

An Taoiseach Michael Martin TD  
Department of the Taoiseach  
Government Buildings  
Upper Merrion Street  
Dublin 2

**Cc:**

Tánaiste Leo Varadkar TD  
Minister for Education Norma Foley TD  
Minister Simon Harris TD,  
Minister Eamon Ryan TD,  
Seán Ó'Foghlú, Secretary General of Department of Education  
Aidan Farrell, CEO The State Examinations Commission  
Aidan Farrell, The State Examinations Commission  
Elaine Sheridan, Assistant Director of Calculated Grades Executive Office  
Eamonn Moran, Principal Officer ,Calculated Grades committee  
Dalton Tatton, Assistant Secretary, Director of Curriculum  
John Hammond, CEO NCCA

10<sup>th</sup> September 2020

A Thaoisigh, a chara,

Following the publication on Monday 7th September of the Leaving Certificate Calculated Grades, our staff and a team of professional data analysts have identified fundamental bias in the methodology used to assign calculated grades to students in our school. Given the unique nature of our school, our student body has been significantly penalised by this process.

The endemic flaws in this process have resulted in **96% of our students having a grade reduced** and **44% of all grades awarded by our teachers reduced**, the equivalent national average was 17% of grades reduced. This level of reduction along with a national grade inflation (4.4%) will result in hundreds of our students missing out unfairly on their chosen career.

The approach of the Calculated Grades Model to standardise to the national norm, adversely affects our students for several reasons. Firstly, by design The Institute of Education is a high performing school that attracts top students from other schools nationwide seeking to ensure the highest points for their chosen courses in university. Therefore, year on year we significantly outperform the national average. In addition, The Institute of Education has the largest Leaving Cert class with over 800 students in 6<sup>th</sup> Year. Given our scale, the model of bringing larger cohorts closer to the national norm has exacerbated the negative impact on our students.



While everyone understands that the State had to do the most it could in challenging circumstances, we do not believe that this is the best the State could have done for the Leaving Certificate class of 2020. Hundreds of our students and thousands throughout the country are going to be penalised by the bias within this process. We understand that many of our students will independently seek redress for the injustice that has been perpetrated against them. However, the timing of the release of information to the students has been designed to ensure that this will be after the first round CAO offers being published tomorrow Friday 11<sup>th</sup> September.

We are asking you to intervene and instruct your officials as follows:

- 1) **To broaden the grounds of appeal** beyond the current very limited grounds (Clerical error only) so that matters of the type in this letter and indeed that student's actual performance for the subject in question can be examined. By failing to provide an appropriate opportunity to appeal, you are compelling these students concerned to exercise their legal rights including recourse to the courts with all of the associated burden of stress, anxiety, financial risk and adverse publicity. We cannot imagine that this would be the intention or desired outcome of the Government
- 2) Pending the outcome of any such modified appeal process and such litigation to take whatever steps necessary so that **the appellants will not lose out on their CAO place** that would have been offered if they had been treated fairly.

This is the first time the Calculated Grades model has ever been used in Ireland. It has never been tested because there is no historical data to test against. There was always going to be anomalies. But not to have recourse to appeal when statistical flaws have been discovered is not good practice.

To give you a simple example of this from our own students – it has been widely reported that 17% of grades were changed. We have estimated had the change to our student grades been limited to 17% then the resulting average decrease in points from **post adjustment would have been 11 points. In fact our students have seen on average a 30 points drop, with some as high as a 77 points drop.**

Having assessed the Department's 203-page explanation of the algorithm, we have identified 3 key areas where the model, with its inherent bias, is fundamentally flawed

1. The national standardisation process used in the model, introduces a material bias at either end of the grade distribution. This has amplified the impact on our students who perform at the upper end of the achievement scale.
2. The document explicitly states that students who are part of a larger cohort of students, will have their grades brought closer to the "national norm", as part of the standardisation process. Given the size of our school, this aspect of the model clearly will have a detrimental impact on the grades awarded.



3. The documentation is ambiguous in relation to the degree of importance placed on how this year's cohort's Junior Cert results are used to calculate the assigned grade. However from our assessment of the documentation and our analysis of the data we are confident that the use of the legacy Junior Certificate data adversely impacted our cohort of students.

These inequalities are particularly stark when we examine the students' Calculated Grades, by subject. See Appendix 1 attached.

We understand that the Department of Education and Skills developed this process in haste and in difficult circumstances and with the best of intentions. We acknowledge that the Minister of Education has consistently stated that **fairness is at the core of this process**. But that is not how it has turned out for our students. A limited Appeals process on an untried and untested statistical model does not seem at all fair or wise.

It is clear that our cohort of students have been significantly disadvantaged, we also note that other schools within the Voluntary Secondary School sector with high achieving students have also received grades that do not make any sense.

We know that students across the entire academic ability spectrum have been affected by the inequalities in this system.

In the interests of the students that have had their lives changed by a system that is flawed, I would ask you to intervene in the provision of the CAO first round offers and you and the DES should begin a full examination of the issues outlined above and adjust the process to ensure that all students are treated equitably.

We would be happy to provide any further information you may require on the above.

Yours Sincerely,

Yvonne O'Toole  
Principal  
The Institute of Education

Peter Kearns  
Director

Una Kearns  
Director



## **APPENDIX 1**

### 1. French at Higher level

In 2019, the national H1 rate was 6.6%. In the Institute of Education it was 27%. For the 2020 results, the national average H1 rate jumped to 7.7%, an increase of 17% proportionately, while at The Institute the rate fell to 17.9%.

Applying the national proportionate increase, we would have expected the H1 rate for our students to be 31.5%. 320 students studied French in 2020.

### 2. Physics at Higher level

In 2019 the national H1 rate was 10.9%. In the Institute of Education it was 20%. For the 2020 results, the national average H1 rate jumped to 15.6%, an increase of 43% proportionately, while at The Institute the rate only increased to 22.6%.

Applying the national proportionate increase, we would have expected the H1 rate for our students to be 28.5%. 208 students studied physics in 2020.

### 3. Applied Mathematics at Higher level (we have selected H2 to show the level of diversity)

In 2019 the national H2 rate was 19%. In the Institute of education it was 23.8%.

For the 2020 results, the national average H2 rate jumped to 26%, an increase of 34% proportionately, while at The Institute the rate decreased to 21.8%.

Applying the national proportionate increase, we would have expected the H2 rate for our students to be 31.89%. 110 students studied Applied Maths in 2020.

The above is only a small sample of the 26 subjects that we teach in the school.

