

**Advisory Group on Planning for State Examinations 2021**

**WEBEX**

**22 January 2021, 10.00 – 12.00**

**Agreed Note of Meeting**

**Present**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation/Position</b>
<b>Joint Chair</b>	Dalton Tattan (DT)	Assistant Secretary General
<b>Joint Chair</b>	Andrea Feeney (AF)	CEO, SEC
<b>Minister for Education</b>	Norma Foley, TD	Department of Education
<b>Students</b>	Reuban Murray	President, ISSU
	Alicia O’Sullivan	Education Officer, ISSU
<b>Parents</b>	Aine Lynch	Chief Executive, NPC-P
	Mai Fanning	President, NPC-PP
<b>Teachers</b>	Ann Piggott	President, ASTI
	Kieran Christie	General Secretary, ASTI
	Martin Marjoram	President, TUI
	Michael Gillespie	General Secretary, TUI
<b>School managers and leaders</b>	John Curtis	General Secretary, JMB
	John Irwin	General Secretary, ACCS
	Paul Fields	Director of Schools, ETBI
	Clive Byrne	Chief Executive, NAPD
	Paul Byrne	Deputy Director, NAPD
<b>NCCA</b>	Barry Slattery	Deputy CEO, NCCA
<b>State Examinations Commission</b>	Hugh McManus	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC
	Elaine Sheridan	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC
<b>Department of Education</b>	Deirdre Shanley	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
	Clíodhna O’Neill	Principal Officer
<b>DFHERIS</b>	Fiona O’Byrne	Principal Officer

<b>Higher Education</b>	Alan Wall	Chief Executive, HEA (Observer)
<b>Observer</b>	Áine Doyle	Adviser to Minister

## Apologies

<b>DFHERIS</b>	William Beausang	Assistant Secretary General
	Keith Moynes	Assistant Secretary General
<b>Department of Education</b>	Harold Hislop	Chief Inspector

### 1. Welcome

The Chair (DT) thanked everyone for their attendance and ongoing engagement.

The Chair (DT) noted that since the last meeting of the Advisory Group, a number of articles have appeared in the media, the contents of which reflect discussions which took place during the meeting. Members were asked to maintain the group's standard of confidentiality, a matter which is addressed through the group's Terms of Reference.

### 2. Opening remarks

Minister Foley thanked the group for convening and noted her appreciation for the opportunity to work together.

### 3. Minute of previous meeting

Minute of meeting held on 14 December 2021 was approved by the group.

### 4. Terms of Reference

The Chair (DT) noted that the Terms of Reference have been circulated to all members and are now for approval.. There was some discussion among the group, noting that the terms of reference should include reference to contingency planning in the event that the exams cannot take place.

The Chair (DT) noted that this was implied throughout the terms of reference.

Terms of reference were approved.

### 5. Presentation by the ISSU on recent report

Reuban Murray and Alicia O'Sullivan of the ISSU gave a presentation on the recently published *ISSU Report on the 2021 State Examinations and Return to Schools*. The presentation brought us through the details of the report, looking at the following areas:

- Senior Cycle Exams (Leaving Certificate and LCA)
- 2021 Junior Cycle Exams (Junior Certificate)
- School closures, and online learning
- School reopening
- Students' Relationship with the Department of Education & Skills

The ISSU report contains a number of recommendations.

- On the matter of the Leaving Certificate, the ISSU state that its preference is for discussions to begin on how to implement “a system of calculated grades for students based on the use of standardised continuous assessment to formulate these grades with the option to sit scaled down end of year exams”.
- The ISSU is also of the view that “oral and practical examinations cannot go ahead”, but that students who elect to sit examinations would be afforded the opportunity to undertake these assessment components at a later date.
- On the Junior Cycle, the ISSU's position is that “the Junior Certificate [Cycle] exams cannot proceed as normal”. The ISSU asks that alternatives be explored including awarding results based on Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs), previous test results or other forms of assessment.
- In relation to school closures, the ISSU advocates that the Department should work to ascertain why students do not feel safe in schools, and work with partners to address those concerns. The ISSU also state that students with family members who are very high risk should be facilitated for remote learning on a longer term basis.
- The ISSU advocates that schools remain closed until after the February midterm, following which there would be a staggered reopening, with sixth years prioritised.

Further points raised by the ISSU include:

- The consultation process carried out found that students are first and foremost seeking clarity on what will happen and more communication from the Department.
- There were concerns that a model of Calculated Grades may prevent home schooled students from progressing to further or higher education.
- Students feel as though they are more disadvantaged than the class of 2020 as they have lost more tuition time, and the traditional examinations model is not an adequate method of assessment.
- Mental health, wellbeing, worry and stress feature regularly across consultation for Leaving Certificate, Junior Cycle and school closures.
- There are concerns regarding a model of Calculated Grades, as some schools have been assessing students regularly in anticipation of such a model, while other schools have not carried out such assessments.
- There were concerns that the cancellation of the orals and practical components would disadvantage students who excelled in those areas.
- Noted that the report does not address SEN students, but thanked the Department for their work in this space.

The ISSU concluded by noting that this is a very challenging time and that last year too much time was spent planning for the traditional exams. This year there is time to plan for a viable alternative. It is clear to the ISSU that the traditional exams cannot continue as planned.

The ISSU thanked the Chairs for the opportunity to present the findings of their report at today's meeting.

The Chair (DT) thanked the ISSU for their presentation and noted that there is a richness here that needs to be considered in detail. The Chair (DT) suggested that a subset of the Advisory Group meet over the next week to give further, more detailed consideration to what has been set out in the report and the challenges the recommendations might pose.

The Chair (DT) invited any immediate comments from the group, noting the limited time available and the intention to meet to further consider the report.

#### **Comments from stakeholders:**

- ISSU thanked their detailed and insightful presentation, highlighting the challenges that need to be addressed
- Agreed that second component assessments are important and should go ahead
- Importance of clarity for the system was reiterated
- Strong feeling coming through from schools, is the sense that schools were better prepared for online learning. Feedback is very positive regarding engagement in online learning and that it is going very well
- Overwhelming message from parents is one of distrust of the health advice and of the Department, concerns are being expressed about the departure from PH advice
- Communication has become more and more important. Need to put wellbeing of students first and foremost
- If the ISSU are carrying out any further work on this, it would be useful to hear from the LCA students.

#### **6. Update from the SEC**

SEC have been advancing with preparations for the State Examinations:

- Development of examinations papers is progressing. Papers will look different this year due to the revised assessment arrangements developed to allow for disruption to learning, for both last year and providing contingency for this year
- Before Christmas, SEC issued a circular regarding coursework and flexibility being made available to schools and students. In response to the school closure, SEC issued a further communication regarding additional flexibilities for coursework and clarified that some deadlines will be extended. Regarding LCA students and completion of tasks, SEC have clarified that these will be delayed
- SEC and DoE are engaged with Public Health regarding planning for examinations. It is noted that SEC have experience in running successful examinations in a level 5 scenario. Public health looking at distancing arrangements, the footprint in schools

- The deadline for applications for the Junior Cycle RACE scheme has been extended
- Examinations data entry process, which would typically involve the SEC issuing 60,000 forms to schools, is now moving online to the candidate self-service portal
- SEC due to open examination entry process for external candidates
- Regarding the LC2021 written examinations, just over 2000 students sat these examinations in November and December. The intention is to issue results in early February. Students will receive all of their results from the written exams. The CAO will receive students 'better of' results. The certificates that students will receive later in the year will include the 'better of' results
- SEC recognise the challenges that need to be addressed, but are continuing to make progress wherever possible

The Chair (DT) thanked the SEC for the update and advised the group that there will be announcement regarding the final date for the issuing of the results of the LC2020 written exams. The group will be kept informed.

## **7. AOB**

The Chair (DT) noted that the usual press statement will issue from the Department this afternoon which will be shared with the group in advance.

The Minister concluded by acknowledging the enormous body of work that has been undertaken in such a short space of time, and thanking everyone for the time that they are dedicating to this work.

## **8. Date of next meeting**

The Chair (DT) advised that a meeting of a subset of the Advisory Group will be arranged for next week.