



# CALCULATED GRADES 2020 EXTERNAL REVIEWER STATEMENT

Statement in Advance of the Issue of Results  
September 2nd, 2020

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## Calculated Grades 2020

### 1. Background

The Government decided on 8 May 2020 to establish a system to be operated by the Minister on an administrative basis pursuant to executive powers of Government under Article 28.2 of the Constitution whereby Leaving Certificate candidates could opt to have calculated grades issued to them by the Minister in order to facilitate their progress to third-level education or the world of work in Autumn 2020

### 2. Quality assurance and integrity of the process for Calculated Grades

Government also decided to establish a non-statutory executive office in the Department of Education to deliver the calculated grades system (in the context that the State Examinations Commission does not have the statutory scope to run such a system under its current statutory mandate) and a non-statutory steering committee under the authority of the Minister, to oversee the process of implementation of calculated grades, from the perspective of quality assurance and integrity.

An independent expert unconnected with the design of the calculated grades model to provide overall validation on the model, including the operation of the appeals system is also to be appointed.

The independent expert is Dr Janet Brown, former Chief Executive Officer of the Scottish Qualifications Authority who will fulfil a role as External Reviewer of the system of calculated grades.

### 3. Remit

The independent expert will provide further independent oversight of the system of calculated grades by fulfilling a role as External Reviewer.

The External Reviewer role will involve;

- a review and validation of the methodology, approach, and process to be used in the implementation and delivery of the system of calculated grades.
- validation, through a review of reports at critical points in the project, of the Calculated Grades system including the application of the standardisation model by the main agent, and the agent carrying out the replication of the data processing,
- monitoring and reviewing overall progress at key points and reviewing the process at the end to confirm that it executed as planned.

The External Reviewer will provide two statements; one in advance of the issue of the results and one in advance of the issue of the appeal results.

These statements will be provided to the Department of Education which will in turn provide the statements to the Independent Steering Committee in furtherance of the Committee's governance role.

The External Reviewer will also be available to provide updates to the Independent Steering Committee.

## Methodology

The External reviewer was appointed on August 7<sup>th</sup> and given the date of appointment, a desk-based review was undertaken of the documentation associated the development, governance of and implementation of the approach to Calculated Grades.

The paper issued by the Department of Education and Skills '*Calculated Grades Data Collection, National Standardisation and Quality Assurance Processes*'<sup>1</sup> clearly outlines the approach being taken for certification in 2020. This has been used as the basis to define a series of milestones and check points that enables appropriate monitoring of compliance and progress this plan.

The following checkpoints have been reviewed:

1. Review of the Proposed Model<sup>2 3</sup>
2. Communications on the Process to be employed<sup>4 5 6</sup>
3. Governance<sup>7 8</sup>
4. Collection of Data from Schools<sup>9</sup>
5. Status of Data received from Schools<sup>10</sup>
6. Evidence and final approval of the National Standardisation Process<sup>11</sup>
7. Development and final approval of model<sup>12 13</sup>
8. Ongoing status reporting<sup>14</sup>
9. Oversight by National Standardisation Group<sup>15 16 17 18</sup>
10. Oversight by Independent Steering Group<sup>19 20 21</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated Grades Data Collection, National Standardisation and Quality Assurance Processes (20/7/2020)

<sup>2</sup> Methodological Considerations for 2020 Leaving Certificate V4

<sup>3</sup> Discussion paper for SEC-DES Technical Working Group on Calculated Results

<sup>4</sup> [Getting My Calculate Grades - A guide for Students](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Information from the Department of Education and Skills](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Leaving Certificate 2020 and calculated grades](#)

<sup>7</sup> Department of Education and Skills: Calculated Grades Executive Office, Governance Framework

<sup>8</sup> National Standardisation Group – Decision Making Framework

<sup>9</sup> Programme Board for Calculated Grades

<sup>10</sup> Interim Report on LC2020 Data Verification

<sup>11</sup> Email communication from Department of Education

<sup>12</sup> National Standardisation Group Meeting Minutes

<sup>13</sup> Description of Progress in Modelling LC2020 Data to Calculate Student Scores

<sup>14</sup> Progress Update – Calculated Grades Executive Office

<sup>15</sup> National Standardisation Group Meeting Minutes

<sup>16</sup> Junior Certificate/Cycle Composite Input Measure

<sup>17</sup> Regression Model for New Subjects

<sup>18</sup> The application of conditioning distributions at class or school level

<sup>19</sup> Requests for further information & Questions from Independent Steering Group

<sup>20</sup> Preliminary Report from the National Standardisation Group to the Independent Steering Committee

<sup>21</sup> Minutes of meetings of Independent Steering Committee

# Independent Expert Reviewer Statement

## September 2nd, 2020

### Summary

It is evident that the provision of calculated grades for the Leaving Certificate 2020 has been approached from the perspective of fairness and a concern for the learner. There was significant research conducted to gain an understanding of the nature of the challenge both from the aspect of teacher assessment but also from that of the challenges of statistical modelling.

The approach was well planned with key elements being focus on governance and decision making; data integrity and validation; and oversight and challenge; and responsiveness and flexibility. The implementation has demonstrated the effectiveness of level of planning, the importance of continuous review and the commitment of those involved.

#### 1. Governance:

The establishment and role of the Calculated Grades Office is clearly set out and provides the basis for the strong governance mechanism that was established with clear remits and responsibilities for the groups established to oversee the development and delivery. Overall, there was good adherence to the governance approach and appropriate information and discussion can be seen to have taken place to ensure that informed decisions were taken at key points in the process. There was clear evidence that any follow-on questions were answered, and issues addressed.

#### 2. Communications:

There was clear evidence of detailed, timely and accessible communications to key stakeholders and the general public of the approach being taken to the system of Calculated Grades for the Leaving Certificate in 2020.

#### 3. Methodological Considerations for the 2020 Leaving Certificate

There was evidence that the overall approach was based on peer reviewed research into the experience of teacher assessment, a well-articulated statistical model taking into account a variety of factors and a clear direction for the need for on-going validation that would lead to the fairest outcome for learners. The documentation highlighted areas where further decisions would need to be taken as the iterative approach progressed.

#### 4. Validation of the Model

There is clear evidence of approval from the National Standardisation Group (NSG) of the input measures that would be included in the model. These have evolved over time and have been presented and discussed in detail with the NSG and will be subject to final approval prior to the issuing of results.

#### 5. National Standardisation and Quality Assurance Processes

Data integrity has been monitored at both the input (Student level data) and as the statistical model has been applied. Reassurance on data integrity and quality assurance was reported to the NSG and to the Independent Steering Committee noting the role of the Educational Research Centre in data verification, validation and quality assurance throughout all stages of the project including progress by the primary provider Polymetrika International Inc (PII).

## 6. National Standardisation Group (NSG)

There is well documented evidence that this group has fulfilled its remit and has engaged fully in the development and evolution of the model and has been the approving body for key decisions in line with its terms of reference.

## 7. Independent Steering Group (ISG)

The ISG has executed its remit to challenge and oversee the process and has engaged comprehensively through all stages of the process.

## 8. Final Approval of National Standardisation Process (NSP)

The finalised NSP was agreed as per the Governance arrangements and based outcomes that supported the overall goals established at the outset of the process.

The approach on calculated grades was then submitted to and approved by the Irish Government.