

ADVISORY GROUP FOR CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS 2020
CLOCK TOWER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS, MARLBOROUGH STREET

17 APRIL 2020, 14.30-17.30

AGREED MEETING NOTE

Present

	Name	Organisation/Position
Chair	Seán Ó Foghlú	Secretary General, DES
Students	Ciara Fanning	President, ISSU
	Alison Dervan	Student Voice Development Manager, ISSU
Parents	Aine Lynch	Chief Executive, NPC-P
	Mai Fanning	President, NPC-PP
Teachers	Deirdre MacDonald	President, ASTI
	Kieran Christie	General Secretary, ASTI
	Seamus Lahart	President, TUI
	John MacGabhann	General Secretary, TUI
School managers and leaders	John Curtis	General Secretary, JMB
	John Irwin	General Secretary, ACCS
	Nessa White	General Secretary, ETBI
	Clive Byrne	Chief Executive, NAPD
Higher Education	Alan Wall	Chief Executive, HEA (Observer)
State Examinations Commission	Aidan Farrell	Chief Executive, SEC
	Andrea Feeney	Director of Operations, SEC
Department of Education and Skills	Harold Hislop	Chief Inspector
	Deirdre Shanley	Assistant Secretary General
	Dalton Tattan	Assistant Secretary General
	Yvonne Keating	Deputy Chief Inspector
	Anne Tansey	Director, NEPS
	Orlaith O'Connor	Assistant Chief Inspector
	Eamonn Moran	Principal Officer
	Ciara Molloy	Assistant Principal Officer
	Mark O'Doherty	Adviser to Minister (Observer)

1. Welcome

Chair:

- Welcomed all present and their support for the work on hand
- Appreciated that many had travelled long distances to the meeting
- Reminded participants of need for social distancing
- Welcomed the news that while the Covid-19 situation is very challenging, the measures taken to date have helped to control the pandemic and avoided unnecessary deaths
- Stated that decisions re the exams will be based on health advice
- Noted that the group is working within the context of the decision made by the Minister to hold the LC examinations in July/August
- Stressed the need for collective wisdom of all present
- Noted that we have a short timeframe for our work; need to bring certainty as soon as possible
- Will hold meetings twice weekly initially; meetings will be of two hours duration approximately

2. Purpose of work of this group

- Draft document, outlining the purpose of the group, a timetable for its work, and membership had been circulated in advance
- The advisory role of the group and the decision-making functions of Minister and SEC were noted
- Chair noted that DES & SEC were not coming with proposals or solutions; rather we want all partners to co-create solutions to the challenges that we face
- Chair noted that we need to reflect on how to record and communicate the work of the group so as to avoid harmful or ill-informed public speculation that could be damaging to students; need to minimise stress and anxiety for students

Comments/discussion

- Agreed to amend section 2 of the 'purpose' document to make specific reference to school staff and remove reference to *our young people* noting that some of the students are adults (section 3 reference to young people also to be amended)
- Document agreed

3. Presentation by SEC

- A background paper on the operation of the examinations had been circulated in advance
- The Director of Operations at the SEC spoke to the paper outlining the context and logistical challenges involved in running the state examinations (see attached Powerpoint presentation)
- Reference was made to:
 - Importance of partnership in the delivery of the State Examinations
 - Unprecedented nature of the conditions in which we now find ourselves

- The very extensive logistical challenges and complexities involved in running the examinations
- The range of people and organisations involved: including teachers, superintendents, attendants, paper developers, Gardaí, school leaders, examination aides and office holders
- Role of school authorities in facilitating many aspects of the examinations: before, during and after the examinations
- Role of teachers in preparing students, practical tests, project work and coursework; their work as SEC contracted staff (as drafters and setters, translators, editors, scrutineers, examiners, superintendents)
- Commitment of the SEC to run examinations in ways that are student-centred at all times; appreciative of the public trust in the SEC; SEC welcomes advice and support of the Group to enable it to do this task in 2020

4. Scoping the issues that we need to examine

- Each stakeholder group had been asked to identify in advance four/five key areas which were of particular concern to their group and which they would like to see included on the future agenda of the Working Group; for each of the issues raised, each group was asked to suggest approach/approaches that could be considered as part of the solution

- The following sets of issues were identified:

(A) Supports for well-being of students

(B) Equity of access to teaching and learning

(C) Projects and practicals from April-May 2020

- **Projects that should have been submitted in April-May 2020**
- **Practicals that should have been completed in April-May 2020**

(D) LCA and LCVP examinations and modules

(E) Running the written examinations

(F) Marking and appeals

(G) Return to school

(H) Contractual issues for teachers and other staff

(I) Junior cycle assessment

(J) Transition to third level

(K) Communication

5. Actions agreed

(A) Projects and practicals that should have been completed in April-May 2020

i. Projects that should have been submitted in April 2020-May 2020

- Agreed that SEC will work with stakeholders to develop detailed plan for treatment of projects including options for consideration of group
- *PAPER TO BE READY CONSIDERATION AT NEXT MEETING*

ii. Practicals that should have been completed in Apr-May 2020

- Practicality of holding construction studies, art and engineering practicals in workrooms will be considered by SEC, working with stakeholders
- *PAPER TO BE READY FOR CONSIDERATION AT NEXT MEETING*

(B) Social distancing in Examinations

- SEC to commence working with schools regarding the implications of implementing social distancing in schools during the examinations
- *ORAL UPDATE TO BE PROVIDED AT NEXT MEETING*

(C) Equity of access to teaching and learning

- Continuity of Teaching and Learning Group (Deirdre Shanley) to report on measures that are being taken on this issue
- Noted that announcements on certain initiatives may be made by DES next week
- *ORAL UPDATE TO BE PROVIDED AT NEXT MEETING*

(D) Supports for well-being of students

- Noted that NEPS and HSE is working to develop and implement a plan of support involving single point of help and multi-layered approach
- *UPDATE TO BE PROVIDED AT NEXT MEETING*

(E) Contractual issues for teachers and other school employees

- Management bodies and unions to document issues for the information and consideration of the Group
- *PAPER MAY BE READY FOR NEXT MEETING OR FOLLOWING MEETING*

6. Issues for further consideration at subsequent meetings

- Agreed that the following would be considered at subsequent meetings:

(A) Arrangements for LCA & LCVP examinations and modules

- Arrangement for LCA orals to be clarified

(B) Running the written examinations, including

- Safety issues re running of the state examinations
- “Option B” for compromised candidates – if we can’t run the exams / provision for ill candidates, etc.

(C) Marking and appeals

(D) Return to school, including:

- Availability of examiners as teachers when they are expected to correct the LC
- Break needed for those who were working as teachers/superintendents/examiners through the summer
- Assessment of JC students disrupting TY and 5th year
- Likely increase in demand for places for: Repeat 5th year, Repeat 6th year; TY
- Impact on book rental schemes

(E) Junior Cycle

- Running of school based examinations and other assessment elements
- Students for whom JC marks the end of their schooling
- Adult learners

(F) Transition to third level

- CAO application dates/change of mind facilities
- Opening date for SUSI grants
- HEAR and DARE deadlines and arrangements

(G) Communication

- Communication to students, parents, schools and HE/FE institutions

7. Communication

- Note of the meeting will be prepared for next meeting and will be approved and then published
- It is understood that conversations will need to be had within organisations about matters discussed at the meetings but the Group shared the concern to avoid ill-informed speculation in public which would be damaging for students
- The weekly publication of Covid-19 related PQs on the dedicated Covid-19 page of the DES website was noted as a source of public information, <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/information-for-schools-preschools-and-third-level-institutions-on-the-coronavirus.html>

8. Dates of future meetings all at 11.30-14.00 unless otherwise agreed

- Wednesday, 22 April 2020
 - Friday, 24 April 2020
 - Wednesday, 29 April 2020
 - Friday, 1 May 2020
 - Friday, 8 May 2020
 - Friday, 15 May 2020
 - Friday, 22 May 2020
 - Friday, 29 May 2020
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