

**ADVISORY GROUP ON PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS 2021**

**BY WEBEX, 21 May 2021, 13.30 – 15.00**

**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)	Chief Executive Officer, SEC
<b>Students</b>	Reuban Murray	President, ISSU
	Emer Neville	Communications 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>	Elaine Sheridan	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC
<b>Department of Education</b>	Harold Hislop	Chief Inspector
	Yvonne Keating	Deputy Chief Inspector
	Orlaith O'Connor	Assistant Chief Inspector
	Declan Cahalane	Assistant Chief Inspector
	Anne Tansey	Director, NEPS
	Eamonn Moran	Principal Officer
	Ciara Molloy	Assistant Principal Officer
	Neville Kenny	Principal Officer
	Padraig Manning	Administrative Officer
	Áine Doyle	Adviser to Minister (Observer)
<b>DFHERIS</b>	Joanne Tobin	Assistant Principal Officer
<b>Higher Education</b>	Sheena Duffy	HEA (Observer)

## Apologies

<b>DFHERIS</b>	William Beausang	Assistant Secretary General
	Keith Moynes	Assistant Secretary General
	Fiona O'Byrne	Principal Officer
<b>Department of Education</b>	Deirdre Shanley	Assistant Secretary General
	Clíodhna O'Neill	Principal Officer
<b>State Examinations Commission</b>	Hugh McManus	Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC

### 1. Welcome

The Chair (DT) thanked everyone for attending and for accommodating the lunchtime meeting,

The Chair (DT) welcomed Emer Neville, ISSU, to the meeting and thanked Alicia O'Sullivan for her role in supporting the work of the group.

### 2. Minutes

Minutes of meeting held on 28 April 2021 approved.

### 3. Update from the SEC:

The SEC provided an update in relation to the 2021 Leaving Certificate examinations.

Since the last meeting of the Advisory Group further examinations have been successfully completed, involving a huge collaborative effort from schools.

Further guidance documents have issued to schools. The Guidance for Schools on the Conduct of the Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021 provides a comprehensive guide for schools on the examinations this year. It includes information on the arrangements for the establishment of examination centres and managing candidate attendance.

The key message for students is that public health must take precedence in all cases. This message has also been communicated through video messages from the Minister, Dr Tony Holohan, Dr Abigail Collins and Dr Kevin Kelleher.

The SEC also issued Circular 16/2021 in relation to the payment arrangements for school appointed personnel and other additional costs for Examinations 2021.

A detailed Guide for Candidates is being prepared, in relation to the examinations and also accredited grades. This will issue to candidates in the coming days. The SEC is also developing guidance for superintendents.

In relation to candidate numbers, there are approximately 300,000 individual subject entries for the Leaving Certificate examinations. There are approximately 400,000 individual subject entries for Accredited Grades only. During portal phase 2, more students opted for Accredited Grades only though very few candidates have opted for just one option.

The SEC also provided an update on the examiner training which is currently underway involving 200 digital conferences in 3.5 weeks.

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

- Thank you for the detailed guides published to date, in particular SEC Circular 30/2021, Guidance for Schools on the Conduct of the Leaving Certificate Examinations 2021, which is very helpful
- The upcoming publication of the Candidate Guide is also very welcome

#### **4. Update from the Department:**

##### **Legislation**

Legislation has passed through all stages in the Oireachtas and will go before the Seanad the following Monday, and includes a request for early signing by the President. Assuming passage through the Dáil and Seanad it is expected that the President will sign the bill into law next week, and the Minister will shortly thereafter sign the Commencement Orders.

##### **In-school process and data collection arrangements**

Currently in the estimate phase of the Accredited Grades process, and schools will be moving into the data collection phase shortly. The data entry system will now open earlier on Friday 28 May for data collection to give schools sufficient time to complete the process. A detailed guide will issue to schools on Monday, 24 May, to support them in this process.

It is essential that all data is submitted by Thursday, 3 June.

The helpline will be available to support schools throughout each stage of the process, the phone number will remain the same. The helpline will continue to take calls on other Accredited Grades related issues also. The e-mail support service is also active and there will be a dedicated e-mail address for queries relating to the data entry process.

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

- The extended period for alignment and data entry greatly appreciated and the guide will be welcomed
- The two video guides developed, to support the main guide and LCA guide on the estimates process, are really helpful

##### **Out-of-school process**

An update was provided on the progress to date in relation to the out-of-schools process. The Department is very grateful to schools and principals who are facilitating the implementation of these processes.

Every effort is being made to provide all out-of-school students with accredited grades, across 3 categories:

- Those taking subjects outside of schools
- Learners studying entirely out of school
- Candidates taking a non-curricular language

1600 candidates were invited to attend for the proficiency assessments in the non-curricular languages which were held across 450 schools on 8 May. 1400 candidates attended. This will allow for estimated percentage marks to be provided for this category of students. Thanks was given to

the ETB sector for facilitating the hosting of the proficiency assessment for those students not linked to a school.

Students studying subjects outside of school, and out-of-school learners, applying for Accredited Grades must engage with the process and ensure that information and evidence of learning is made available for review by a Panel of Registered Teachers, in order for the panel to provide an estimated mark.

An appeals process will be available to candidates in circumstances where a decision is made that it is not possible to submit an estimated percentage mark.

Support of stakeholders has been crucial in getting to this point, and it is greatly appreciated. The support services, phone line and e-mail, continue to be available to support the out-of-schools process.

**Comments from stakeholders:**

- The measures put in place for students of NCLs are very welcome
- Important that schools are further advised that 28 May to 3 June is set aside for the in-school alignment and data entry processes

**5. Leaving Certificate examinations 2022**

Feedback was sought from stakeholders on the presentation given on the 28 April 2021 on Leaving Certificate 2022, Curriculum and Assessment Options. In particular, stakeholders were asked to consider what the best option might be for curricular and assessment requirements:

1. Revert to 2019 curriculum and assessment arrangements
2. Retain curriculum and assessment changes as announced in September 2020 and updates at Christmas 2020 for LC 2021
3. Retain further assessment changes as announced in March 2021 for LC 2021, subject to a review of LC 2021 process.

Stakeholders were also invited to put forward other options for consideration?

**Feedback from stakeholders:**

- Have to respect the loss of learning for 5<sup>th</sup> years. It's an opportunity to reflect on what worked well this year and apply this learning to 2022. Some of the feedback, for example, on the orals and how they were carried out, was very positive – it lessened some of the stress
- Some stakeholders expressed a contrary view.
- There is a sense that it will be easier to regain lost tuition time for some subjects than others, with languages in the latter category.
- Hybrid between the second and third options, with maybe some specific arrangements put in place for particular categories of subjects (e.g. languages and practical subjects)
- Use of Easter holidays was an exceptional measure this year, some students have indicated that they would have preferred to have the time to study
- Think the option of using the Easter holidays should be open for consideration
- Some stakeholders expressed reservations regarding this position
- System needs to know as soon as possible which direction LC 2022 will take. An announcement before this year's Leaving Certificate examinations would be welcomed

- Some students in this cohort will not have sat a Junior Cycle examination and this needs to be taken into consideration
- Suggestion to carry out an audit in terms of lessons learned this year; loss of learning experienced by 5<sup>th</sup> years; subject specific issues
- There should be a contingency plan in place for Leaving Certificate 2022 in case of a further loss of learning
- This is seen as an opportune time for reform of the Leaving Certificate. NCCA Review of Senior Cycle should also be factored in there.
- It is important that lessons learned are applied in the appropriate way, some arrangements put in place this year were done so on an exceptional basis and cannot simply be repeated
- There will be some learning also from the students who have opted for Accredited Grades only and it will be important to consider the reason and impact of this
- The flexibility demonstrated this year should be noted and reflected on

Responding to comments the NCCA noted that it would be difficult to complete an audit on the loss of learning experienced by 5<sup>th</sup> years given the differing experiences across schools. In addition, a hybrid of options two and three would take a long time to put in place.

It was noted that the first changes to curriculum and assessment for 2021, which involved extensive engagement between SEC, DOE and NCCA, and engagement with stakeholders, were notified to the system in September 2020 with an updated version communicated in December 2020. The further adjustments to examination papers announced in March this year were more significant (and less equitable across subjects) in terms of their direct impact on the examinations. There is a need to be cautious about such changes for Leaving Certificate 2022, as these students have had a much more positive experience in online learning in the 2020/2021 in comparison to 5<sup>th</sup> year students in 2019/2020. Specifications have been designed to cater for all, as have the forms of assessment.

The need to address the loss of learning in some way is acknowledged. The needs of different learners must be addressed with a balanced set of decisions and an early communication to the system.

The Department will consider the matter further, together with the NCCA and the SEC, reflecting on comments and feedback raised today. It noted the general view that a return to the position for 2019 (option 1) would not be desirable for the Class of 2022.

## **6. AOB**

The Chair (DT) thanked Reuban Murray, as the exiting President of the ISSU, for his continued support and for his contribution the work of the Advisory Group.

## **7. Date of next meeting**

Date of next meeting will be communicated to members.