

Advisory Group on Planning for State Examinations 2021

WEBEX

Wednesday 17 February 2021, 17.00-18.00

Agreed Note of Meeting

Present

	Name	Organisation/Position
Joint Chair (acting)	Harold Hislop (HH)	Chief Inspector
Joint Chair	Andrea Feeney (AF)	CEO, SEC
Minister for Education	Norma Foley, TD	Department of Education
Students	Reuban Murray	President, ISSU
	Alicia O'Sullivan	Education Officer, ISSU
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
	Paul Byrne	Deputy Director, NAPD
NCCA	Barry Slattery	Deputy CEO, NCCA
State Examinations Commission	Elaine Sheridan	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC
Department of Education	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
	Grainne Cullen	Principal Officer
DFHERIS	Fiona O'Byrne	Principal Officer

Apologies

Joint Chair	Dalton Tattan	Assistant Secretary General
DFHERIS	William Beausang	Assistant Secretary General
	Keith Moynes	Assistant Secretary General
Observer	Áine Doyle	Adviser to Minister
Higher Education	Alan Wall	Chief Executive, HEA (Observer)
State Examinations Commission	Hugh McManus	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC
Parents	Aine Lynch	Chief Executive, NPC-P
	Mai Fanning	President, NPC-PP

Introduction:

Harold Hislop (HH), Chief Inspector, advised that he would act as Joint Chair in Dalton Tattan's absence.

The Joint Chair (HH) thanked everyone for attending at such short notice, and welcomed the Minister to the meeting.

The Minister thanked all stakeholders for their commitment to the process and critical role they have played, often out of hours. The Minister acknowledged that it would not be possible to reach a conclusion that all will be happy with but that it was essential that clarity was provided for students.

The Minister advised that Government has made decisions regarding:

- Leaving Certificate 2021 examinations
- SEC Accredited Grades
- Junior Cycle examinations not to run

The Minister advised that the Joint Chair (HH) will provide the details on the decisions made.

Overview of decisions:

The Joint Chair (HH) advised that the authority to make the Government decision was devolved to Cabinet Committee on Education which met this afternoon. Decisions taken:

- Confirmed that Leaving Certificate 2021 examinations will proceed with orals and practicals, subject to public health guidelines
- Students will also have the alternative option of applying for grades accredited by the State Examinations Commission (SEC), to be known as SEC-Accredited Grades
- Junior Cycle examinations will not be run in 2021. Schools will be provided with guidance on continuing to engage this year group in online learning and assessment

It was noted that there are elements of this decision that will disappoint some, but certainty and clarity is needed.

SEC Accredited Grades:

- The process of Accredited Grades will be operated by the SEC once the *vires* matter is resolved
- Will be based on the professional judgement of teachers (which will not be subject to appeal)
- Will be offered to all students who are eligible to receive them
- Estimated marks will go through an in-school alignment process to ensure fairness amongst candidates at school level
- Estimated marks signed off at school level and submitted to the SEC
- Friday 14 May will be the last day that student work will be considered as part of the evidence base for estimated marks
- Will have to provide guidance on types of evidence that can be used by teachers, draft guidelines are being advanced

- On 28 May schools will close for all students
- From 14 – 28 May individual teachers will assemble and examine the records and evidence that they will use to inform their judgement about the estimated marks and alignment process, for principals to approve
- Alignment meetings must be completed and data submitted to SEC by a deadline in the week ending Friday, 4 June
- Data will be put through a standardisation process
- Department is engaged in a procurement process for contractor to undertake the standardisation process
- Indemnity for teachers will be put in place similar to last year
- SEC Accredited Grade and examination outcomes will have regard to the pattern of results in 2020 and previously, with further details of the process to be determined by the Minister having regard to advice from the SEC
- There will be a right for students to appeal their Accredited Grade, this will comprise a process review focused on examining possible errors in the transmission and processing of student data
- SEC's involvement is critical. Minister will be bringing legislation before the Oireachtas to allow the SEC to complete this process

Written examinations:

- Students will have the option of taking written Leaving Certificate examinations in some or all of their subjects. The examinations will:
 - Operate in accordance with the normal timetable to be published tomorrow
 - Be conducted subject to public health advice and providing, as far as possible, access to the examinations for very high risk students, and
 - Provide clear information and guidance to students communicating the approach to examinations this year
- Minister wants real opportunity for students to sit written examinations in June
- Examinations will start on the normal date of 9 June
- JC will not take place and will be conducted as school based assessment similar to last year, guidance will issue on this
- Consideration has been given to further adjustments to LC examination papers to give a greater choice to students
- If that were to apply, while duration of exam remains the same, students will have less to complete
- Written exams will be marked in the traditional way, with further online marking available this year

Orals and Practicals:

- Normal non-examination assessment components, such as orals, practical performance tests will run, subject to public health advice with certain elements not running for public health reasons
- Coursework will be completed to a revised timetable and submitted to the SEC
- Oral examinations will be held in schools in the Easter period and immediately after, outside of tuition time

- Schools will be asked to source teachers locally (from their own staff, or from another school, or using retired teachers) to administer the oral examinations, but teachers will not be required to assess their students
- This will allow those candidates who chose to take the written examinations to complete an oral assessment
- It is hoped that teachers cooperate with schools – to have neighbouring teachers, retired teachers etc., recruited by the school not the SEC (paid by the SEC) to support the process
- Management Bodies have responded favourably to allowing access to schools over Easter for the orals and examinations aides will be provided to schools
- Music performance examinations will be conducted by SEC examiners, possibly in the Easter period
- Adjustments may have to be made in relation to the Music practicals, in line with public health advice, to ensure safety of candidates and examiners. Public health advice on this will inform any final guidance to be issued
- Some practicals are not feasible for public health reasons, but marks will be increased proportionately elsewhere
- Materials of coursework and orals will be submitted to the SEC.

Issuing of Results:

- One set of results will issue to each candidate on results day: students will get the better of the SEC Accredited Grade or examinations
- For students who opt for AG only, will only get the AG results
- For students who opted for both, the better of the two results will be awarded to the student on their results day.
- A short time later, students will get access to their estimated mark, accredited grade and LC examination results
- There will be an appeals process
- LC certification for 2021 will not distinguish between AG or examinations awarded grade
- It is not possible to provide AG results before the option to sit the exams is confirmed, the timeframe does not allow for this
- It is intended that results will be available for CAO and UCAS deadlines
- The SEC accredited grade and the examinations are two distinct processes

Students studying out of school and students studying subjects out of school

- Provision as far as practicable for out-of-school learners or students studying one or more subjects outside school to apply to receive Accredited Grades through the devising of an appropriate and practicable process

Facilitating and protecting the process

- Legislation will be required to:
 - confer on the State Examinations Commission power to operate a system of Accredited Grades
 - if possible, prohibit canvassing

- if possible, underpin indemnity for teachers, tutors, principals, boards of management and patrons

Next steps:

- Substantial agenda of work that has to be done, which will require engagement between the Department, SEC and stakeholders
- The draft of the public guide on examinations and accredited grades will be shared for comment
- Will develop detailed guide for teachers and schools
- Have to develop processes for OOSL and for those taking subjects out of school. Committed to putting better process in place. Litigation may also factor in here

Stakeholders were invited to ask questions. Clarity was sought on some matters:

Is coursework compulsory?

No part of the LC is compulsory. For candidates sitting subjects with alternative assessment components, students can decide not to do these elements but they will forfeit the marks. The same as happens in a traditional year.

If a student plans not to sit an exam, they need not attend school or complete the coursework or orals?

No, but the teachers will continue to gather evidence to inform the estimated marks up to 14 May.

If a student plans to sit the exam but is unable due to illness or other reason, will there be another opportunity to do so?

There will be no second sitting of the exams. The SEC accredited grade provides contingency for situations such as this.

Is there an embargo on this information?

There is no embargo on this information, anything said here will be made public shortly.

LCA tasks and practicals, how will these be managed?

SEC looking at the schedule for these at the moment for February and May tasks and the revised timing for completion.

It would be useful to have short descriptions of agreements?

These will be issued as soon as possible.

Is there a plan for detailed guidance for canvassing?

There will be material in the guidance document regarding canvassing. In terms of other guidance, drafts will be circulated to members of the Advisory Group for their inputs.

Stakeholders were invited to provide more general comments on the announcement:

- Welcome the announcement in terms of the clarity it provides and the provision of a choice for students

- There will be logistical issues that will need to be teased out, including the guidance to support the process
- Having the orals and practicals is very welcome
- Would ask that it is noted that the option to provide the AG results before confirmation of the option to sit the written exams was considered but not possible due to timeline
- Look forward to working with Management Bodies and teacher unions to progress plans here and ensure that this can be delivered, there is a lot of work to be done
- Have discussed the extraordinary lengths involved in the quality assurance process for the data once it's submitted to the SEC, but concerns remain about the lack of evidence used in the development of estimated marks prior to the submission – and concerns remain around the resulting inequity
- Will have to have detailed conversations regarding protection for teachers
- Will need to bring this back to members
- Everyone here has the best interests of student at heart and that's evident
- Plus side is that there is contingency built in should Covid-19 interrupt

SEC were invited to provide last comments:

The Joint Chair (AF) concluded by thanking everyone for their commitment during what has been a very challenging time. The SEC will need to work with all stakeholders over the coming days and weeks to support both processes.