessment of my students. I believe that the grades I provide throughout are accurate. However, the exam practise that takes place in the months approaching tends to gain students an extra 5%+ on what their average is, in my experience. The standard the student is operating at the end of the two years is much higher than where they began. The skills they have developed are significant and an average may not recognise that. I would think that in terms of continuous assessment some form of coursework would be best but that it might be that this work would not be done or submitted until 6th Yr. Or final drafts, at least. I see problems with continuous assessment but I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, most likely. Especially in my subject [REDACTED], where a time-pressured exam makes a mockery of the writing and editing skills we are supposed to emphasise*
- *More projects for LC. Not fair having all riding in the outcome of one exam testing two year's study*
- *I have taught for [REDACTED] years. I do not disagree with designated assessment but what happened in June was utterly unfair and devalued the whole process. Have designated exams throughout the year, if that helps, rather than all in one fortnight in June but they must be completely impartial not seen or designed by the teachers on site, they must then be corrected independently because if it is not this way it is subject to bias, inflated grades, fear of letting students down, whom you know for 6 years, even when they got the inflated grade some of the students were very unhappy, even though they may have failed the mocks, they thought somehow a H5 was very bad? They did not have any realisation that there was a direct*

connection between the work they did or did not do and the mark they got. I hope I will never ever take part in such a process again

- Teachers mostly wouldn't disadvantage their students so regardless of the noble aims of conscious or unconscious bias it was and would be there every time. The exam for all its imperfections is still the fairest way to assess with complete anonymity. To bring in continuous assessment, half the leaving should be assessed at the end of 5th year and the rest on 6th year. It would be fair comprehensive and without any kind of bias. Our country is too small for the type of system that exists in other countries and there would always be the dangers of abuses like nepotism simony as well as other types of corruption that exist in other jurisdictions. My solution is achievable but will cost money and could end the now or soon will be defunct Junior Cycle. Third level as a stakeholder in second level education came up with nothing but criticism of the present system but came up with no solutions either temporary or permanent. Third level need to get their own house in order and clean up their own acts first
- It seems that some teachers in some schools 'bumped up' student's results. This had a knock on effect to the whole process. There should be projects in every LC subject/course
- While learning is more focussed by the pupil's when assessment is continuous sometimes the deeper understanding is sacrificed for expediency in learning and practising. This can damage teacher student learning and teaching. We are tracking this year and the girls are finding it stressful but most are becoming accustomed to it, however many are absent due to high anxiety levels. The extra work for staff is considerable and involves again more exam orientated tests and less AfL - the girls feel every result counts towards a possible predicted grade rather than that the test is a piece of work to be learnt from
- My response to the first question in this section is based on the DES decision to downgrade █% of our students in at least one subject. The decision to remove school profiling worked against our school (it was an absurd decision, politically motivated and based on ignorance of the process). For this reason, I would be unwilling to participate in a calculated grades process again even though I am fully supportive of moving to a greater level of school-based assessment at Leaving Certificate level
- I am confident that I applied the predictive scheme fairly and accurately. However, looking at the outcome for the national results, I feel foolish for not inflating my grades. Clearly teachers in some schools were under pressure to produce a very specific set of results; this resulted in a ballooning effect. I know that many of my students were downgraded unfairly and would have done better had they sat the exam. The highly competitive nature of the Irish education system is amplified by the points system, the 'LC industry' (grinds, media etc.) and the privatisation of secondary school; this suggests that a system whereby teachers marks their own students may not work despite its obvious pedagogical advantages
- Please carry out a similar survey on what happened after the process was finished. This research seems incomplete without looking at the next stage of the process and how teachers were NOT consulted on whether they would or would not carry out the work of the CG process; the poor instructions given; the broken agreement by the DES and the subsequent damage to teacher- pupil relationships and teachers now have zero trust in this process. Only those that do not understand or do not work with school-going teenagers would say this was a good process. I for one will never support any element of this type of assessment for certification. The best LC reform would divide the exams over June of 5th and June of 6th year. Continuous assessment does not work with teenagers. They feel totally overwhelmed and constantly stressed in those situations. The majority have not yet got the capacity to be self-disciplined enough. No amount of reform can change the stage of development they are at. Thank you

- *The question of evidence there is key. The DES deliberately asked for no evidence of how the estimation was arrived at. That was a political decision. You cannot under any circumstances compare using a retrospective assessment of a pupil with continuous assessment. These two processes are entirely different in my view. If LC reform does come in and include continuous assessment, the assessment will suffer significantly from what was asked of teachers in calculated grades*
- *I fear that too many of my colleagues got hung up on using pure data from previous summative assessments and felt unable to quantify (or possibly justify) using formative assessment, even those who have implemented tracking systems, or their observational evidence of students in class. Should this model be used again in future, this is an area I feel needs further attention and clarification for teachers.*

Comment was also made on the extended pressure that would be felt by teachers in the event that continuous assessment becomes a more dominant feature at senior cycle:

- *Leaving cert exam is fair and objective, there is huge pressure on teachers to award grades particularly if they know the students. This year wasn't a fair model, if teachers were assessing their own students they would have a paper trail and students and parents would have a realistic idea of what to expect and how the grade was arrived at. Also as calculated grades co-ordinator, it was difficult to enter a grade that you knew has serious repercussions for a student e.g., a student getting 500 points and failing Ordinary level Irish therefore unable to take up a lot of University courses. Parents and student did challenge me and the Principal on how I could let this happen and were not happy that I just had an administrative role in submitting the grades*
- *If you are involved in the CBA or SLAR process, you know that there will be an entire overhaul to the system before teachers will be giving grades as parts of continuous assessment. The current educational climate is unwilling to let any student fail so all the teachers are helping them to complete all in class material whether it is projects, or assessment tasks. I am not helping more than is outlined but I have corrected 30 scripts in a row that all have the same cut and paste. And I am aware this is due on the majority to parent pressure. Until that is removed from the equation then students will be awarded the highest marks by teachers. Even like a pen-pal system. Teachers swap with another local school, no idea who is correcting yours and who you are correcting. With a very strict marking scheme so you don't have discrepancies*
- *I felt the calculated grades system was fine from my perspective and was the only option available to the DES but I would not like to see this implemented in the future. I am against the concept of teachers assessing their own students for the purposes of state certification. It was reasonably fine in so far as we as teachers had no direct contact with the students from the beginning to the completion of the calculated grades process. If this system was introduced it would put teachers in a very difficult situation dealing with students and parents right through senior cycle. The pupil-teacher relationship would become flawed. As a **math** teacher numerical data doesn't lie and my students got what their assessment marks produced and there was no deviation from these results. As an experienced state exam corrector all my assessments are marked in line with state exam procedure so their assessments are an accurate reflection of their ability and potential grades.*

Specific concern was raised about the quality and usability of formative assessment data to inform the awarding of marks/ranks in modern and foreign language (MFL) teaching in particular. The potential for a washback effect, including student overload and fatigue, arising from ongoing CBA used to inform calculated grades, was also highlighted. Attention was drawn too to the plight of students facing the LC in 2022:

- I found the whole process extremely stressful. In previous subject inspections we were told to provide formative feedback in the form of comments and recommendations for specific areas for improvement for each student. These comments were not recorded and a simple word in the teachers' journal (excellent, good etc.) was the only record for many pieces of written work. This caused a difficulty in language subjects where it is not appropriate to grade every task with a percentage. In some cases, students had scored highly in easier exam questions set in class or for homework and had not submitted the harder written pieces. This led to some difficulty in trying to calculate where those students really were in terms of their learning. Another difficulty was that the process did not allow for the tremendous improvement made in LC MFL once students have finished their oral. Written work tends to improve greatly after the intense preparation for the oral and some students can really improve their grade in those final 8 weeks or so of term. This was very hard to calculate and I felt I had to really rely on past experience to calculate the trajectory that some students were on. If a student had a teacher who was new to teaching then they may have been unfairly disadvantaged due to that teacher's lack of experience, where the teacher had to rely solely on recorded grades. The knock on effect for this year's 6th years and my concern about the LC reform, is that it makes every single task seem like a 'high stakes' task. Students may resort to using translation apps to ensure written work is perfect, to attain a short term high mark that will go on their record. However, this hinders true learning as students do not learn from their mistakes or learn the craft of putting a sentence together correctly when they are using translation services. If LC reform in MFL is to take place, there must be consultation with MFL teachers as it is not the same as gathering data in other subjects. Learning a language is a gradual process and students cannot be assessed using the same criteria at the start of 5th year and the end of 6th year. As a teacher and a parent of a LC 2021 student, I would be very concerned that the role of the teacher moves from advocate and cheerleader to judge, jury and executioner in LC reform. There must be investment from the SEC to carry out independent assessment if we are to move to a continuous assessment system*
- I think there ought to be an acknowledgement of the stress and tension currently being experienced by the students of 2021 who feel as if they are too facing uncharted territory. In terms of student voice, in our school we are hearing reports of many students facing more stress, pressure and anxiety as their teachers may be over assessing "just in case the same thing happens again"*
- While the process can have some benefits such as improved attendance and more focused from beginning of 6th year, I feel that this is very student dependent and similarly a student may become more detached if they feel that the teacher has power over their outcome in the certificate exams. It is widely known that not all students and teachers get on and students who might have had a bad experience with a teacher in junior years might not have an opportunity to "choose" teachers and could feel that they do not stand a chance...even though a teacher's professionalism would not allow this. Similarly, I think it could negatively affect a teacher's approach to teaching and learning as every assessment/ evidence produced in the class might be needed to work towards a calculated grade. This would actually be more*

harmful as it could put more stress on students to always "perform" so as not to negatively affect their predicted outcomes. In this way instead of having 2-3 stressful weeks in June of leaving cert they could be having 2 years of stress. It also must be considered that many of us teachers live in the same communities as our students. Being that responsible for someone's results in a certified exam is not something I wish to partake in. In the extreme, unlikely circumstances we saw ourselves in last year it was doable but long term I feel it would make me uncomfortable and may ruin relationships I have built with students. I think while the traditional leaving cert does not work for everyone, it is quite a fair system, and the terminal exam, again while not suited for everyone, gives some others the chance to pull it together after maybe a poor year or a disengaged period for whatever reason. At the end of the day the teenage years are a turbulent one and to facilitate a system where students have to perform at all times for their two years of school and have a number of projects or continuous assessments in different subjects at the same/ overlapping times is, in my opinion, not feasible. I see it currently with the CBAs in junior cycle where many students are fatigued by the constant CBA focus and overload

- *I will never do this again. We are there to guide and help not sit in judgement, particularly when that judgement is not based on the individual, but a class as a whole. My school and class are very high achieving... The majority have and would get a H2+ ...students should not be 'pulled down' because 'too many' got a H2. This year's students are afraid to get anything wrong in case it goes against them for future predictive grades. This is causing very high levels of anxiety to the point where I have had to promise not to record the results of a test... in case it gets used.*

A minority indicated that they favoured more radical reform including more extensive use of a calculated grading system and greater flexibility in the assessment process for state certification particularly for vulnerable groups (e.g., students suffering a bereavement), albeit DES motives for seeking reform were questioned (as were the motives behind the survey question):

- *I found the whole process very interesting. If this was rolled out across the country going forward, it would promote student motivation*
- *I think it would benefit students enormously to have greater flexibility in the assessment process for state certification. In one sense our school does very well in that we have continuous assessment throughout 5th and 6th year. On the other hand, there are some very informal practices in regard to SLAR meetings in the subject I teach... (part of the comment is omitted to preserve the identity of the writer). I attended a SLAR meeting in another school I worked in and it was an extremely positive experience, because everybody was well prepared and we discussed examples of work in detail. It was probably the best example of collaboration that I have experienced teaching in an Irish post-primary school. (I also taught in Scotland, where collaboration among subject teachers is embedded in the school structure, including in a timetabled weekly meeting of all same subject teachers.) I'd love to see teachers assessing pupils' work for certification, but unfortunately it failed to be acceptable for Junior Cycle. Pity teachers' unions are so resistant*
- *This could be a very useful process for students who fail to sit exams due to ill health, death of a family member etc. However, I fear to think that it may be a back door method utilised by the Department of Education to cut down on their expenses when conducting the exams*

- *I believe that the calculated grading system needs to be implemented across the system. I think there needs to be better guidance for schools and staff on how to complete this process in an ethical manner which will minimize the opportunity for unfairness and bias.*

Comments on the survey instrument

It will have been noted from comments listed earlier under previous themes that a number of respondents expressed their gratitude for the invitation to participate in the survey with one noting that it had been the only opportunity afforded to teachers to provide feedback on their experiences of the calculated grades process (*I would like to thank the researchers for taking the time to carry out this survey, as a teacher, I am not aware of any effort to consult teachers prior to, during or after the process for any opinions of evidence that might inform the process or inform a review of the process*). A small number of respondents commented specifically on the questionnaire instrument itself:

- *I actually was disappointed that this questionnaire asked such leading questions. It appeared that a conclusion had been made before designing it. I believe the majority of teachers assessed fairly since they know their students and they know their capabilities. However, I would not be comfortable being put in that position again, not to mention the fact that in rural schools we know and meet the students and parents but also the fact that it was such a stressful time for students and teachers*
- *Loaded survey, fully aware of the intended outcome.....there's plenty of independent assessment and project work in the LC as is.....why dumb it down like the JC?*
- *I teach in Further Education and I feel this was not thought about in this survey. Your questions were very focused on secondary school teachers. Further Education teachers have tons of experience in setting and correcting exams. Your survey is a very narrow snap shot which I feel does not capture the full picture. What frustrated me in the marking scheme which you never touched on in your survey was why was it difficult to mark. For me we have huge problems with attendance. I felt a terrible pressure to mark students who I didn't know or had no work from. In one case I gave a student a good mark based on his mock paper only. I never saw him. There was pressure from management to pass the students, even though they had poor attendance, didn't submit during the year. For the regular students who did attend and engage, this was not a problem to mark their work, and it was done fairly*
- *I found it a difficult process as I felt it was foisted upon us with no training or previous experience. Just a point of interest for yourselves. This is a good survey and well done but there is an error in question 11(2). I think it should read 'in terms of the grades they got' not 'in turns of the grades....'*

Cancellation of the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2020 as a result of Covid-19 and the subsequent involvement of post-primary teachers in estimating marks and ranks for their own students as part of the Calculated Grades process were unique events in the history of Irish education. In the closing months of 2020, following the publication of Leaving Certificate results and completion of the appeals process, an online questionnaire survey of post-primary teachers involved in the Calculated Grades process was conducted.

Two research questions were addressed:

1. How did post-primary teachers engage with the process of Calculated Grades in their schools?
2. How did the process impact how they view their role as assessors?

Preliminary findings with respect to the data from 713 respondents provide much food for thought and are timely given the decision to offer students a choice of taking Calculated Grades (now called Accredited Grades) in 2021.

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