

**ADVISORY GROUP FOR CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS
2020**

**CLOCK TOWER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS, MARLBOROUGH
STREET**

13 May 2020, 10.30 – 12.00

Agreed Meeting note

Present

	Name	Organisation/Position
Chair	Seán Ó Foghlú	Secretary General, DES
Minister	Joe McHugh, TD	Minister for Education and Skills
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
	Joan Russell	Director of Schools, ETBI
	Clive Byrne	Chief Executive, NAPD
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	John Hammond	Chief Executive, NCCA
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
	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
Observers	Philip O'Callaghan	Special advisor to Taoiseach
	Mark O'Doherty	Adviser to Minister

	Ed Carty	Press advisor to Minister
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Apologies

	Name	Organisation/Position
Department of Education and Skills	Deirdre Shanley	Assistant Secretary General
School managers and leaders	Nessa White	General Secretary, ETBI

1. Welcome

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

Minister McHugh thanked the group for the work that they had done to develop an alternative strategy for Leaving Certificate students, for the support that they had given to the calculated grades model and the leadership demonstrated by each organisation over the last number of days.

The Chair added his thanks to all members of the group for their commitment and engagement in this process and the advice provided. The Chair acknowledged the huge level of engagement with all the stakeholders since the announcement the previous Friday, which was appreciated given the significant demands each organisation is dealing with.

2. Minutes

- 1 May for final approval – revised note circulated and now approved
- 6 May for initial consideration – circulated for initial consideration, observations to be submitted
- Noted that the minutes of meetings, as agreed by the group, and other meeting documentation will be available on the Department website, [here](#).

3. Calculated Grades

Update from Chair on launch and availability of information on gov.ie

The Chair noted that a range of documents were published at the time of the Calculated Grades announcement in order to provide as much clarity as possible on the decision made about the 2020 Leaving Certificate. These included:

- A Guide to Calculated Grades for Leaving Certificate Students May 2020
- Challenges of Organising Examinations with Social Distancing Requirement
- Wellbeing of Leaving Certificate Students: Factors for Consideration - NEPS May 2020
- Frequently Asked Questions regarding Leaving Certificate 2020

Update on work to develop detailed guidance for schools and teachers

Aidan Farrell advised the group that work is currently underway in relation to two front facing aspects of the calculated grades model:

- Development of a candidate portal to allow candidates to opt in to receive calculated grades. The portal will also allow them to confirm the level of the subject at which they intended to take each examination. Detailed guidance for schools and teachers on the operation of the model will be provided.

Guide to Calculated Grades

The Chair invited group members to suggest general areas/issues where further information is required for students and parents and the most effective ways in which this information could be communicated.

Comments noted:

- Thanks expressed to Minister for his deep engagement with stakeholders
- The decision regarding the leaving certificate was in general favourably welcomed and for many provided a sense of relief
- Concerns expressed regarding the timeline for implementation of the new calculated grades system, e.g. do we know how long it take to gather information from students regarding them opting in and subject level?
- Need to address queries as quickly as possible, in order to provide clarity to the system, teachers are currently working in a vacuum. Positive outcome will rely on clear answers to all these questions
- Method of communication needs to be considered, including visual and audio versions of support materials, so that information is easily accessible. Also need to be mindful of the digital divide and look at material that can be easily disseminated, particularly to students who may have already disengaged.
- Guidance for parents and students should include information about what it is they should be doing, in a positive way. This would help dispel a lot of anxiety. Current rumours regarding canvassing are unhelpful.
- Need to provide more information regarding school alignment and standardisation processes, and greater detail on how students won't be disadvantaged because of the school they go to
- A question was raised regarding the issuing of leaving certificate results and CAO offers at the same time
- Teachers will need specific guidance in relation to particular subjects and programmes which will provide a greater level of detail. They will need to be advised as to what data they should use, what data is considered appropriate, e.g. journals that have already been submitted to SEC, practicals/projects and how such marks might be taken into account
- Detailed guidance on particular cohorts of students will need to be provided, including; students planning to complete an exam in a non-curricular language; repeat candidates; external candidates; mature students
- Teachers want to ensure equity in this system, will need to use hard data in order to do so, concerns re taking account of homework
- Advise will be needed on how RACE provisions should be applied
- View that students should be given the benefit of the 100% awarded to them for oral examinations in languages last March
- Need for guidance on the data that needs to be retained in the school
- Need for legal cover for teachers. This will help in supporting the mental health of teachers
- Protecting teachers needs to be balanced with fairness

- Further information should be shared on what facilities will be made available to support progression onto Further Education, Higher Education, apprenticeships, etc. next year
- Question raised regarding timing of the postponed written exams and if they will allow for candidates to take up a place in Higher Education this year. Students want to do exams as soon as possible and not have to wait a year
- Will need to deal with issue of equity in relation to Higher and Further Education, further support in SUSI to allow students take up positions not being taken by international students. Also need to look at HEAR and DARE programmes

The Chair thanked everyone for their inputs and made some points in relation to transition issues:

- Leaving Certificate exam results and CAO results are not issued on the same day, for a number of reasons. The purpose and meaning of LC results is recognition of student achievement on the completion of post-primary education. In addition, not all students progress to Higher Education, meaning CAO results are at this stage not relevant to those students
- Regarding a timeline for written exams and the issuing of results, there are a number of factors to be considered before a date for written exams can be agreed. It is noted in the FAQs that students who opt to sit the Leaving Certificate examinations later in the year and receive a CAO offer on foot of these results will start their course in the 2021/22 academic year. Where a candidate who has started first year of a HE course becomes entitled to a higher CAO offer and chooses to accept same in the following academic year, attendance for first year of the new course would remain eligible for free fees and SUSI funding as appropriate.

The Chair asked Aidan Farrell to respond to comments:

- Important issue is that candidates will not be disadvantaged
- Fairness and integrity in the process is essential and teachers will need to be given the time and space in this context
- Getting information out as early as possible will help prevent misinformation

The Chair invited Harold Hislop to provide comment:

- This has been a really useful session, highlighting many of the issues that we need to consider in further guidance and development
- Timelines for the various elements of the implementation of the calculated grades system are based on our best estimates, this work is all new to everyone involved. In addition, it is essential that, where technical components are being used, such as the student portal, they must be tested properly
- This is a difficult space for teachers, there is a need to support them to resist contacts from parents and students. A position on the cessation of tuition for leaving certificate students has been published in order to support teachers on this.
- There is still a lot more technical work to be done in addressing the many queries that have arisen

The HEA was also invited to provide comment:

- The Higher Education representative bodies welcome the changes that have been announced and have agreed to work with the calculated grades system and use it as it would the traditional Leaving Certificate
- CAO have also confirmed that they will work with calculated grades
- There have been discussions with the representative bodies on a number of issues. One is around the numbers for the HEAR and DARE Programmes and HEIs have agreed that they will be flexible in relation to the numbers of places. The same has also been agreed for high points courses. A further issue is the number of International students, which is more complex. It was noted that the number of international students applying are still holding up, but those numbers may not come to fruition. In addition, over 2,000 Irish students have traditionally gone abroad each year to study and may decide not to do so this year
- Need to be cognisant of what measure will be in place in September in Higher Education, particularly regarding social distancing requirements and the impact this will have on numbers in lecture halls, labs etc.
- HEA will work through a statement of principles for what September will look like.
- A stakeholder group, similar to this one, has been formed and is looking at the impact of Covid 19 on entry to tertiary education
- It is important to remember that this is a postponed leaving certificate and must be treated in the same as other leaving certificates

The Chair concluded this item with some final remarks:

- Noted that the opening of schools buildings from 18 May was not a return to work for teachers
- This was a useful conversation, important to hear others' concerns
- It is important to remind people not to forget how challenging this is for school managers, principals and teachers
- Must work through these challenges collectively

4. Supports for well-being of students

A brief update was provided by NEPS:

- Publication of *Wellbeing of Leaving Certificate Students: Factors for Consideration NEPS May 2020* on Friday
- NEPS believes that stress on students has been reduced as result of Friday's announcement
- Students will continue to experience stresses associated with calculated grades model but the availability of clear information will help lessen this
- While tuition for Leaving Certificate students has stopped, students remain students of the school until the end of the school term on 29 May
- In terms of the school's role in supporting the wellbeing of Leaving Certificate students, the role of the Student Support Team should remain available until the end of the school term.

- NEPS continue to engage with the Department of Health and will keep group informed of any developments

Discussion among stakeholders:

- Thanks expressed for work of NEPS and support teams in schools
- Where questions from students and parents arise, a natural source would be the teacher; as this is no longer an option could there be a nominated teacher in the school to answer queries (a teacher unconnected with the process of calculated grades)
- There is a need for dedicated support in DES, similar to the helpdesk facility provided by the SEC during the examination
- Information published by way of guidance for teachers and parents is welcomed but more guidance is required
- Work now being done by schools and teachers that would have been done by SEC; there is a need for discussions on contractual issues
- Recognition of cases for students outside of school
- Equity issues in running the examinations is a concern, need to consider inter-year equity also. Cannot have a situation where this year's leaving certificate is perceived to have a lower value than other years

5. Dates of future meetings, all at 11.30-13.30 unless otherwise agreed:

- Friday, 15 May 2020 – via webex on Reopening of Schools
- Friday, 22 May 2020 – in Clock Tower
- Friday, 29 May 2020