

ADVISORY GROUP ON PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS 2021

BY WEBEX, 28 April 2021, 11.30 – 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
	Mai Fanning	President, 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
	Paul Byrne	Deputy Director, 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
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
	Clíodhna O’Neill	Principal Officer
	Neville Kenny	Principal Officer
	Padraig Manning	Administrative Officer
DFHERIS	Joanne Tobin	Assistant Principal Officer
Higher Education	Sheena Duffy	HEA (Observer)

Apologies

DFHERIS	William Beusang	Assistant Secretary General
	Keith Moynes	Assistant Secretary General

	Fiona O'Byrne	Principal Officer
Department of Education	Deirdre Shanley	Assistant Secretary General
	Anne Tansey	Director, NEPS
	Áine Doyle	Adviser to Minister (Observer)

1. Welcome

Thanks to everyone for attending today. It has been a number of weeks since the Advisory Group last met and great progress has been made during this time. Today is an opportunity to provide you with an update on the work that has been completed to date.

2. Update from the SEC

An update was provided by the SEC covering a number of areas:

Candidate Portal including Examinations and AG data

The Candidate Self Service Portal (CSSP) was open between 10 to 16 March to allow 2021 Leaving Certificate candidates to select their choice of sitting examinations, opting for accredited grades, or both, on a subject by subject basis.

Some statistics relating to this phase of the CSSP:

- 90% of all candidates registered to sit at least 1 LC examination
- 80% registered for a mix of LC examinations and Accredited Grades (AG)
- 2% registered for LC examinations only
- 5% registered for AG only
- 5% of candidates didn't complete phase 1 of the CSSP

In relation to Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) candidates and the CSSP phase 1 process:

- 65% opted for mix of LC examinations and Accredited Grades
- 1% registered for examinations only
- 24% opted to receive AG only
- 10% of LCA candidates did not complete the process

The CSSP portal has reopened for phase 2 of the portal. The SEC now have contact details for all candidates who registered as part of phase 1 of the CSSP and can do targeted communication with the candidates. All students are required to complete phase 2 of the CSSP and candidate's choices for Accredited Grades will be locked in from Friday 30 April. While students cannot add subjects as part of the phase 2 process, if there appears to be an error the schools can contact with the SEC to make the necessary amendment.

With the provision of the proficiency assessments, students of non-curricular languages (NCL) are being asked to update their choices through the portal in regard to receiving an Accredited Grade

The SEC will continue to engage with schools in relation to students who have yet to register on the CSSP.

Orals, Practicals and changes to examination papers

The oral examinations in Gaeilge and modern European languages took place from 26 March to 15 April. This involved a huge collaborative effort across the school system. Guidance on the running of the oral examinations was provided to schools in advance and appears to have been well received.

The majority of the oral examinations recordings have been submitted to the SEC and arrangements for the marking of these recordings are currently being finalised.

The Music Performance Practical took place over Easter from 6 to 9 April, delivered by SEC examiners. Again, a huge thanks again to teachers and schools for the successful hosting of these examinations. While the duration of the test was reduced, all the same elements were examined during the practical performance. There are a small number of practicals still to take place.

There are a number of coursework deadlines over the coming weeks. Coursework will be retained in schools until June and returned to the SEC.

Adjustments to the examinations papers for 2021 were published in advance of the Easter holidays. This was an exceptional measure acknowledging the loss of learning for this particular student cohort. The duration of the examinations remains the same, with the number of questions reduced in many subjects and greater choice provided. Every effort was made to be as consistent as possible across subjects and subject levels. The weightings between examination components remains the same, with scaling applied where necessary.

LCA Year 1 and Year 2

This is a busy time for LCA candidates. Revised arrangements were introduced for the February tasks which were marked over the Easter holidays in schools. Similar arrangements will apply for the May tasks which will be marked in June.

Next week is the start of the LCA oral examinations. The SEC will issue guidance to schools today, including subject specific guidance. The LCA oral examinations recordings will be returned to the SEC. The practical performance tests will take place in May as normal and coursework will be completed in June.

Examinations delivery arrangements including May examinations

The timetables for the Leaving Certificate and Leaving Certificate Applied examinations were published in February and include information in relation to holding the Leaving Certificate Computer Science examination in May.

Details of examination centre plans will issue to schools shortly based on information provided by schools. In a normal year the SEC would have 5000 centres with LC and Junior Cycle examinations. This year there are 5006 centres for LC alone. Each examination centre accommodates 23 candidates with a typical classroom holding 10 candidates. While the maximum in an examination centre is 23 candidates, schools can have 3 centres in a PE Hall.

Information on online marking and aural examinations is also due to issue to schools shortly.

In relation to contract staff required for the examinations, the SEC have offered contracts to superintendents who previously filled the role. There is a shortfall in some areas, the SEC will continue to work on this. The number of examiners available is good but there are some concerns as society begins to open up.

It is important to note that SEC Accredited Grades are the contingency this year in all cases where it is not possible to sit examinations and there is no alternative sitting of the examinations.

Stakeholders were invited to provide comments:

- General sense that the adjustments to examination papers were well received, the changes may have encouraged more students to sit the examinations

- With the cut-off for assessment for Accredited Grades set for 14 May, some students are of the view that they can finish school at that point. It is important that students are encouraged to attend class for as long as possible
- It should be noted that some schools are running assessments, for the purposes of providing estimated marks, after school and during lunchtimes. While the issue doesn't seem to be widespread, it is understood the Department is considering the matter.

3. Update from the Department:

An update was provided by the Department covering a number of areas:

Guidance Documents

A series of guidance documents have been developed to support schools in the AG process and were issued to schools shortly after the announcement on 17 February regarding AG:

- A Guide to State Examinations and Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021
- A Guide to State Examinations and Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate Applied 2021
- Guide to Accredited Grades for Leaving Certificate 2021 for Out-of-School Subjects, and Out-of-School Learners
- Supporting Teaching, Learning and Assessment in the Context of Accredited Grades 2021

On Monday 26 April a more detailed Guide for Schools and Students on implementing the Accredited Grades Process for Out-of-School-Subjects and Out-of-School Learners was published.

This will be followed by a detailed guide on the in-schools process for providing estimated marks and a separate guide for those following LCA programme. Both of these guides will have a supporting instructional video.

The Department is also providing support to school leaders, teachers and other school personnel, tutors, parents and students by providing a dedicated phone-line service for queries on the Accredited Grades process.

In relation to the out-of-schools process, this is as closely aligned as possible to the in-school process in an effort to include as many students as possible. Students in the out-of-school process must have a link to a school. The Department is looking to schools to assist these students to facilitate them in receiving AG. Principals are to appoint a panel of 3 registered teachers assisted by AG aide. This panel decides on estimated mark for students in the out-of-school process.

There are special arrangements in place for NCL candidates. Proficiency assessments will be held on 8 May, the assessments will be 1.5 hours long. The Department is preparing packs in relation to the proficiency assessments providing all that the superintendents should require; the packs should be with schools early next week. The assessments are to be returned to the Department for marking, this process will be supported by Post-Primary Languages Ireland. The resulting estimated marks will be fed into the AG process.

Legislation

The Education (Leaving Certificate) (Accredited Grades) Bill 2021 was published last Friday, 23 April. The Bill will be initiated in the Seanad and the Department is expecting a May scheduling of all stages, the Dáil process will follow as soon as possible. Enactment is expected towards late May with commencement following as soon as possible after that.

The purpose of this Bill is to confer on the SEC the necessary functions to operate a system of accredited grades, and to provide a prohibition on the canvassing of teachers by students/parents or the giving of false or misleading information; and to provide for an indemnity for those involved in the process. This Bill also provides for the issuing of a certificate of final results in relation to the 2020 Leaving Certificate

The Bill Applies to 2021 only.

Data Collection Arrangements

Work is ongoing with ETS (Educational Testing Service), the external provider, in relation to the data collection process for AG. A Guide to Data Entry will be prepared and published before 24 May to support schools during the data entry process from 31 May to 3 June. Assistance will also be given to schools in advance of the data entry process regarding username and log-in details.

In addition to the guide, the helpline will also be open to schools in relation to data entry process.

Junior Cycle Certificate of Completion

Further to the decision made in April of last year to cancel the Junior Cycle exams, it was agreed that students would get written report from schools and the Junior Cycle Certificate of Completion would issue from the Department.

This work has been delayed due to focus on LC though some letters have issued to students to facilitate the taking up of apprenticeships.

A certificate will issue to each student through their schools. Schools on both the Post-Primary Online Database and JCAD system have been asked to confirm that their details are correct. The deadline for confirmation is this Friday.

The Certificates, which will be bilingual, will be sent to schools in PDF week beginning 10 May for issuing to students.

Communications

An agile communications approach has been applied, addressing issues as they arise. The approach provides a seamless response regardless of whether candidates are opting for AG, LC, or both.

This week it is important that all candidate engage with the CSSP process. As the SEC now have contact details for candidates, this is the primary form of contact which is supplemented with a social media campaign. How-to guide from the SEC in relation to phase 2 of the portal is being supported with a how-to video.

The helplines for both the CSSP and the new AG Department support service are being widely advertised.

Comments were invited from the Stakeholders:

- In relation to the Bill, on the provision of false information, is this in relation to students or teachers?
- Concerns were expressed over the timeline for enactment of the Bill and the effectiveness of provisions in relation to canvassing and the indemnity for teachers

Clarification from the Department:

- With regard to false information, it is however such information arises, not necessarily student/teacher

- The timeline for the Bill is in the hands of the Oireachtas. Arrangement in relation to withholding or results and indemnity for teachers can apply on an administrative basis pending enactment of the legislation, no different to last year. There is established practice in this regard

4. Leaving Certificate examinations 2022 – initial discussion

Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, gave a presentation on the curriculum and assessment options for LC examinations 2022. The purpose of the presentation is to stimulate thinking and an initial discussion on the matter which will be considered at a future meeting.

The presentation looked at the following area:

- Priorities for learners
- Priorities for the learning experience
- Possible options
- Syllabus/curricular requirements for exams

Comments from Stakeholders:

- The sooner clarity can be provided for 5th year students the better
- Any solution would need to be carefully considered but it is reassuring to be having the conversation now
- The initial discussion is welcome and gives a good indication of the current position
- It is important that Junior Cycle students are also kept motivated and that Junior Cycle examinations arrangements in 2022 are considered

5. AOB

The issue of antigen tests for LC candidates was raised, this might be something worth consideration in order to minimise the disruption were Covid cases to arise. It is understood that a piloting of antigen testing across the public service has been suggested. The matter will be considered by the Department.

Concerns have been expressed about events being planned in school. Management Bodies have advised schools not to host events in order to minimise the risk of a Covid outbreak. The Department and the SEC are preparing communications for schools and students on this matter. The Department will also engage with the ISSU on this issue.

6. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Advisory Group will take place mid-May.