

Considering Reform at Senior Cycle: Teachers' Feelings and Beliefs About High-Stakes Assessment Following the Onset of COVID-19

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Abstract

In March 2022, the Minister for Education in Ireland announced her plans to redevelop senior cycle; in tandem, a press release from the Department of Education advised that the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC), in consultation with education partners, would jointly research how an externally moderated, school-based form of assessment would operate. Hence, the stage seems set for potentially significant change to the Leaving Certificate Examination (LCE), after almost 100 years, despite vociferous teacher union opposition to its members' involvement in assessment for certification. Against that backdrop, this article draws on the findings of two surveys that explored teachers' feelings and beliefs about such involvement, based on their experiences of having to assess their own students' work when COVID-19 necessitated the introduction of systems of calculated grades and accredited grades in 2020 and 2021. A key finding was that, while the majority of teachers reported not wanting to be involved in an assessment of this kind, a significant minority (approximately one in three) held different views, suggesting that individual teachers' feelings and beliefs may not be immutable to change, despite collective union opposition.

Keywords: feelings/beliefs about assessment, teachers' role in high-stakes assessment, calculated grades, accredited grades, assessment reform

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It took the advent of a global pandemic in the spring of 2020 to derail an examination administered at the end of post-primary education in Ireland for almost 100 years. The Leaving Certificate Examination¹ (LCE) is a high-stakes assessment used to certify achievement at the end of the final two years of post-primary education (also known as senior cycle) and as a selection mechanism for entry into further and higher education. Each year, the State Examinations Commission (SEC), a non-departmental public body under the aegis of the Department of Education (DE), oversees the development, administration, and marking of examination papers. Most students sit examinations in six or seven subjects, from a total of more than forty. A feature of the post-primary education system in Ireland (the six years following primary education) is that teachers do not assess their own students for certification purposes, although many are employed by the SEC each summer to mark the anonymised scripts of students from other schools.

Following much debate and deliberation among Irish politicians, policymakers, and representatives of the teaching unions, the Minister for Education announced in May 2020 that, due to COVID-19 health-related risks, the traditional LCE would be replaced by a system of calculated grades (CG). This process would be overseen by the Calculated Grades Executive Office (CGEO), as it was envisaged that legal impediments would prohibit the SEC from doing so. The Minister indicated that outcomes from the CG process would be used, in lieu of LCE results, as a basis for awarding a certificate of post-primary education and to facilitate the transition of post-primary students to the world of work and to further or higher education. In a document issued to schools by the Department of Education and Skills² later that month, it was explained that a student’s CG 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, and
- Data on the past performance of students in each school and nationally – the “standardisation process” (Department of Education and Skills, 2020a).

1 Most students in Ireland (circa 95%) follow the Leaving Certificate Established programme (Department of Education, 2021a; 2022b). Students following the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) take six or seven Leaving Certificate subjects and two additional Link Modules: Preparation for the World of Work and Enterprise Education. Students taking the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) follow a pre-vocational programme made up of a range of courses structured around three elements: Vocational Preparation, Vocational Education, and General Education.

2 The name was changed to the Department of Education (DE) in the autumn of 2020.

Over the course of the following weeks, teachers worked, alone initially, to estimate a mark and class rank for each of their students based on guidelines issued by the Department of Education and Skills (2020a). Following that, they attended moderation/alignment meetings with colleagues teaching the same subject area in their own school, with the aim of ensuring consistency of marking across students and classes. The school principal was then required to review all the school’s CG data before submitting them to the DE for standardisation by June 19, 2020.

The original plan was that data for the standardisation process would be derived from:

- patterns underlying national Leaving Certificate grade distributions for subjects between 2017 and 2019
- patterns of Leaving Certificate performance for individual schools across the same years
- Junior cycle³ (JC) data for the Leaving Certificate class of 2020, and
- JC data linked to the Leaving Certificate national cohorts between 2017 and 2019 (Department of Education and Skills, 2020b).

However, subsequent controversies about the fairness of using historical data for individual schools meant that these data were omitted from the final standardisation (Department of Education and Skills, 2020b). When teachers submitted grades, these were found to be higher overall than any set of previous results. While standardisation procedures went some way towards addressing the issue, the upshot was that the set of LCE results published in September 2020 was the highest ever – up 4.4% on the previous year (Mooney, 2021).

Due to the ongoing risks to health posed by COVID-19 in 2021, the Minister for Education announced in February that a reduced content version of the traditional LCE would proceed in June 2021 and that students would also have the option of taking a grade awarded by the SEC – the nomenclature used was accredited grade (AG). Crucially, the Minister made it clear that, in cases where a student’s examination result and AG differed, the higher of the two would be used for certification purposes. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of students opted for both: to sit an examination, and to take an AG in at least one of their subjects (SEC, 2021).

The process involved in deriving an AG for each student was broadly similar to that used for the CG process in 2020 (DE, 2021b, 2021c). However, on this occasion, teachers were asked to estimate marks only (not ranks) for their students, as the unexpected publication of class ranks used for the 2020 CG process was controversial (Doyle et al., 2021a). Taking into account that school historical data were again omitted for standardisation purposes, and that students had the dual option available to them, the

3 The Junior Cycle Examination (JCE) is taken by students in Ireland after the first three years of post-primary education, also known as the junior cycle (JC).

set of LCE 2021 results was even higher than for the previous year – up a further 2.6% (Mooney, 2021).

The decision by post-primary teachers in Ireland to participate fully in the calculated and accredited grades processes in 2020 and 2021, respectively, was momentous given their trade unions' staunch opposition to prior proposals involving teachers assessing their own students for certification purposes (further elucidation of these issues is provided in the discussion section of this article). Teacher unions argued that their members were simply responding to an exceptional set of circumstances and that their involvement should not be interpreted as an expression of support for any particular change in how post-primary students in Ireland might be assessed in the future. That said, a large cohort of teachers went through an assessment process that would have been unimaginable in post-primary schools in Ireland prior to the advent of the pandemic. Given these events, two surveys were conducted with volunteer samples of these teachers following the completion of the CG and AG processes in 2020 and 2021, respectively, with two overarching research questions in mind:

1. How did post-primary teachers in Ireland engage with the CG and AG processes in their schools?
2. How did these processes impact on how they viewed their role as assessors?

Readers are referred to a number of complementary publications focused on data pertinent to the first question (Doyle et al., 2021a, 2021b; Lysaght, 2023; O'Leary et al., 2022a). In this article, a subset of the data from the two surveys is used to address the second question, in particular teachers' feelings and beliefs about their role in high-stakes assessment. Of particular note are data from a significant minority of teachers whose opinions have not featured strongly in previous discussions and publications relating to LCE assessment reform. While the current article is focused on events that took place in an Irish context, the issue of how teachers see their role in high-stakes assessment is internationally relevant and one that has been to the fore across many countries as a result of the pandemic.

Following this introduction, the remainder of the article is in four parts. In the section to follow, the issue of why teachers' feelings and beliefs about assessment matter is discussed in the context of a review of literature pertinent to the topic. An overview of the research strategy (questionnaire survey), as well as a description of response rates and instrumentation are included in section three. In section four, the survey results are presented in three parts: findings pertaining to all participants, findings for subgroups of participants, and findings for participants holding positive attitudes to the issue of teacher involvement in assessment for certification and its impact on fairness for students. The article concludes with a discussion about assessment reform at senior cycle, which also considers why the findings are significant in the context of planned reform.

Research Framework

Interest in teachers' feelings and beliefs about, and their roles in, assessment has been foregrounded in teacher assessment identity research (e.g., Looney et al., 2017) which, in turn, builds on research on teacher identity and teacher assessment literacy. From a socio-cultural perspective, teacher identity is conceptualised as fluid and variable, rather than fixed or immutable – a construct that is iteratively reconceptualised, reframed, and refined in light of competing personal and professional tensions (Duff & Uchida, 1997). Hence, Olsen (2008, p.139) defines teacher identity as “the collection of influences and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems”. Gibbs' (2006, p. 2) reminder that, “the journey of becoming and being a teacher is unique for each teacher and yet depends on others”, underlines that when challenged to reconcile multiple, and frequently conflicting, identities (Taylor, 1998) in the course of their professional lives, different sub-identities (Swennen et al., 2010) such as teacher as assessor, as instructor, as colleague, as mentor/friend, etc., interplay and potentially compete. In such cases, the need for sustained congruence between “who I am” as a teacher and “what I do” as a teacher (Mockler, 2020), between a teacher's personal teacher identity and their collective teacher identity (Nordhall et al., 2020) linked, for instance, with membership of a teacher union, is paramount. This alignment underscores both the teacher's ongoing personal and professional wellbeing (Siu et al., 2014) and, in turn, their teacher agency (Toom et al., 2015) and the quality of teaching, learning, and assessment in schools and classrooms.

It is recognised that the unrelenting pace of globalisation, and its attendant impact on local education systems (Little & Green, 2009), has increased pressure on teachers “to adopt new professional roles, cultivate their professional identities, and incorporate new insights into their professional practices” albeit that “such transformations in educational practices... and in teachers' identities... do not occur easily... are slow, and hard to achieve” (Vähäsantanen, 2015, p. 1). As acknowledged, this is in part because when teachers act, they do so based on feelings and beliefs as well as knowledge and skill: “Teachers' actions and decisions are not purely rational... emotions are at stake, for example, in the case of professional identity negotiation” (Vähäsantanen, 2015, p. 11).

Internationally, one of the most public and controversial challenges to teachers' identities in recent years was born out of the COVID-19 pandemic and the required cancellation of publicly certified high-stakes examinations. In Ireland, contrary to tradition and despite teacher unions' staunch opposition to involvement of their members in assessment for certification purposes, teachers' roles as assessors fundamentally changed overnight when they agreed to assign grades and ranks (calculated grades) in 2020 and then grades only (accredited grades) in 2021 to their own LCE students. This brought into sharp relief not just teachers' assessment literacy (Popham, 2011)

but what Looney et al. (2017) labelled teacher assessment identity. According to Looney et al. (2017, p. 15), notwithstanding teachers' baseline assessment literacy, i.e., *what* teachers "know and are able to do", when they engage in the assessment of their students, "*who* teachers are" (italics added) must be considered. Hence, "an expanded conceptualisation of teachers' assessment work" (p. 1) is advanced and teacher assessment identity is viewed as the dynamic and interactive interplay of four constituent dimensions: teacher beliefs, feelings, knowledge, and skills (see Looney et al., 2017, Figure 1). Looney et al.'s reconceptualisation extends both the traditional understanding of teacher assessment literacy (with its focus on knowledge and skills), and more recent work by Xu and Brown (2016) who introduced the Teacher Assessment Literacy in Practice framework, to foreground teacher identity as a mediating factor in teachers' engagement with the role of assessor. The inclusion of feelings and beliefs in Looney et al.'s conceptualisation of teacher assessment identity was a catalyst for the decision in this study to construct two scales focused on teachers' feelings and beliefs about assessment following their involvement in the CG and AG processes of 2020 and 2021, respectively.

Methodology

Research Strategy

A questionnaire instrument, designed by the authors to capture the experiences of teachers who had been involved in the CG process, was piloted with a convenience sample of twelve post-primary teachers in October 2020. The instrument, which focused on the LCE Established programme and contained multiple-choice, Likert-type items and a small number of open-ended questions, was approved for use in an online survey by DCU's Research Ethics Committee in October 2020 (DCUREC/2020/189). From the beginning, participants' attention was drawn to the fact that the questionnaire was designed to gather data on what happened in schools rather than on what transpired later during the standardisation process. The final version was organised in four parts to facilitate data gathering from respondents on their:

- biographies (e.g., gender, teaching experience, subject(s) taught, school profile, etc.)
- reflections on the process of estimating marks and ranks for students
- experiences of, and reflections on, the alignment meetings they attended in their schools, and
- engagement in the CG process and how it had influenced their perceptions of assessment and their role as teacher assessors (see Doyle et al., 2021b, Appendix 1).

A second questionnaire instrument, focused on the AG process used for the LCE in 2021, was approved for use by DCU's Ethics Committee in November 2021 (DCUREC/2021/217). The AG survey instrument mirrored very closely the one used for the CG survey in terms of layout and question types (O'Leary et al., 2022a).

Both surveys were administered online in the months of November, December, and January following the completion of all elements related to the CG and AG processes (e.g., rechecks, appeals, legal challenges). Both employed forms of volunteer sampling:

- A list of contact details for all post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland obtained through the DE website; emails addressed to principals requesting that the research and related survey web links be brought to the attention of their school colleagues
- Contact 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 studies.

Response Rates

A total of 946 and 487 teachers responded to the 2020 CG and 2021 AG surveys, respectively. In both cases, many respondents provided biographical or school data only and did not respond to any of the questions about their experiences with assessment. Hence, only data from teachers who responded to at least some of the substantive questions about how they experienced the calculated and/or accredited grades process in their schools (n=713 and 223 respectively) were used in reports and peer-reviewed papers published on the studies (see Doyle et al., 2021a, 2021b; O'Leary et al., 2022a).

Following the CG and AG processes, two Likert-type agreement scales constructed to gather reliable data on teachers' feelings and beliefs about assessment were included towards the end of each questionnaire. In all, a total of 571 teachers involved in the CG process and 187 teachers involved in the AG process provided data pertaining to the scales. Outcomes from the analysis of these data were not included in the reports and papers cited above and are presented below. Given the focus on the subset of participants who responded to the feelings and beliefs scales in this article, it should be noted that the details pertaining to biographical data in Table 1 below may differ slightly from those of the larger set of participants on which previously published analysis was conducted.

TABLE 1*Profile of Respondents*

Biographical Variables	CG 2020 (n = 571)	AG 2021 (n = 187)	Nationally
	%	%	%
Gender ¹			
Female	68	66	70
Male	32	34	30
Teaching Experience (years)			
≤ 5	10	15	n/a
6 to 10	17	13	n/a
11 to 20	35	30	n/a
>20	38	43	n/a
LC Classes Taught			
None (first time)	3	6	n/a
≤5	51	32	n/a
6 to 10	9	10	n/a
11+	37	52	n/a
Gender of Students Taught ²			
Female	27	31	18
Male	14	14	14
Mixed	58	55	68
School Type ³			
DEIS	22	18	27
Fee-paying	13	13	7
Non-DEIS	65	69	66
School Size ²			
100-299	11	13	24
300-599	34	35	39
600+	55	53	38
Language of Instruction ⁴			
English	95	90	90
Gaeilge	5	10	10

Note. As percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, some columns may not add to 100 percent. The following sources were used for national data, at teacher or school level as available:

1 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-wamii/womenandmeninireland2019/education/>

2 Central Statistics Office (2020);

3 Non-fee-paying schools are classified as either DEIS (disadvantaged status) or Non-DEIS;

<https://assets.gov.ie/220043/d6b98002-a904-427f-b48a-0fa0af756ea7.pdf>

4 <https://gaeloideachas.ie/i-am-a-researcher/statistics/>

Across both surveys, the ratio of female to male respondents was 2:1, reflecting the gender split among second-level teachers nationally. Data were also consistent from both surveys showing that respondents were predominantly experienced LCE teachers with most (70%+) indicating they had been teaching for 11 years or more and had taught LCE classes multiple times (however, the higher proportion of respondents selecting ≤ 5 LCE classes taught in 2020 is noted [51% v 32% in 2021]). Teachers of 36 subjects from the LCE programme responded to the surveys with close to half of each cohort being teachers of biology, English, Gaeilge, or mathematics (between 10% and 15% for each subject). The vast majority of teachers (85%) taught their subject at higher level. As well as being subject/classroom teachers, most respondents across the two studies occupied roles that included either subject/department head (at least one in two) and/or assistant/deputy principal (at least one in three). Most respondents worked in mixed gender (55%+), non-fee-paying, non-disadvantaged schools (65%+) with at least 600 students (53%+) where English was the language of instruction (90%+). Despite the non-random/volunteer nature of the sampling, the profile of the study participants and their schools are very similar across both studies and broadly similar to the equivalent statistics (where available) for the population of post-primary teachers in Ireland.⁴ Two other points are worth noting when considering the findings in this article. Of the 187 teachers who responded to the AG survey, almost all (95%) indicated that they had also submitted CG for their students in 2020, while one in five (21%) said they had participated in the 2020 CG survey.⁵

Instrumentation

Due to the length of the questionnaires, the feelings and beliefs scales were constructed to be as parsimonious as possible while ensuring that they demonstrated content validity and internal consistency. Drawing on the literature on teachers' conceptions of assessment (e.g., Darmody et al., 2010), teacher assessment identity (e.g., Looney et al., 2017), teachers' assessment literacy (e.g., Popham, 2011), documentation pertinent to the AG and CG processes (e.g., Department of Education and Skills, 2020a, 2020b), and consultation with 12 experienced LCE teachers (the pilot group), two scales were constructed. Each consisted of six statements pertaining to (i) teachers' *feelings* about assessment following their involvement in the CG/AG processes and (ii) their *beliefs* about being directly involved in assessing their own students for high-stakes certification purposes. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each of the twelve statements by selecting one of five

4 That said, it should be noted that across the two surveys, the proportion of respondents working in DEIS schools was somewhat lower than the percentage of DEIS schools in the post-primary system (22% and 18% respectively compared to 27%). Contrariwise, the proportion working in fee-paying schools was marginally higher (13% in both cases compared to 7% nationally). The proportion of schools nationally with 600+ is approximately 38%, which suggests that teachers from schools with fewer than 600 students are under-represented in both samples. The percentage of teachers working in schools where English is the language of instruction (90%+) reflects the proportion of such schools in the system.

5 As both surveys were completed anonymously, it was not possible to track teachers' responses across the surveys.

possible responses. For the purposes of quantitative analyses, each response option was assigned a numeric value: *strongly disagree* = 1; *disagree* = 2; *undecided* = 3; *agree* = 4, *strongly agree* = 5.

To minimise the possibility of what is termed a response set (the tendency for respondents to agree or disagree with every statement; see Weijters et al., 2013), two items in each scale were phrased in the negative. These were reverse coded for the analyses discussed in this article (see note 2 underneath Tables 3 and 4). The key psychometric data pertaining to the two scales are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Psychometric Properties of the Assessment Feelings Scale and the Assessment Beliefs Scale

Data Source	Scale Name	Number of Items	KMO/ Bartlett's Test	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Average Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha Reliability
CG_2020 n = 571	Assessment Feelings	6	.80/ <.001	2.84	47.4	.59	.77
	Assessment Beliefs	6	.71/ <.001	2.82	46.9	.62	.77
AG_2021 n = 187	Assessment Feelings	6	.83/ <.001	2.99	49.8	.62	.79
	Assessment Beliefs	6	.75/ <.001	3.02	50.2	.63	.79

The psychometric properties of the scales were examined separately for each scale across the two years using exploratory factor analysis. Results from the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (.79 and .71; .83 and .75 respectively) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < .001$ for all four statistics) supported the application of factor analysis to the scales. Principal axis factoring and inspections of scree plots revealed the presence of one dominant factor in each case (eigenvalues of 2.8 or higher), while the proportions of variance explained by these single factors were all high (at least 46.9%). Additionally, most statements (items) had strong positive Varimax rotated loadings on the dominant first factors – average loadings ranging from .59 to .63. Scale reliabilities, as measured by the Cronbach alpha, were in the range .77 to .79, which is considered satisfactory (Crocker & Algina, 1986).

Results

Overall Findings

The data in Table 3 pertain to teachers' feelings about assessment following their involvement in the LCE calculated and accredited grades processes of 2020 and

2021. Statements (also referred to in this article as items for stylistic purposes) are identified using the letters *a* to *f*. The mean ratings in the third column are based on the 1–5 scale described earlier. Higher mean ratings reflect higher levels of agreement with a statement (and vice versa). For each statement, the data pertaining to the 2020 CG process are presented first, with equivalent data for the 2021 AG process directly underneath. Statements are ranked from high to low in terms of the mean ratings pertaining to the 2020 (CG) survey.

TABLE 3

Teachers' Feelings About Assessment Following Their Involvement in the 2020 Calculated Grades and the 2021 Accredited Grades Processes

Assessment Feelings Scale Items			Agree*	Disagree**	Undecided
(As a result of having been involved in the 2020 calculated grades/2021 accredited grades process in my school...)			%	%	%
a) I feel less (more) confident in the validity of the judgements I make about my students' work (Note 2)	CG_2020	3.90	80	14	7
	AG_2021	3.91	81	15	5
b) I feel more convinced about the importance of assessment for informing teaching and learning throughout the LC programme	CG_2020	3.54	67	23	11
	AG_2021	3.50	64	28	8
c) I feel that my professionalism as a teacher has been enhanced	CG_2020	2.78	33	54	14
	AG_2021	2.68	35	52	14
d) I feel less (more) supportive of efforts being made to reform the LCE programme and examination (Note 2)	CG_2020	2.64	36	53	11
	AG_2021	2.59	34	58	8
e) I feel more enthusiastic about expanding my repertoire of assessment approaches in the future	CG_2020	2.62	32	58	10
	AG_2021	2.73	34	57	9
f) I feel more positively disposed to being involved directly in assessing my students for certification purposes	CG_2020	2.41	29	62	9
	AG_2021	2.55	36	58	7
Overall Mean Rating	CG_2020	2.98			
	AG_2021	2.99			

Note. 1. As percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, some rows may not add to 100 percent.
 2. Statements a) and d) have been reverse coded to ensure the table could be rank ordered by percent agreeing. In each case, the term in the bracket should be used to ensure correct interpretation of the percentage agreeing.
 3. Numbers responding to the statements relating to the 2020 calculated grades process ranged from 569–571. Numbers responding to the statements relating to the 2021 accredited grades process ranged from 184–187.

*Strongly agree and agree options combined.

** Strongly disagree and disagree options combined.

At the outset it must be acknowledged that even though the two surveys relate to very similar assessment events and processes, the data are not longitudinal insofar as they relate to two different and non-random samples. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalised to the population of post-primary teachers in Ireland and differences or similarities in the data between surveys should not be interpreted as evidence of change or stability. That said, a noteworthy feature of the data across the two surveys is how consistent⁶ they are (with the possible exception of item *f*). The mean ratings for the scale are almost identical across the two surveys (2.98 and 2.99, respectively). In terms of the percentages agreeing or disagreeing, the overwhelming majority of respondents (80/81%) indicated that, as a result of having been involved in the AG process, they felt more confident in the validity of their judgements about students' work (item *a*). A majority (67/64%) also expressed agreement about the importance of assessment throughout the LCE programme (item *b*) even if similar percentages (58/57%) expressed lack of enthusiasm about expanding their repertoire of assessment approaches in the future (item *e*). Data with respect to item *c* indicate that while one third of respondents felt that their professionalism was enhanced because of being involved in the calculated/accredited grades processes, two thirds expressed disagreement or uncertainty about this. A similar split in opinions is evident in relation to support for LCE reform (item *d*). Outcomes with respect to item *f* are particularly noteworthy. While the majority of respondents (62/58%) across the two surveys disagreed that they were more positively disposed to being involved in assessment for certification purposes, the percentage taking the opposite view was 29% in 2020 but higher, at 36%, in 2021. The presence of a substantial minority of respondents in these surveys, with more positive attitudes to involvement in assessment for certification purposes, seems significant insofar as such sentiments have not been widely expressed previously.

Data on teachers' beliefs about assessment following their involvement in the CG and AG processes of 2020 and 2021 respectively are presented in Table 4. As in Table 3, statements are ranked from high to low in terms of mean ratings from the 2020 data, with data pertaining to statements about the CG process presented in the top part of each row and the equivalent data for the AG process underneath.

⁶ It should also be noted that the data with respect to teacher professionalism (item *c*) are almost identical to those derived from questions asked about professional development in assessment in other sections of the 2021 accredited grades survey (see O'Leary et al., 2022a, Table 7 and Figure 2) and provide evidence that participants responded consistently throughout the questionnaire.

TABLE 4

Teachers' Beliefs About Assessment Following Their Involvement in the 2020 Calculated Grades and 2021 Accredited Grades Processes

Assessment Beliefs Scale Items			Agree*	Disagree**	Undecided	
			%	%	%	
a)	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	CG_2020	3.48	64	28	8
		AG_2021	3.15	53	39	8
b)	I believe that teachers’ involvement in assessment for certification purposes would improve student attendance in my school	CG_2020	3.18	51	37	12
		AG_2021	3.03	49	43	9
c)	I believe that students in my class were (not) disadvantaged in terms of the grades they got by: not being able to sit the LC exam in June 2020/ having a dual system of Accredited Grades and Examinations applied in 2021 (Note 2)	CG_2020	3.04	50	39	11
		AG_2021	3.50	64	27	9
d)	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)	CG_2020	2.76	36	48	16
		AG_2021	2.59	36	56	9
e)	I believe that my involvement in the calculated grades/accredited grades process in 2020/2021 led to fairer outcomes for the students in my class than if they had taken the LC exam in June 2020/if the LC 2021 exam only had taken place	CG_2020	2.63	31	54	15
		AG_2021	2.97	45	48	8
f)	I believe that teachers’ involvement in assessment for certification purposes would (not) undermine student/teacher relationships in my school (Note 2)	CG_2020	2.40	30	63	7
		AG_2021	2.39	30	65	5
Overall Mean Rating		CG_2020	2.91			
		AG_2021	2.94			

Note. 1. As percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number, some rows may not add to 100 percent.
 2. Statements c) and f) have been reverse coded to ensure the table could be rank ordered by percent agreeing. In each case, the term in the bracket should be used to ensure correct interpretation of the percentage agreeing.

3. Numbers responding to the statements relating to the 2020 calculated grades process ranged from 569-571. Numbers responding to the statements relating to the 2021 accredited grades process ranged from 184-187.

*Strongly agree and agree options combined.

** Strongly disagree and disagree options combined

A perusal of the data in Table 4 makes it clear that the patterns of responses across the two surveys in terms of teachers' beliefs about assessment are not as similar as those that were observed in Table 2 for teachers' feelings about assessment (although the overall mean ratings are very similar – 2.91 and 2.94 respectively). For example, the percentage agreeing that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification would

motivate students in their school to engage more actively in learning (item *a*) was 64% in 2020 but 53% in 2021. Contrariwise, agreement with item *c*, which indicated a belief that students had not been disadvantaged by the CG/AG process, was 14% higher in 2021. Given the advantage to the 2021 cohort of students of being able to sit an exam and/or take an AG grade, this difference in their teachers' opinions is not overly surprising. Another notable difference across the two surveys is apparent in the data pertaining to item *e*. This item addresses the issue of teacher involvement in assessment for certification purposes and its impact on the fairness of outcomes for the students they teach. In this case, the percentage of teachers indicating that they believed outcomes for students were fairer as a result of their involvement was 31% in 2020 but 45% in 2021. That said, it should be noted that approximately one in two teachers indicated that they did not believe this. The findings across the two surveys are broadly similar in terms of whether teacher involvement in assessment would improve student attendance in their school (about half agreed with item *b* and half either disagreed with it or expressed uncertainty about it) and whether this involvement would undermine student/teacher relationships in the school (item *f* – about two thirds indicated it would, while 30% took the opposite view). Of particular note is the 36% of respondents in both surveys who agreed that teachers' involvement in assessment for certification would lead to fairer outcomes for students in their schools (item *d*). While the percentage taking the opposite view was 48% in 2020, it was 56% in 2021 (with the percentage expressing uncertainty commensurately lower the second year).

Findings by Gender, LCE Teaching Experience, and School Type

Table 5 presents the assessment feelings and assessment beliefs scale means by three demographic variables of interest: gender of respondents (self-reported as female, male, other), experience of teaching LCE classes, and school type. Respondents were divided into two groups in terms of number of LCE classes taught – those who had taught LCE classes to completion up to ten times and those who had done so 11 times or more. Not surprisingly, a Chi-square test for independence using the 2020 data revealed a significant relationship between this variable and total teaching experience ($X^2(1, n = 624) = 87.5, p < .005$). Schools where respondents taught were categorised as either DEIS (disadvantaged status), fee-paying or non-DEIS. Mean ratings and inferential statistics are used to compare subgroups. For the sake of parsimony, only the results of statistically significant inferential tests are reported in detail in the text following the table.

TABLE 5*Mean Ratings Across Surveys by Respondent Subgroups*

Data Source	Scale	Female	Male*	≤10 LC Classes	≥11 LC Classes*	DEIS*	Fee-Paying	Non-DEIS
		rating		rating		rating		
		(n=382)	(n=181)	(n=35)	(n=209)	(n=124)	(n=74)	(n=367)
CG_2020	Feelings	2.96	3.02	3.05	2.86	3.04	2.97	2.96
	Beliefs	2.93	2.86	2.96	2.82	3.10	2.65	2.89
		(n=119)	(n=61)	(n=65)	(n=96)	(n=32)	(n=23)	(n=123)
AG_2021	Feelings	2.97	3.00	3.18	2.88	2.68	2.80	3.10
	Beliefs	2.94	2.93	3.06	2.85	2.58	2.66	3.04

Note. Figures **in bold** are significantly different from the reference category (reference marked with *).

Independent samples *t*-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between the mean ratings of female and male teachers across the two scales and two surveys. Teachers with less experience of LCE classes who had participated in the CG process in 2020 had statistically significantly more positive feelings about assessment ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.88$) than their more experienced counterparts ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.83$; $t(563) = 2.53$, $p \leq .01$). However, the magnitude of the difference (effect size) as measured by Cohen's *d* was small ($d = .22$). A similar pattern was observed for the 2021 AG data with less experienced teachers expressing statistically significantly more positive feelings ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .90$; $M = 2.88$, $SD = .95$; $t(159) = 1.98$, $p \leq .05$). In this case the effect size was relatively small ($d = .32$). In neither survey were statistically significant differences between less experienced and more experienced teachers observed for mean ratings with respect to assessment beliefs.

Due to uneven sample sizes and, in the case of the 2021 accredited grades study, very small sample sizes, the non-parametric equivalent of ANOVA - the Kruskal-Wallis Test - was used to compare teacher ratings by school type (DEIS, fee-paying, and non-DEIS). In terms of the 2020 CG survey, the data show that, on average, while teachers in DEIS schools expressed more positive feelings and beliefs than their counterparts in fee-paying and non-DEIS schools, only ratings for assessment beliefs were statistically significantly different across schools ($X^2(2) = 10.82$, $p \leq .004$). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons (using the Bonferroni correction) revealed that only the DEIS ($M = 3.10$; $SD = .93$) versus fee-paying ($M = 2.65$, $SD = .84$) comparison was statistically significant ($p \leq .001$). The Cohen's *d* in this case was .50, which can be considered a medium effect size (Cohen, 1992).

While the equivalent outcomes for the 2021 accredited grades data need to be interpreted with caution due to the small sample sizes in two of the three groups, they are interesting insofar as the more positive feelings and beliefs (reflected in average ratings) are expressed by teachers in non-DEIS schools on this occasion. The outcomes of the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in the case of

assessment beliefs only with post-hoc Bonferroni pairwise comparisons revealing just one statistically significant difference ($p = .05$) between non-DEIS ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .98$) and DEIS schools ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.02$). The related Cohen's d revealed a medium-sized effect ($d = 0.47$).⁷

Findings with Respect to Respondents with Positive Attitudes to the Direct Involvement of Teachers in Assessment for Certification and Fairness for Students

Two statements, one in each scale, stand out as being particularly important in seeking to understand the feelings and beliefs of a relatively large minority of teachers (about one in three) who expressed more positive feelings about assessment following their experiences with the LCE in 2020 and 2021. The statements in question are: *I feel more positively disposed to being involved directly in assessing my students for certification purposes* (see Table 3, item *f*) and *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)* (see Table 4, item *d*). Additional outcomes with respect to the percentages agreeing or strongly agreeing with each statement are presented in Table 6. Given that the focus in this article is on respondents who expressed more positive attitudes to teacher involvement in high-stakes assessment – as distinct from their experiences of the CG or AG processes *per se* – and in the interests of parsimony, the decision was taken to analyse the data from the two surveys in combination. However, it should be noted that only respondents to the 2021 AG survey who indicated that they had not participated in the 2020 CG survey ($n = 148$) were included in these analyses.

⁷ The p -value derived from the Kruskal-Wallis Test for the assessment feelings comparison was 0.057 and the Cohen's d for the non-DEIS/DEIS comparison was 0.45.

TABLE 6

Teachers' Feelings and Beliefs About Assessment for Certification and Fairness for Students, by Gender, LCE Teaching Experience, and School Type

Respondents by Subgroups	Combined n (2020 and 2021) responding to each statement	(As a result of having been involved in the 2020 CG/2021 AG process in my school) I feel more positively disposed to being involved directly in assessing my students for certification purposes			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)		
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Total	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
		%	%	%	%	%	%
All	691/692	9	21	30	12	24	36
Female	472/475	8	21	29	12	24	36
Male	215/213	10	24	34	12	24	36
≤10 LCE Classes	397/399	10	24	34	13	25	38
≥11 LCE Classes	279/278	8	18	26	10	22	32
DEIS	143/143	11	32	43	13	31	44
Fee-Paying	85/83	9	13	22	7	21	28
Non-DEIS	459/462	9	20	29	12	23	35

The overarching message coming through in the data is that in most instances, about one in ten respondents were in strong agreement with both statements while about one in four or one in five selected the *agree* option. As the percentages in the total columns show, about one in three participants across the two surveys provided positive responses to the two statements. That said, the large proportions of respondents teaching in DEIS schools in agreement with the statements is particularly striking (43% and 44%, respectively). The fact that the proportion of students transferring to further and higher education from schools with a disadvantaged designation increased from 57% to 63.5% in 2021 (Mooney, 2021a) may be a relevant contextual variable here. Gender differences in terms of percentages agreeing with the statement about involvement in assessment for certification were relatively small (a 5% difference in total), while identical percentages from the two gender groups (36%) were in agreement on the issue of fairness for students. Once again, as noted in the discussion around Tables 3 and 4, respondents with less experience of teaching LCE classes and those working in DEIS schools expressed more positive feelings and beliefs (notwithstanding the less positive attitudes of DEIS participants in 2021 compared to their counterparts in 2020, also noted previously). For both variables, this was especially noticeable in the overall difference in the percentages agreeing with the statement about being directly involved in assessment for certification purposes. Neither of the two-way between-groups ANOVAs conducted to investigate possible interaction effects between school

type and LCE teaching experience using the agreement data in relation to the two statements ($n = 203$ and 239 respectively) produced statistically significant results.

At the end of the questionnaire instruments used in both surveys, respondents were given an opportunity to add comments about their experiences during the CG/AG processes. The full set of commentaries as well as the methodology employed are available to review in two published reports (Doyle et al., 2021a; O'Leary et al., 2022a). While the majority of these comments expressed some disenchantment with what transpired (particularly in relation to the downgrading of students during standardisation and the release of class rank data to students), some can be used to illuminate the thinking of respondents who expressed more positive feelings about teacher involvement in assessment for certification and more positive beliefs about fairness for students. A total of 93 responses across the two surveys were linked to respondents who had either strongly agreed or agreed with the two statements in Table 6. The comments in Table 7 represent a purposive sample of 15 of the 32 comments provided by participants who selected the *strongly agree* option for the two statements. They are divided into two groups: those that reflect wholly positive opinions about their CG/AG experience and those that reflect positive but more nuanced views about it.

TABLE 7

A Purposive Sample of Comments From Teachers on Their Experiences of the 2020 Calculated Grades and 2021 Accredited Grades Processes

Wholly Positive Comments	More Nuanced Positive Comments
A combination of assessment is best. Would be great to see the dual system continue. Definitely a project or continuous assessment part in EVERY subject and programme.	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 minimise the opportunity for unfairness and bias.
I found the whole process very interesting. If this was rolled out across the country going forward, it would promote student motivation.	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 (...). I hope that if predicted grades or some forms of assessment are used again, then a student's JC grades should not bear a factor in their final awarded grades
Would love to see this process replace the established LC examinations.	
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.	It took the stress off the pupils as they had the cushion of knowing they had a grade. I made sure my H1 students would get a H1 based on what happened the year before. With the greater choice on the paper, some students concentrated on certain subjects and got grades higher in my subject from the exam than they would have got on the traditional Leaving Cert. I feel with more standardisation all these issues could be solved (...)

(...) 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.

(...) 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 (...)

Really enjoyed the process, felt as an experienced examiner of LCA my experience as an oral examiner made this process easier. I had the marking scheme clear in my head (...)

The initial feedback from teachers in my school after going through the calculated grades process was very positive, however, this was subsequently undermined (...)

I think it would benefit students enormously to have greater flexibility in the assessment process for state certification (...) 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.

The decision to remove school profiling worked against our school (...). 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 felt having been an examiner for art for the SEC greatly helped me in the assessment for the project work. I found the learning in the classroom was greatly focused on completing tasks in class, participation, completing homework and making sure all assignments were submitted on the due dates (...) I found the overall professional development of myself as a teacher was heightened as I had to show the work and grades to another teacher to justify my grades (...)

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 its duty to protect teachers by fully informing parents of the process in a meaningful way (...)

Note. (...) denotes some of the commentary has been omitted.

Based on the comments in Table 6, experiences indicating that the CG/AG process was doable, interesting, enjoyable, motivating, less stressful for students, not as susceptible to parental pressure as might have been feared initially, and professionally rewarding may well help to explain why a significant minority of respondents became more supportive of teacher involvement in high-stakes assessment. The benefit of having greater flexibility in the assessment process for state certification was also mentioned. Better guidance for schools, staff, and parents, revisions to how national standardisation was carried out, and greater trust in teacher judgements were highlighted as issues that needed attention by respondents who were, nonetheless, "fully supportive of moving to a greater level of school-based assessment at Leaving Certificate level."

Discussion and Conclusion

Until 2019, a defining feature of the traditional LCE programme in Ireland was that teachers did not participate directly in assessing their own students for high-stakes certification purposes. Indeed, over the years, public and teacher confidence in the LCE examination remained high, due in part to two of its defining features: standardised

administration and anonymous marking. The replacement of LCE examinations with a system of calculated grades in 2020 and the implementation of a dual system of accredited grades/examinations in 2021 were momentous events in the history of Irish education. Of particular significance was the agreement of teachers to be directly involved in assessment for certification, something their trade unions had been vehemently opposed to in the years prior to the advent of COVID-19.

An initiative led by the NCCA to reform the senior cycle, including the LCE, has been ongoing since 2016 (see <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/senior-cycle-review/>). On March 29, 2022, the Minister for Education launched the *Advisory report on the review of senior cycle* (NCCA, 2022) – a document based on extensive research and sustained consultation with key stakeholders within and across the education sector and wider society undertaken between 2016 and 2020. Specifically in relation to assessment for the LCE programme it is noted that:

In a redeveloped senior cycle, students would experience a variety of assessments appropriately spaced across the two or three years of senior cycle. Assessment methods, items, component weightings and timing could be developed to achieve greater alignment with the flexible learning pathways within a redeveloped senior cycle. The assessment changes introduced would aim to reduce the focus on the final examination period in June and the stress experienced by students associated with this time. These changes could also allow for access to second-chance opportunities for assessment in senior cycle (p. 49).

While the NCCA report highlights how different approaches to this could be achieved (see for example, p. 47), it is silent in respect of any consideration of teacher-based assessment for certification purposes. A brief digression to consider another reform effort may help to explain why.

In an attempt to lessen the influence of the JC Examination (JCE) taken by post-primary students at the end of their third year, a proposal was made by the Department of Education and Skills in 2012 to introduce a classroom-based assessment component worth 40% of the overall marks and a terminal JCE worth 60%, set externally but administered and marked by teachers in the school. However, following strong resistance by the unions to the idea of teachers engaging in summative assessment for certification purposes, an agreement was reached in 2017 whereby students would undertake two classroom-based assessments (CBA), an assessment task (AT) demonstrating skills and competencies developed, and a final examination. Crucially, while the CBAs are administered and marked by the students' teachers, they are devised externally and are reported on separately. Moreover, the ATs count for just 10% of the final marks on the JC Profile of Achievement (JCPA). The final examination (counting for 90%) remains as before (see Murchan, 2018, for a detailed account of the events surrounding JC reform). Research undertaken during this period suggested

that while Irish teachers were open to classroom-based assessment, a summative conception of assessment was endorsed most strongly by the majority (Darmody et al., 2020). In addition, it has been noted that JC assessment reform in Ireland was strongly influenced by “traditional views of examinations” and “undermined by the dominance of high stakes summative discourse” (MacPhail et al., 2018, p. 14). Lessons learned here continue to resonate.

On the same day that the *Advisory report on the review of senior cycle* (NCCA, 2022) was published, the Minister for Education also launched *Equity and excellence for all* (DE, 2022a). Describing it as “an ambitious programme of reform” for senior-cycle education in Ireland, the Minister outlined plans for “changing the final assessment procedure to significantly reduce reliance on final examinations and introduce teacher-based assessment components.” She made the point that “as Leaving Certificate subjects are revised they will have assessment components additional to the conventional written examination worth 40% of the total marks; with the written examination worth 60% of the final score.” She also stated her preference that the 40% component should be school based, i.e., marked by teachers in the school. Despite the Minister explaining that her proposed changes would be trialled in a set of “network schools...at an early stage”, the teacher unions were less than impressed. The president of the Teachers’ Union of Ireland (TUI) described the response at its annual conference:

...the unwise judgements by the Minister and Department of Education to depart substantially and fundamentally from the considered advice of the NCCA regarding the review of the Leaving Certificate received from members precisely the response those decisions so richly deserved. The clarity of the motion of consequence was more than matched by the resolve demonstrated by members and the Minister and her officials could be left in little doubt that marking our own students for state certification purposes will not be entertained by us (Marjoram, 2022, p. 3).

The president of the Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland (ASTI) expressed a similar view:

...any changes to the senior cycle must be built upon fairness for students and trust in the system... It is longstanding ASTI policy that certification in the state exams is entirely externally assessed. This must be retained in all aspects of the development of the Leaving Cert. It’s vital that the integrity of the state exams system is maintained (Dennehy, 2022, n/a).

Between them, these two unions represent the vast majority of post-primary teachers in Ireland and are very powerful in terms of controlling the nature and pace of educational change in the sector. Representatives were centrally involved in the development of recommendations for reform at senior cycle and key proposals, in the NCCA’s advisory report to ensure that there would be less reliance on a single terminal exam (the LCE)

in the future, had the backing of both unions. These included having a greater balance between continuous assessment and state exams in all subjects and spreading the state exams over the two years of senior cycle (DE, 2022a). External marking was considered a *sine qua non* in terms of fairness, a strongly held position but one with which some teachers in the current study might not necessarily agree. The perceived danger that teacher involvement in assessment for certification would undermine student-teacher relationships has been cited as an argument against the proposal in the past (e.g., see Murchan, 2018), and while it is not surprising to find that two thirds of respondents in the current study believe that this is indeed a concern (see Table 3, item *f*), the presence of a significant minority of respondents holding a different view is worthy of attention. Indeed, the two thirds/one third split in the feelings and beliefs of the 700+ respondents about many of the key issues pertaining to teacher involvement in certification assessment and fairness for students is the standout finding across both surveys. Indications in the data that less experienced LCE teachers and those working in DEIS schools were more likely overall to be positively disposed in assessing their own students for certification purposes are also consistent across both (although it must be acknowledged that attitudes of teachers in DEIS schools were not as favourable in 2021 compared to 2020 and that teachers in non-DEIS schools were more favourably disposed to the idea in 2021). The exact nature of what that involvement might entail is now unlikely to be known in the immediate term given the press release issued by the Minister for Education on September 20, 2023, indicating her intention to postpone plans for teacher-based assessment amid concerns about artificial intelligence:

I am particularly conscious of the more recent accelerated evolution and growth in generative AI...With that in mind I have asked the SEC that further research would be commissioned on the potential role and impact of generative artificial intelligence in teacher-based assessment in particular. While this work is ongoing, I have decided to progress additional and practical components that will be externally assessed by the SEC (Government of Ireland, September 20, 2023).

In the same statement, the Minister referred to "important and extensive research" that had been conducted on her initial proposals. At the time of writing, it is known that at least two research studies were undertaken in response to tenders issued by the NCCA and the SEC, respectively, at the behest of the Minister immediately following her press release of March 29, 2022 (Lysaght et al., in press).

Despite what is widely regarded as the Minister's policy U-turn, there is general agreement among key stakeholders in Ireland (e.g., teachers, policymakers, parents, industry personnel, and the general public) that curriculum and related assessment arrangements need to be redeveloped to meet the needs of young people preparing for an ever-changing world and an increasingly unpredictable future (e.g., Banks et al., 2018; NCCA, 2019; O'Leary, 2021). New subjects at senior cycle (e.g., drama, film/

theatre studies, and climate action/sustainable development) and new ways of teaching and learning (e.g., using digital technology) mean that traditional paper and pencil-based, once-off summative assessments, which served the system in the past, are no longer sufficient as the sole means of capturing the full range of achievements expected of students. The Minister's press release of September 2023, while parking the thorny issue of imminent teacher-based assessment for certification purposes, does indicate a strong intention to introduce new external assessment components and revamped terminal exams for these and other subjects in 2025. The view expressed by the former Chief Inspector, Harold Hislop, that extensive changes brought about by the pandemic "have undoubtedly created a greater appetite for change" (DE, 2022b, p. 313) augurs well for the success of the Minister's plans. However, Looney's (2021) reminder of the cultural embeddedness of public examinations such as the LCE is salutary: in 2024 the system of state examinations used at the end of post-primary education in Ireland will be 100 years old. The LCE is a cultural institution in Ireland, which makes changing it very challenging. Compounding change further is the fact that LCE results are used as a selection mechanism for entry into further and higher education. For many teachers (including, in all likelihood, the majority of respondents in the two surveys featured here), this sets the stakes too high for them to feel comfortable about assuming any role that involves assessing their own students for certification purposes.

Everyone agrees that fairness in high-stakes assessment matters, but not everyone agrees that externally set and marked assessments are the only way to achieve this. Education systems in jurisdictions such as New Zealand, Ontario, Queensland, and Sweden suggest what is possible when teachers work in an assessment culture that is different to the one that dominates in Ireland (O'Donnell, 2018). Given that identity is shaped socially (Côté, 2006), this is an important issue to consider when trying to understand feelings and beliefs about assessment. While few will argue for a system of CG/AG where teachers are the sole arbiters of what appears on a student's post-primary certificate, there is merit in considering the possibility that teachers are likely to know more about their students' achievements, especially in hard-to-assess areas of the curriculum, than any set of examinations can reveal. At the very least, because they interact on a daily basis with their students, teams of teachers working collaboratively are well-placed to make judgements about achievements in cross-curricular skills such as information processing, communication, collaborative problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity (see, for example, <https://ncca.ie/en/resources/senior-cycle-key-skills-framework/>).

There is much to learn from the unprecedented experiences of everyone involved in the iterations of the LCE that took place in 2020 and 2021. However, the limitations inherent in using data from non-representative samples need to be acknowledged. For example, in the case of the research described in this article, it is difficult to determine the extent to which teachers whose experiences of CG/AG were particularly negative

or positive were more likely than peers to respond to the surveys. It is certainly true that a very large number of respondents contributed negative comments about their experiences of the CG process in 2020 (see Doyle et al., 2021a, Appendix 2). That said, there is evidence across two surveys to suggest that the voices of a significant minority of teachers relatively positively disposed to being involved in assessing their own students for certification purposes have yet to be heard. It is unclear at this point if these teachers remained silent during the various consultations that took place about senior-cycle reform between 2016 and 2020 or if experiences with high-stakes assessment during the pandemic changed hearts and minds in a fundamental way. This possibility warrants further consideration because, if true, it underlines Duff and Uchilda's (1997) argument that teachers' individual feelings and beliefs about their potential involvement in high-stakes assessment may not be immutable even when the collective public stance is one of firm opposition. The issue will need to be explored in future research studies, the findings from which are likely to resonate well beyond Irish shores in countries grappling with high-stakes assessment reform.

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