



CALCULATED GRADES 2020 EXTERNAL REVIEWER STATEMENT

Statement on Appeals Process
October 13th, 2020

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Methodology

The External reviewer has undertaken a desk-based review of the documentation associated the implementation of the approach to appeals for Calculated Grades.

The following points have been reviewed:

1. Clear commitments made about the appeals process^{1 2 3 4}
2. Communication to students and stakeholders of the scope
3. Adherence to the published timetable and execution of the process
4. Management and Governance
5. Control of the process⁵

¹ [A Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate students 2020](#)

² [Calculated Grades – A Guide for Leaving Certificate Students 2020](#)

³ [Calculated Grades – A Guide for Parents and Guardians of Leaving Certificate Students 2020](#)

⁴ [Leaving Certificate 2020: Your questions answered - October 2020](#)

⁵ Calculated Grades Scope and Nature of Appeals Process (Working Paper)

Independent Expert Reviewer Statement

Appeals Process

October 13th, 2020

Summary

It is evident that the provision and execution of an appeals process for calculated grades for the Leaving Certificate 2020 has been approached from the perspective of fairness and a concern for the learner.

It was seen as fundamental to the adoption of a system of Calculated Grades from the outset that the professional judgement of the school (teachers and principals) would be outside the scope of the appeals process. The appeals system was therefore restricted to looking for technical errors in the data provided on behalf of students and in the processing of that data.

The appeals process that is being reviewed is distinct from and has no relationship to the reissuance of grades recently that resulted from coding issues.

The mechanisms outlined in the documentation indicate a well planned and executed approach. Quality assurance in the checking for technical errors has involved the use of experienced staff in the manual validation and incorporating an IT based validation. These, taken with alongside the ability to escalate any further student concerns through the Independent Appeals Scrutineers should ensure a robust outcome for learners.

1. Commitments made about the Appeals Process

In the context of the system of Calculated Grades, there have been some published commitments about the access to information and the nature of the system of appeals that will apply which have been set out in the published documentation about the calculated grades system.

These commitments state that there will be a three-stage process:

Stage 1: Checks will be undertaken to ensure that the intended information was recorded correctly by the school and that the information was transferred correctly into the data collection system.

Stage 2: There will be also be a review to ensure that the data was correctly received and processed in the national standardisation process conducted by the Department.

Stage 3: Students unhappy with the outcome of this process can seek a review by Independent Appeal Scrutineers.

Stages 1 and 2 would be undertaken at the same time following the initial application by the student. Stage 3 would be a separate process which can be invoked by any student dissatisfied by the outcome of the initial appeal.

Students who remain unhappy with the outcome of the calculated grade awarded have the opportunity to sit the 2020 Leaving Certificate written examinations at a later stage when it is safe to do so.

The published appeal process is clear that the appeals service is provided to students to make individual applications to appeal and that the appeal is as administrative one

2. Management and Governance:

Given the nature of the appeals process, the management, oversight, and execution of the appeals process has been undertaken by the Management Group for Calculated Grades. Oversight and decision-making responsibility were provided by the Programme Board and progress and actions reported to the Management Group.

Overall a structured and well documented approach has been taken to the processes involved in managing the appeals. Experienced staff from within the organisation have been assigned to undertake the manual checking process and IT validation routines have been employed to effectively confirm data integrity across systems and paper records.

3. Communication:

Effective communication of the approach to appeals has been undertaken since the decision was made to implement Calculated Grades for the Leaving Certificate 2020. The approach to the process was clearly communicated to students and the general public via the Department's website.

Namely that:

"The appeals process is a process review focussed on looking for errors in the transmission and processing of student data through the process.

It is not possible to appeal the information (estimated percentage mark or rank order) provided by the school. Due to the nature of the Calculated Grades system the professional judgement of the school is outside of the appeals process.

It should further be noted that the design of the statistical model and the application of the national standardisation process is also outside of the scope of the appeals process."

Students had access to their Estimated Mark and the Calculated Mark prior to making an appeal. The rank order data was released to students on 28 September for information after the closing date for the appeals.

4. Timetable

The timetable for the appeals application process has been clearly communicated and milestones have been met. At the time of writing, the publication of appeals process outcomes in a timely manner was on track.

The commencement date for the written Leaving Certificate examinations, which is a further stage of the appeal process, has recently been announced by the State Examinations Commission as 16th November subject to public health advice.

5. Quality Assurance Processes

Quality assurance mechanisms have been utilised and have included cross checking, escalation of issues and additional random sampling.

Each of the appeals has been manually reviewed using a well-documented checking process to ensure data integrity across the piece. Any discrepancies identified were escalated and further checks undertaken including engagement at school level to establish the correct mark.

All the data on forms and systems is recorded, signed, and dated for later reference and checking. A further check of 10% of all the work has also been undertaken.

These mechanisms build upon the validation and checking routines associated with the data entry and the work conducted over the summer in reconciling data with schools.

The process is one that should ensure a robust mechanism for identifying any technical data errors.