An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

A Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate students 2020

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1. Introduction

Owing to the Covid-19 crisis, it is not possible to operate the Leaving Certificate examinations safely in July/August 2020 as planned. Existing and anticipated physical and practical requirements to protect the health of all citizens mean that the holding of the examinations is not feasible.

The Minister for Education and Skills recognises the need to facilitate students in the Leaving Certificate class of 2020 in their progression to further or higher education or the world of work. To achieve this in the current circumstances, he is offering a system of calculated grades.

2. What is a calculated grade?

A Calculated Grade is a grade that can be provided to students following the combination of school information about a student's expected performance in an examination and national data available in relation to the performance of students in examinations over a period of time.

A calculated grade results 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 available from the **State Examinations Commission** – this includes data on past performance of students in each school and nationally.

The combination of these data sets through a process of national standardisation can determine the grade to be awarded to each student in each subject, thereby resulting in a calculated grade.

3. Principles underpinning a system of calculated grades

The system of calculated grades that is being offered is based on the following key principles:

- ***Teacher professionalism:*** Teachers know their students and can balance a variety of factors in arriving at a professional judgement in relation to their students' expected performance. Their professional code of practice, underpinned by the values of *Integrity, Trust, Care and Respect* is core to how they work in schools to ensure the best outcomes for their students.
- ***Support for students:*** Ensuring that student wellbeing is promoted and that the need for students to be provided with valid certification is satisfied.

- ***Objectivity:*** Teachers and schools will be objective in their assessment of the student's expected performance and will take into consideration a range of evidence to support the judgments that are made. Schools and teachers will work collaboratively to ensure that no bias, conscious or unconscious, influences the decisions made in relation to a student's expected performance.
- ***Fairness and equity:*** Schools and teachers will strive to achieve fairness and equity in the way in which they apply the process at school level.
- ***Collaboration:*** A collaborative approach will be used in schools to ensure that each stage of the process is completed.
- ***Timeliness****:* Schools and teachers will ensure that the deadlines set for the completion of the in-school processes are met and that each stage is completed within the designated timeframe.

4. Key steps in the process of arriving at a calculated grade

There are **two main phases** in the process of arriving at a calculated grade:

- A school-based phase
- A national standardisation phase

Both phases are underpinned by the principles noted above. In addition, and in the spirit of fairness to all Leaving Certificate students, the option of sitting the Leaving Certificate examinations when it becomes feasible to hold them remains open to all students.

The process of arriving at a calculate grade applies to:

- Established Leaving Certificate – subjects
- Leaving Certificate Applied – subjects, tasks and vocational specialisms
- Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme – Link Modules.

5. The role of the school

The role of the school is to provide marks and rankings that reflect:

- An **estimation of the percentage mark** in each subject that each candidate is likely to have achieved if they had sat the Leaving Certificate examination in 2020 under normal conditions
- A **class ranking** for each student in each subject – i.e. a list of all the candidates for a particular subject in a class in the order of their estimated level of achievement.

In providing the above estimated marks and rankings, there will be **four main school-based steps**:

- The teacher's estimation of student marks and rankings
- School alignment of marks for a subject through a subject alignment group comprising teachers who are teaching the subject to Leaving Certificate students this year
- Oversight of the alignment process by the school principal
- Transmission of the marks and rankings for national standardisation.

Each of these steps is set out in detail below.

6. Teacher's estimation

There is a strong body of research confirming the ability of teachers to make accurate professional judgements in relation to rank ordering students within their class groups and to assign estimated marks, particularly where the nature, structure and demands of the examination or test are very familiar to them.

In this step of the process, the teacher of each Leaving Certificate class will be asked to provide:

1 His/her estimate of the **percentage mark** for his/her subject that each candidate is most likely to have achieved, had he/she sat a Leaving Certificate examination in 2020 as normal

2 A **class rank order** – that is, a list of all the candidates in a class for his/her particular class group in the subject in order of the predicted level of achievement of each candidate.

6.1 What informs the teacher's estimated marks and rankings?

In coming to their judgements, teachers should draw on existing records and available evidence. It is important that the judgements are objective, and they should only take account of information about student performance. This will include the following, where available:

- Records of each student's performance over the course of study including for example, classwork and homework

- Performance on any class assessments for example, house exams, Christmas exams, summer examinations and (with caveats) mock examinations taken over the course of study
- Performance on any coursework component, even if this has not been fully completed
- Previous results in the school in this subject
- The level of performance the teacher has observed in this year's students compared to those in previous years
- Any other relevant information related to student performance.

6.2 Are additional assessments required?

The teacher's judgement will be based on evidence of learning and achievement such as that indicated above up until the point of school closure. Teachers will **not** set additional assessments for the purposes of determining an estimated percentage mark.

6.3 What about work done or not done by students since schools closed in March?

Where additional work has been completed after schools were closed on 13 March, teachers will be advised to exercise due caution where that work suggests a change in performance. In many cases, this is likely to reflect the circumstances and context in which the work is done rather than what might have happened if everything had been normal. This caution about interpreting what has happened since schools closed will not, of course, preclude teachers from taking account of the degree to which many students under normal circumstances would intensify their levels of commitment in the run-up to the examinations.

6.4 Some subject-specific issues

Most subjects have more than one examination component –for example, coursework, two written papers, an oral or practical examination. Teachers should give each component its usual weighting for the Leaving Certificate examination and provide a single overall mark for the subject as a whole, not a separate mark for each component.

6.4.1 Languages and music

When making estimates for language subjects, teachers should base them on the assumption that the oral examination component would have proceeded as usual. Likewise, for Music, teachers should base the estimate on the assumption that the performance test would have proceeded and the candidate performed to their expected standard.

The earlier arrangement (communicated in March) that full marks would be awarded in respect of the orals and music performance tests was predicated on the written examinations proceeding this summer. As the examinations will not proceed that arrangement will not apply.

6.4.2 Subjects with coursework

In the case of coursework that has already been completed, a teacher's overall estimate should incorporate the mark they think that this coursework would have achieved if it had been marked in the usual way.

6.4.3 Answering through Irish

In the case of students who are entered to take their examinations through Irish, the teacher should base the estimate of the student's likely performance on the assumption that this bonus is included in the estimate. If the teacher is unsure how the bonus applies in their subject, information is available at www.education.ie.

6.5 Fairness and equity

As noted in Section 3 of this Guide, principles of equity, fairness and objectivity are paramount in the calculated grades system. Teachers should do their best to remain alert to possible sources of unconscious bias that might affect the estimates. For instance, research shows that teacher estimates of student performance may be affected by the teacher's experience and perceptions of the student's classroom behaviour, or their knowledge about a student's socio-economic or family background. By being alert to this source of unconscious bias, teachers can focus objectively on information that is clearly about attainment in the subject and not about other factors.

If there is a real or perceived conflict of interest involved in giving an estimated mark to a particular student (such as a close relative) in a teacher's class, the teacher will draw the

attention of the principal to this. There will be additional oversight by a nominated teacher and a deputy principal in such cases. If the conflict of interest arises for a principal who is teaching the student, she/he will so advise the deputy principal.

6.6 Reasonable accommodations for students with special educational needs

Where any reasonable accommodation has been approved for any student (such as a reader or scribe), the teacher will base the estimate of the student's likely performance on the assumption that this accommodation would have been available.

6.7 Students who are new to the class or school

If a student has joined the class from another class in the school, the teacher will consult with the previous teacher and get whatever relevant records they have. If the student has joined the class from another school, and if the length of time is such that the teacher considers he/she does not have enough evidence to make a sound judgement, he/she should consult with school management about acquiring additional information from the student's previous school. It may not be possible to get this, in which case the teacher will still need to make the best judgement he/she can on the information available.

7. School alignment of marks

In this step of the process, subject teachers together review the teachers' estimated scores for students who are taking that subject. Following this element of the alignment process, each teacher will finalise the estimated scores and the rank order of their students in the class. If there is only one teacher of the subject in the school, the subject teacher conducts the in-school alignment process with the Deputy Principal of the school.

7.1 What is the purpose of school alignment of marks?

The purpose of school alignment of marks is to ensure that:

- The process of estimating scores and rank ordering students within a class is correctly applied by each teacher

- The estimated mark awarded by a teacher and the class rank order correspond exactly with each other

7.2 How is the school alignment process organised?

Prior to the alignment process, each subject teacher drafts the initial estimated scores and class rank order for each of their students and class groups. A separate rank order will be required for higher, ordinary and foundation levels where relevant.

7.2.1 What happens during the alignment process?

A consultative engagement that is inclusive of all the relevant teachers is put in place. The alignment process should be designed in a way that enables group reflection and discussion by the teachers of a particular subject (the subject alignment group) with a focus on ensuring that the process of arriving at estimated marks and rank ordering has been correctly applied and that marks have been properly aligned.

7.2.3 What is the next step in the alignment process?

Following the consultative engagement, each teacher reviews his/her class group data sets (i.e. estimated marks and rankings), adjusts if necessary, and finalises a completed estimated mark form for each student in the class group. These individual student forms and the completed rank order form for the class group are submitted to the school principal through the subject alignment group as the product of the subject alignment process.

It should be noted that in the course of the process only the class teacher can change the estimated mark or rank order for a class group.

8. Oversight of the marks/ranking process by the school principal

The third school-based step in the provision of marks and rankings **is the oversight of the marks and ranking process** by the school principal. In line with the principles of fairness, equity and objectivity, the principal reviews the process applied to the collection of data to assure the fair treatment of individual students and to ensure that a uniformity of standard is applied within the school and in situations where more than one class group is entered for a subject. In this regard, the principal will ensure that different teachers of the same subject within the school are applying similar standards.

In this step of the process, the principal:

- Reviews the data sets submitted to him/her by the subject alignment groups
- Assures himself/herself of the fairness of the processes to that point
- Where it appears that an anomaly or error has arisen, returns a data set for further review to the subject alignment group. In such circumstances, the principal does not have a role in altering a student's estimated mark or rank; his/her role is to return the queried marks/rankings to the subject alignment group for further review.

8.1 What are the grounds on which a principal may return data sets for further review?

A principal may return the data sets to the subject alignment group for further review if he/she reasonably believes that one or more of the following grounds may apply:

- There was a procedural flaw in the process up to this point – for example a misalignment between the estimated mark and the rank order for a class group
- There were unexplained inconsistencies in the data sets submitted following the subject alignment stage
- There is persuasive evidence that a student's estimated mark is inconsistent with the school's information on the student's achievement from a range of sources (See Section 6.1. above)
- There is evidence of lack of objectivity (bias, discrimination) in the procedures as applied.

In instances where the data sets are returned by the principal to the subject alignment group for further consideration, the principal indicates the reason(s)/stated grounds for the return of the data. The stated grounds are confined to one or more of the above grounds. The group will consider the stated ground(s), make any necessary adjustments, and return its final consideration to the principal.

9. Transmission of estimated marks and rankings for national standardisation

The finalised data sets are submitted to the DES by the principal (ideally by end May 2020).

10. National standardisation using statistical methods

Research makes clear that because teacher judgments are made in the context of each school, they need to be examined and adjusted at a national level to ensure comparability across different schools and that a common national standard is applied.

10.1 How will the State Examination Commission data be used in the process?

The school-sourced data will be combined with historical data available from the SEC through a process called standardisation in order to generate the calculated grade for the students in the subject. This standardisation process will bring the two data sets into alignment with each other and will be used to ensure the calculated grades reflect standards that are properly aligned across schools and with a common national standard.

10.2 What happens to the school data in this process?

The rank order within the class group is preserved in the statistical process. However, the teachers' estimated marks from each school will be adjusted to bring them into line with the expected distribution for the school. Each school's expected distributions will be arrived at from the statistical analysis of all the historic SEC datasets. These data sets allow the production of good calculations of the distributions of marks to be expected for each school and nationally.

The relevant State Examinations Commission data sets that support the process include mark data at:

- **National level** for both Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate examinations for 2019 and previous years;
- **School level** for both Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate examinations for 2019 and previous years;
- **Candidate level** for both Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate examinations for 2019 and previous years;
- **Candidate level** for the Junior Certificate results of the 2020 Leaving Certificate cohort of candidates.

10.3 Processing the school level data

In advance of receiving the estimated marks from schools, a detailed analysis on a subject-by-subject and school-by-school basis as to how students from each school have performed in that subject in the recent years will be completed as part of the national standardisation process.

Estimated marks and class rank orders will be collected from schools. The preliminary calculated expected distribution of marks for the school will be used to adjust the estimated marks submitted by the school, in the standardisation process. In arriving at this distribution account will be taken of prior performance data for the school and candidates in the 2020 cohort.

After the standardisation process, the calculated marks will be converted into calculated grades, and these grades will be issued to candidates. The calculated grades will be expressed in the same manner as currently applies to Leaving Certificate grades – H1 etc.

10.4 Issuing of calculated grades

It is intended that calculated grades will be provided to candidates as close as possible to the normal results day.

11. Ensuring objectivity and fairness

11.1 Processing of school's estimated marks/rankings

At the core of both the school-based and national standardisation phases of the system of calculated grades is a commitment to objectivity and fairness. To ensure this, the school-based process must not be compromised.

Therefore, the principal, deputy principal(s), teachers or other members of the school staff must not under any circumstances discuss with any student or with the parents or guardians of any student the estimated marks that the school is submitting. There are two reasons for this:

- The mark assigned by the school is not necessarily the final mark that the student will receive and it would therefore be misleading for the student to receive that mark before the calculated grade processes are complete
- Allowing access to and discussion of estimated grades before the calculated grades process is complete would interfere with the process being carried out properly and fairly. If teachers discussed the marks with some students but not

others, of if some teachers did this and others did not, these discussions might actually influence (consciously or unconsciously) or be represented or construed as influencing the mark the teacher submits to the subject alignment group.

After the results are issued, students will be able to see the final mark that led to their grade.

11.2 Appeals

It is open to a candidate to appeal his/her calculated grades.

- The appeal process will include a three-stage process involving:
    - A series of checks that data was correctly entered at school level and correctly transferred to the DES
    - A review that the data was correctly received and processed by the DES
    - If a candidate remains dissatisfied after notification of outcome of the above two stages, verification of the DES processes by independent appeal scrutineers

    In addition, the DES will arrange for an independent international expert unconnected with the design of the calculated grades model to provide overall validation on the model, including the operation of the appeals system.

- Finally, candidates who remained unhappy with the outcome of the calculated grade awarded would have the opportunity to sit a normal Leaving Certificate written examination in the subject(s) when the holding of conventional examinations becomes possible. If a candidate sat such an examination and achieved a higher grade that his/her calculated grade:

    - the stated results provided to the candidate would be amended
    - if the improvement in the candidate's grade meant that he/she would have been entitled to a higher offer of a CAO course, he/she would be facilitated in taking up that place as soon as practicable.

12. Calculated grades 2020

Finally, it should be noted that calculated grades are being offered as an option to students in 2020 simply because of the unprecedented impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on their education. The Department of Education and Skills and all the education partners recognise that exceptional measures are required in 2020 for the assessment and certification of students' learning but that implementation of these measures will not be regarded as a precedent or as agreement to operate such measures in future years.