

ADVISORY GROUP ON PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS 2021

BY WEBEX, 30 June 2021, 11.00 – 12.30

Agreed Note of Meeting

Present

| | Name | Organisation/Position |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Joint Chair | Dalton Tattan (DT) | Assistant Secretary General |
| Joint Chair | Andrea Feeney (AF) | Chief Executive Officer, SEC |
| | | |
| Students | Reuban Murray | President, ISSU |
| | Emer Neville | Communications Officer, ISSU |
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| Parents | Aine Lynch | Chief Executive, NPC-P |
| | Mai Fanning | President, NPC-PP |
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| Teachers | Ann Piggott | President, ASTI |
| | Kieran Christie | General Secretary, ASTI |
| | Martin Marjoram | President, TUI |
| | Michael Gillespie | General Secretary, TUI |
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| 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 |
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| NCCA | Ben Murray | Director, NCCA |
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| State Examinations Commission | Elaine Sheridan | Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC |
| | Hugh McManus | Asst Head of Examination & Assessment, SEC |
| | | |
| Department of Education | Harold Hislop | Chief Inspector |
| | Yvonne Keating | Deputy Chief Inspector |
| | Orlaith O'Connor | Assistant Chief Inspector |
| | Declan Cahalane | Assistant Chief Inspector |
| | Eamonn Moran | Principal Officer |
| | Ciara Molloy | Assistant Principal Officer |
| | Neville Kenny | Principal Officer |
| | Grainne Cullen | Principal Officer |
| | Sarah Miley | Assistant Principal Officer |
| | | |
| DFHERIS | Joanne Tobin | Assistant Principal Officer |
| | | |
| Higher Education | Sheena Duffy | HEA (Observer) |

Apologies

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|------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| DFHERIS | William Beausang | Assistant Secretary General |
| | Keith Moynes | Assistant Secretary General |
| | Fiona O'Byrne | Principal Officer |
| Department of Education | Anne Tansey | Director, NEPS |
| | Deirdre Shanley | Assistant Secretary General |
| | Clíodhna O'Neill | Principal Officer |
| | Áine Doyle | Adviser to Minister (Observer) |
| School managers and leaders | Paddy Lavelle | General Secretary, ETBI |
| NCCA | Barry Slattery | Deputy Director, NCCA |

1. Welcome

The Chair (DT) thanked everyone for attending and accommodating the change of date.

2. Minutes

Observations on minutes of meeting held on 21 May 2021 to be submitted and will be circulated again for approval.

3. Leaving Certificate 2021

Update on examinations

SEC provided an update on the Leaving Certificate examinations 2021.

Credit must be given to schools for how they managed the examinations process this year. It is a testament to all stakeholders that all the hard work has paid off in terms of student's successful completion of the examinations.

Feedback on the content of the examinations was very positive. Students were able to demonstrate their learning over the two years. Schools encouraged students to sit the exams

The SEC now move to the next stage of marking. All training for examiners is taking place on a digital platform with over 200 conferences being delivered over the coming weeks. There is a blend of manual and digital (online) marking. The supply of examiners this year is positive and allows for contingency planning.

The marking of coursework is almost complete. A significant number of candidates completed and submitted their coursework.

The changes made to the examination papers in March 2021 were significant and will impact on the grading and weighting of components. Students will be provided with information on this so they will understand the grading awarded when they get their results.

The planned results date of 3 September reflects the level of work involved in completing all the various aspects of this work, in addition to the Accredited Grades process.

Comments from stakeholders

- Tributes paid to the SEC for the incredible effort in successfully holding this year's examinations, which went relatively seamlessly, a number of schools emailed complimenting the SEC on same
- Very positive turn out from students, though there is still evidence that a number of students disengaged from May
- It will be useful to see the numbers of students that did sit the examinations when they are available at the issuing of the results

Accredited Grades

The Department provided an update in relation to the process of Accredited Grades.

Since 8 June, the SEC now has responsibility for the implementation of the Accredited Grades process. Work is ongoing in relation to the transition process while maintaining a seamless process from the perspective of students and stakeholders. The Department has committed to the SEC to maintain the strength of resources to the Accredited Grades process until certain aspects have naturally concluded.

A sincere thanks must be given to schools for the 400,000 estimated percentage marks submitted on behalf of students. Inspectorate colleagues and IT Unit have been working through a data reconciliation process to ensure all data is in order.

The first series of decisions have issued to out-of-school candidates where it wasn't possible to produce an estimated percentage mark. Those students had an opportunity to appeal, with less than 10 appeals received and only a small number left to be decided.

There is one High Court case which is active regarding the process of Accredited Grades which will be heard later this week. The Department intends to strongly defend the action.

The SEC provided an update on the standardisation aspects of the Accredited Grades process.

An independent external contractor, Educational Testing Service (ETS), is in place to work on the coding aspect of the standardisation process.

A policy decision has been made that this year's standardisation model will be similar to last year's, with some refinements to the model this year based on learning from last year. The coding for this year's model is being built by the new contractor, ETS.

Testing, exploration and analysis will be completed as the model is developed and this work will continue over the summer.

A separate procurement process has been completed to bring on board another contractor to complete an independent quality assurance process.

Comments from stakeholders:

It is a fantastic achievement for the system to have completed both the examinations and the data collection process

- Important that the message that the two processes are not interlinked, in terms of results, is more widely dispersed

- Will there be two separate bell curves, one for examinations and one for Accredited Grades?
- Will the way in which Junior Cycle data is used in the standardisation process be published?
- Teachers have advised that the Accredited Grades process this year did not go as well as last year, that there was much more guess work involved this year. Last year teachers were accused of overestimating and it is hoped that this will not happen this year.
- It is believed that the stronger cohort of students attended the 2021 examinations and completed what are believed to be 'easier' papers which will produce a certain set of results
- It is important the students' anxieties relating to standardisation are eased
- Last year there was a useful briefing meeting held in August, it would be helpful to have a similar meeting this year
- The anecdotal statistics relating to students that turned up to the exams, were they DEIS/non-DEIS, high achievers, etc. What does this tell us and what changes do we need to make sure that we catch all students in the future?

SEC noted that there will be further communication with candidates over the course of the summer and the issue regarding the separate nature of examinations and Accredited Grades will be clarified further.

Regarding the approach to marking, it is different to a normal year. The range of students will not be the same as traditional years. SEC advised that in a normal year candidates responses and the professional judgement of examiners is being relied on. In a typical year, the draft marking scheme is applied to a sample of candidate's responses, with candidates awarded marks based on the demand of the scheme and the demand of the examination paper. This year it is the professional judgement of examiners that will be relied upon.

On the use of JC data in the standardisation process, broadly speaking there will be reliance on JC data similar to 2020. Details on how the model functions this year will be published at an appropriate time. It is also intended to provide some detail on the process of standardisation in the candidate booklet to be published over the summer.

There will be one set of Leaving Certificate results this year. Shortly after the issue of the 'best of' results students will be provided with detail on how exactly they did in the exams and they will receive their accredited grades estimated percentage marks and standardised marks in order to be as transparent as possible. On the day of issue of results, information will be provided digitally and in paper format.

It is too early to comment on grade inflation.

Will be helpful to review data on the numbers of sittings and the types of students that did sit the exams. There is positive data in relation to the LCA, with good numbers of students attending.

4. Leaving Certificate 2022

The Chair (DT) gave a presentation in relation to the 2022 State Examinations.

It is important that plans for the 2022 State Examinations acknowledge the loss of learning for JC and LC 2022 cohorts of students, noting that the learning loss was not as significant as that experienced by cohort of 2021. It is also important that the system is provided with certainty as quickly as possible.

Advisory Group members will recall that a number of options for 2022 have been considered:

- revert to 2019 curriculum and assessment arrangements;
- retain the curriculum and assessment changes as announced in December 2020 for LC 2021;
- use the further curriculum and assessment changes as announced in March 2021 for LC 2021, following a review of LC 2021 process.

Following the consideration of these options, it is the intention that the JC and LC 2022 examinations will retain curriculum and assessment changes as announced at December 2020 for JC and LC 2021. Some minor changes will be needed to the December 2020 document to reflect syllabus content issues.

The adjustments to the assessment arrangements will be proportionate to the students' experience and loss of learning and will be educationally appropriate. In addition, the adjustments will not overly restrict curricular content and will support a better teaching and learning experience. The adjustments will provide for a comprehensive assessment of the curriculum and opportunity for students to demonstrate broad knowledge and learning.

It is important that there is a move from emergency Covid measures towards more normal requirements and standards in assessment arrangements. The exceptional measure of Accredited Grades is not planned for 2022.

The SEC will also run an alternative set of Leaving Certificate Examinations in 2022, shortly following the main set of examinations. These examinations will be limited to certain students who are unable to sit the main set of examinations due to close family bereavement, COVID-19 illness and certain other categories of serious illness to be determined which prevent them sitting the main examinations, clearly and strictly delineated. Eligibility for access to the alternative sitting is to be determined, a stringent access mechanism will apply. The details will be worked out by SEC, in consultation with stakeholders

The Advisory Group were also advised that there will be no second sitting of Junior Cycle examinations in 2022.

Comments from stakeholders:

- Can the system be informed of these decisions as soon as possible?
- Most will welcome a return to normality
- It is important that the positives of the CG and AG should factor into the reform of the SC, particularly to reduce students stress
- Last year there was a review of the revised assessment arrangements in December, and a similar review should be carried out this year, particularly in relation to the languages
- In relation to the serious illness aspect of the second sitting, will further detail on this issue today?
- With the variants that are currently at play, what would happen if there was a COVID-19 outbreak in a schools which prevented schools from opening for examinations?

Calculated Grades and Accredited Grades were provided as exceptional measures. Any reform informed by these measures would need to be researched and planned for as a part of the senior cycle review currently being undertaken by the NCCA.

There is further work to be done in determining the eligibility for the second sitting of the examinations before further details can be made available.

Consideration will be given to the points raised here today in the drafting of the revised assessment arrangements document to be published later this month.

5. Action Plan for Education

A presentation was provided by Sarah Miley from the Public Service Reform Programme Office on the development process for the five quarter Action Plan for Q4 2021- Q4 2022. The Action Plan will be informed by the Statement of Strategy consultation process and is due to published around Budget time in October.

The presentation included information on the:

- Structure of the Action Plan Framework, including the mission, vision and goals;
- Themes for consultation;
- Development process.

Stakeholders were invited to inform the Department of new areas which they feel should be considered by the Department in the context of the development of the new Action Plan for Education.

Comments from Stakeholders:

- The Department document on student voice is from 2002 and should be updated

This document will be reflected on as part of the work of the Action Plan for Education.

6. AOB

The Chair (DT) noted that this was the last meeting attended by Reuban Murray, exiting President of the ISSU. The Chair (DT) acknowledged the important role of Reuban and the ISSU in ensuring that the student voice informed developments over the last year and a half.

The Chair (DT) also noted that it was Ann Piggott's last meeting as outgoing President of ASTI. The Chair (DT) added that none of this work would be possible without teachers, and that while it has been a difficult and challenging process for all of us at times, much has been achieved.

The Chair (DT) recorded his thanks to all members for the work that has been completed this year, with hugely helpful contributions informing this year's process, assisting in its success.

The Chair (DT) concluded by wishing all members a good break over the summer.

7. Date of next meeting

Next meeting will take place near the time of the results.