

ADVISORY GROUP ON PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS 2021

WEBEX, 14 December 2020, 11.00 – 13.00

Agreed Note of Meeting

Present

	Name	Organisation/Position
Joint Chair	Dalton Tattan (DT)	Assistant Secretary General
Joint Chair	Andrea Feeney (AF)	CEO, SEC
Students	Reuban Murray	President, ISSU
	Alicia O’Sullivan	Education Officer, ISSU
Parents	Aine Lynch	Chief Executive, NPC-P
	Paul Rolston	Communications Director, NPC-PP
Teachers	Ann Piggott	President, ASTI
	Kieran Christie	General Secretary, ASTI
	Martin Marjoram	President, TUI
	Michael Gillespie	General Secretary, TUI
School managers and leaders	John Curtis	General Secretary, JMB
	John Irwin	General Secretary, ACCS
	Paul Fields	Director of Schools, ETBI
	Clive Byrne	Chief Executive, NAPD
NCCA	Barry Slattery	Deputy CEO, NCCA
State Examinations Commission	Hugh McManus	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC
	Elaine Sheridan	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC
DFHERIS	Fiona O’Byrne	Principal Officer
Department of Education	Harold Hislop	Chief Inspector
	Yvonne Keating	Deputy Chief Inspector
	Orlaith O’Connor	Assistant Chief Inspector
	Eamonn Moran	Principal Officer
	Ciara Molloy	Assistant Principal Officer
	Padraig Manning	Principal Officer
	Daniel Kearns	Administrative Officer

Apologies

DFHERIS	William Beausang	Assistant Secretary General
	Keith Moynes	Assistant Secretary General
Higher Education	Alan Wall	Chief Executive, HEA (Observer)

Department of Education	Anne Tansey	Director, NEPS
	Deirdre Shanley	Assistant Secretary General
Observer	Áine Doyle	Adviser to Minister

1. Welcome

The Joint Chair (DT) thanked members of the advisory group for their attendance at today's meeting.

2. Minute of previous meeting

The draft minutes of the last meeting, held on 25 November, were approved.

3. Terms of Reference

The Joint Chair (DT) invited stakeholders to provide high level observations on the draft Terms of Reference (TOR).

It was commented that early circulation of presentations and/or papers in advance of meetings of the Advisory Group would be useful and would allow for stakeholders to make informed comments and inputs on behalf of their organisations at subsequent meetings.

The Joint Chair (DT) noted the above comment and advised that as the work of the group moves forward, efforts will be made to share issues for consideration in advance of meetings.

Members of the Advisory Group were asked to submit any observations on the draft TOR to Ciara Molloy by close of business on Friday 18 December. These observations will be worked into the draft TOR as appropriate, for sign off at the next meeting.

4. 2021 Examinations

A presentation was given by the Andrea Feeney and Elaine Sheridan of the State Examinations Commission (SEC). The SEC noted that while their priority is to run the Leaving Certificate examinations (LC), they have expressed their desire to also run the Junior Cycle examinations (JC), while being mindful of health and safety of all of those involved in the examinations process. The SEC need to ensure that any arrangements made in relation to the 2021 examinations must not detrimentally impact on the integrity of the examinations process or create security concerns.

The presentation will be circulated following the meeting.

The presentation included the following areas:

- The Examination Network
- Annual Examinations Challenges
- Covid – Concerns and Challenges
- Normal Examinations Year
 - Coursework
 - Orals and Practicals
 - May Events

- Written Examinations
 - Delivery Model
 - Written Examinations – Key Issues
 - Capacity to Mark Examinations
 - Providing for students who miss LC examinations due to Covid
 - Questions for consideration

The Joint Chair (AF) invited comments from the stakeholders:

- Thank you to the SEC for the substantial work that has been done to date in planning for the 2021 state examinations. This early work is very helpful. The presentation raises a number of issues which will require consideration by members of the Advisory Group
- Flexibility was a common theme throughout the presentation, including the flexibility shown to date regarding the timelines for the completion of coursework. Learning from the November exams also demonstrates the flexibilities possible within the system.
- An assessment of space available to schools to conduct the LC, JC and provide for special centres simultaneously would be useful. This is a piece of work that could be completed by schools relatively quickly, with information returned to the SEC
- Scheduling of the various assessment components needs to be considered, but there is a need to minimise class disruption and teacher absence
- There is a need to retain other assessment components as much as possible to avoid an over reliance on written components in June
- If there is a possibility that a digital delivery model will be used for aspects of assessment this needs to be communicated to schools as soon as possible. A digital solution should not be ruled out, schools have shown great capacity to engage in digital delivery over the last number of months. However, need to be mindful of the challenges regarding digital access for students and the supports required to ensure continued digital access to education and also assessment
- Bringing forward the examinations start date would further impact on loss of tuition time. Also, moving assessments into holidays and weekends is not a preferred option, as students and teachers will require a break
- Delayed results will have knock on effect on entry into Higher and Further Education, and will also impact those hoping to study abroad. This issue will need to be addressed by the third level sector, noting that the LC is not just about entry into Higher and Further Education
- Clarification will be needed as to how exemptions from coursework will be reflected in a student's results/certification
- Encouraging to hear comments regarding teachers' willingness to participate in the examinations process, though it is noted that the situation for principals is quite fraught in terms of releasing teachers to support examinations process. A co-ordinated campaign to attract teachers could work well.
- Issues such as mandatory work experience for LCA should be clarified
- Roadmap for Vaccination will be available on Tuesday and will hopefully address some concerns and issues raised here regarding high risk students. The Department should engage with Public Health on this front
- Need to consider approaches which would allow us to prioritise the LC while still providing for the JC

- Important to get positive and confident communication out to the sector regarding planning. There is a role for each organisation here to communicate changes, once agreed, to their members
- Difficult to amend the breadth of the curriculum, acknowledging the different ways in which teachers approach the delivery of their subject, with the best approach in terms of flexibility being to give greater choice within the examination paper

Both Chairs welcomed the views expressed. The Joint Chair (DT) stated the importance of ensuring the workability of any decisions ultimately made. He invited members of the AG to make written submissions on foot of today's presentation and reflections on same, should they wish to do so. It would be appreciated if submissions could be made to Ciara Molloy prior to the Christmas break. He also advised that contact would be made with Public Health to consider the health issues arising around the examinations.

5. Update on Assessment Arrangements for Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021

An update was provided by Orlaith O'Connor, Assistant Chief Inspector, regarding the publication of updated Assessment Arrangements for Junior and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021. The document was first published in August with the objective of providing certainty to the school system and is designed to take account of the disrupted learning experienced by students.

The changes to the assessment arrangements were made following engagement between the subject experts in the NCCA, SEC and the Inspectorate.

Following its publication in August, the Department received a small number of submissions in relation to the document. The document on assessment arrangements has now been updated to take account of the observations received. Clarifications/adjustments to the assessment arrangements have been made in relation to a number of subjects. The document will be published by the Department of Education shortly.

6. AOB

A press statement will issue following this meeting and will be circulated to the members of the Advisory Group in advance.

7. Date of next meeting

The Joint Chair (DT) advised that a suggested date for the next meeting in early January will be circulated later this week.