

**Sub-group of the Advisory Group on Planning for State Examinations 2021**

**WEBEX**

**27 January 2021, 14.00- 15.30**

**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
	Paul Byrne	Deputy Director, NAPD
<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>	Harold Hislop	Chief Inspector
	Orlaith O’Connor	Assistant Chief Inspector
	Ciara Molloy	Assistant Principal Officer
<b>Observer</b>	Áine Doyle	Adviser to Minister

**1. Welcome**

The Chair (DT) thanked everyone for attending, and welcomed Minister Foley to the meeting.

Minister Foley acknowledged the ongoing commitment of group and thanked all for their attendance.

The Chair (DT) noted that the purpose of the meeting is to explore further possible options for the state examinations, having regard to the findings of the ISSU Report on the 2021 State Examinations and Return to School.

The Chair (DT) commented on the recent announcement regarding level 5 restrictions in place until 5 March and the ongoing engagement regarding the return to school on a phased basis.

## **2. Exploration of further possible options for the state examinations, having regard to the findings of the ISSU Report on the 2021 State Examinations and Return to School**

The Chair (AF) presented a series of questions and challenges for consideration and reflection under the following headings:

- Alternatives
- Student experience
- Scope and form of assessment
- Further adaptations/changes to examinations
- Junior Cycle

The Chair (AF) noted that, given the time allowed, today's discussion would focus on alternatives and student experience.

The group were asked to consider the following questions:

### **Alternatives**

- What further issues arise with an extended period of school closure? Does any extended school closure present a threat to the viability of our previously agreed approach?
- What type of alternatives could be put in place to enable students to progress this year? Calculated grades has been suggested but are there other approaches that we should consider?
- What are the challenges in providing any alternatives?
- When we think about students having a choice of sitting examinations or an alternative, what comes to mind?

### **Student experience**

- We started in this process thinking about the challenge of over-assessment and now concerns are being raised about the absence of information on student performance – what is our sense of what has been happening in schools?
- What about student engagement – how do we ensure that any alternatives continue to ensure students remain engaged and motivated in continuing with their learning?
- Are there measures we can take to address concerns teachers may have about the student-teacher relationship in the event of alternative forms of assessment?

### **Summary of discussion by key topic:**

#### **LC v. Alternatives:**

- Still feasible to run exams once students return to school, but recognise challenges
- Great optimism with numbers of cases declining, it's too early to look at alternatives
- Assessment could be a combination of both teacher assessment and some form of external assessment
- Mini assessment alternative, which is being implemented in other jurisdictions, should be considered
- Continuous assessment could lead to greater stress for students
- Higher Education has a role to play – open access to HE/FE and allow all students to progress

- Pared back form of LC in June, students will know what they are preparing for
- Running two systems of assessment in parallel will be very difficult
- Proposing form of Calculated Grades and scaled back exams in June
- Need to ensure fairness between options
- This year, in comparison to last year, there is time to plan and there is also the experience garnered from last year

**Practicals and coursework:**

- Students are concerned that they will not have an opportunity to complete their coursework
- Students must be given the opportunity to complete alternative assessment components – it will disadvantage students if they do not have the opportunity to do so

**Choice:**

- Students are indicating that they want a choice between traditional exams and an alternative
- Preference for some is that there is no choice, that all students operate under the one system
- Choice could cause certain stress for students

**Engagement in online learning:**

- Very positive reports about online learning and practices employed by teachers, much improved since last year
- There has been an improvement in online learning but it is still a challenge for students

**Teacher assessment:**

- Teachers could play a role in assessment, particularly in relation to practicals, e.g. facilitating the recording of music practicals
- Work with teachers on assessment so there is a common understanding of what different grades look like
- Major concerns with teachers assessing their own students, teachers will be placed under great duress
- Need to provide level of protection for teachers
- Great confidence in teachers knowing their students and having a sense of how they would do in a subject
- Teachers less favourable towards providing estimates for their students due to loss of in class contact time

**Student wellbeing:**

- Need to consider alternatives, just because it's possible to run the exams doesn't mean it's the right things for students – loss of face-to-face teaching and greater disruption
- Extended closure is causing further mental duress for students
- Need greater clarity and certainty

**3. AOB**

The Chair (DT) noted that a press statement will issue from the Department after the meeting and will be shared with the group in advance.

The Chair (DT) advised that there would be an announcement regarding the LC2020 written examinations and the date of the issuing of results. Details will be shared with the Advisory Group.

#### **4. Date of next meeting**

The Chair (DT) advised that a meeting of a subset of the Advisory Group will take place at 2pm on Friday 29 January 2021