

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

**29 APRIL 2020, 11.30 – 13.30**

**Agreed Meeting note**

**Present**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation/Position</b>
<b>Chair</b>	Seán Ó Foghlú	Secretary General, DES
	Joe McHugh, TD	Minister for Education and Skills
<b>Students</b>	Rob O'Donnell	Student Council Coordinator, ISSU
	Alison Dervan	Student Voice Development Manager, ISSU
<b>Parents</b>	Aine Lynch	Chief Executive, NPC-P
	Mai Fanning	President, NPC-PP
<b>Teachers</b>	Deirdre MacDonald	President, ASTI
	Kieran Christie	General Secretary, ASTI
	Seamus Lahart	President, TUI
	John MacGabhann	General Secretary, TUI
<b>School managers and leaders</b>	John Curtis	General Secretary, JMB
	John Irwin	General Secretary, ACCS
	Nessa White	General Secretary, ETBI
<b>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</b>	John Hammond	Chief Executive, NCCA
<b>Higher Education</b>	Alan Wall	Chief Executive, HEA (Observer)
<b>State Examinations Commission</b>	Aidan Farrell	Chief Executive, SEC
	Andrea Feeney	Director of Operations, SEC
<b>Department of Education and Skills</b>	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
<b>Observers</b>	Philip O'Callaghan	Special adviser to Taoiseach
	Mark O'Doherty	Adviser to Minister
	Ed Carty	Press advisor to Minister

## Apologies

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation/Position</b>
<b>School managers and leaders</b>	Clive Byrne	Chief Executive, NAPD
<b>Students</b>	Ciara Fanning	President, ISSU

### 1. Welcome

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and welcomed the Minister for Education and Skills, Joe McHugh, TD, who joined the meeting for the discussion on Junior Cycle Assessment.

Minister McHugh thanked the group for their ongoing stakeholder engagement at this time, particularly in their role as an advisory group on these important issues.

### 2. Agree notes of previous meetings

- Note of meeting 22 April – recirculated and now agreed
- Note of meeting of 24 April – circulated and agreed

### 3. Junior Cycle

The Chair thanked all for the views expressed last week which have informed the development by DES of the draft paper - *Assessment and Reporting on Students' Learning at Junior Cycle, May 2020, Guidelines for Schools*.

Stakeholders were invited to offer further thoughts on the draft Guidelines and the following were noted:

- Guidelines comprehend the welfare of our students
- All schools will be able to deal with the requirements set out in the document
- Guidelines aims to recognise the efforts of all students
- It is important that the guidelines recognise that some students may be unable to undertake additional assessments because of issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic, schools should be given flexibility and discretion to deal with such cases
- Guidelines should note that it is the entire learning experience of Junior Cycle that is being reported on
- Existing NCCA reporting templates were an option for use by schools in their reporting.

The Chair noted that it is the intention that all schools will engage with parents/guardians in relation to the action being taken by the schools as regards Junior Cycle assessment. Partners will engage with schools, recommending the guidelines as best practice in relation to assessment and reporting on students' learning at Junior Cycle.

Some minor edits to the paper were suggested which were taken on board in a revised version of the paper circulated to the group and agreed with them at the end of the meeting.

**Agreed:** Amended paper accepted by group. Press statement to issue following the meeting confirming advice of the group on Junior Cycle. Guidelines to issue to schools.

**Agreed:** Optional template for reporting based on the template prepared by the NCCA for second year end of year report will be available on NCCA website. There will be no connection between the template used and the JCPA.

The Minister thanked the members of the group for their efforts to resolve the various examination related issues arising for the closure of schools. He welcomed the agreed advice of the group regarding the Junior Cycle examinations. He also acknowledged the challenges presented in arranging for the holding of the Leaving Certificate examinations and valued the inputs, experience and insights of the group on the various matters arising in this regard.

#### **4. Arrangements for reopening of schools**

Presentation made by the DES Inspectorate on challenges that may arise regarding arrangements for the return of Leaving Certificate students to school in July. The purpose of the presentation was to stimulate initial discussions on the matter. There were three broad areas to consider:

1. Purpose: the two week engagement prior to the LC examinations must have a clear purpose, be relevant, practical and meaningful for the students but also manageable for the schools and teachers
2. Designing and customising the schooling provision: students will be at varying levels of readiness; some students will have suffered a loss/experienced trauma; some students will not be in a position to attend school during this period. How can the needs of all students be met over these 10 days?
3. Operational issues: there will be logistical challenges regarding the number of students and the range of subjects, these will also have implications for timetabling. There will be many practical issues for teacher and students which will need to be considered, before, during and after the school day.

The Chair asked for comments from the stakeholders; comments included:

- Purpose of the what the 10 days are for needs to be clearly set out and should focus on the reengagement of students and preparation for exams
- Matter of predicted grades as an alternative choice to sitting exams was raised in order to address the health and safety concerns expressed by parents regarding the return to school
- Consideration needs to be given to what the reopening of schools will look like prior to engagement with relevant state agencies
- Noted that some teachers would not be in a position to return to work due to Covid-19 related issued. An audit of teachers availability in July was suggested
- Context in which teachers return to school will be predicated on the health care advice available at the time
- Some members believed that two weeks of schooling would not be sufficient if students were also required to complete project/coursework during this period
- Schools will need clear guidelines on social distancing requirements and autonomy to design timetable suitable to their needs and facilities
- Schools will require proper health and safety equipment, including sanitiser
- Need to be mindful that whatever measures are put in place do not add to the stress and anxiety of students

- Plans need to be put in place for students/teachers who become ill during this two week period.
- Need for a compliance officer role in the school, to manage both the day to day issues but also the acute incidents which may arise

The Chair noted that this work will need to link in with work of the SEC on the running of examinations, and will ultimately feed into the arrangements for the return to school for all. The Chair noted the requirement to put in place alternative arrangements for student cohorts who will be unable to sit the written exams in July/August. The matter of students who require their results more speedily (e.g. for those hoping to study abroad) will also be considered by the group at future meetings.

## **5. Options Paper on Project, Coursework, Practical Examinations and LCA**

An updated options paper was presented by the SEC, looking at Leaving Certificate projects, coursework and practical examinations, and also the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme. Discussion among stakeholders:

- Thanks to the SEC for the work in producing this paper and for their engagement on this particular matter
- Completion of project work in the two weeks prior to the written examinations extends the period of time of interaction between students and teachers
- Removal of marks for practical elements of will disadvantage some students
- It is not possible for all students to complete projects at home due to supports required. In addition, some students may not be able to complete projects due to illness, giving rise to further inequities
- Issues regarding equity will arise due to March announcement awarding of full marks for orals and certain practicals, these inequities will need to be addressed in some way
- Issues of equity, sustainability and mental health must be to the forefront in any decisions made
- Need to be mindful of the additional stress and anxiety the completion of project work at home would cause on families
- Students have called for all practicals and projects to be cancelled and full marks awarded, in line with the announcement in March.
- Elements of work that were already completed should be marked and awarded accordingly

The Chair thanked the SEC for the detailed paper, noting the range of issues and challenges raised by the stakeholders.

**Agreed:** Members of the advisory group to reflect further on the various issues outlined in paper. The matter will be tabled for further discussion at a later meeting.

## **6. Contractual issues for teachers and other school employees**

The Management Bodies and Unions introduced their paper on Contractual Issues. A number of key issues were flagged:

- Teachers, whose contracts are due to terminate at the end of May, and who may be required for the return to school in July. Is there a mechanism that could be considered which would allow for such contracts to be extended?
- SNAs are scheduled to work in June but are generally considered to be on leave during July and August. Arrangements will need to be considered in order to make SNAs available for the reopening of schools and for the examinations
- Secretaries/Caretakers/Cleaning Personnel, will need to ensure that such personnel are available to work particularly those who are typically off during the summer
- Examinations aide scheme should be significantly enhances to deal with the current exceptional circumstances

**Agreed:** that there would be further discussion on these issues, including discussions involving External Staff Relations Section of the Department.

## **7. Supports for well-being of students**

An update on this matter was provided by NEPS. The final guidance document for Leaving Certificate students is to be published later today. The website for Leaving Certificate 2020 students is also due to go live imminently. The webpage will host all information relating to supports available for leaving certificate candidates. Thanks were given to those who provided comment on the guidance document.

## **8. Dates of future meetings, all at 11.30-13.30 unless otherwise agreed:**

- Friday, 1 May 2020
- Wednesday, 6 May 2020 (tentative)
- Friday, 15 May 2020
- Friday, 22 May 2020
- Friday, 29 May 2020