

ADVISORY GROUP ON PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS

BY WEBEX, 20 January 2022

Draft Note of Meeting

Present

	Name	Organisation/Position
Minister for Education	Norma Foley, TD	Minister for Education
Joint Chair	Dalton Tattan (DT)	Assistant Secretary General
Joint Chair	Andrea Feeney (AF)	Chief Executive Officer, SEC
Students	Emer Neville	President, ISSU
	Jack McGinn	Education Officer, ISSU
Parents	Aine Lynch	Chief Executive, NPC-P
	Mai Fanning	President, NPC-PP
Teachers	Eamon Dennehy	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
	Paddy Lavelle	General Secretary, ETBI
	Paul Fields	Director of Schools, ETBI
	Paul Crone	Director, NAPD
	Paul Byrne	Deputy Director, NAPD
NCCA	Barry Slattery	Deputy CEO, NCCA
State Examinations Commission	Richard Dolan	Director of Operations, SEC
	Elaine Sheridan	Head of Examinations and Assessment Division, SEC
Department of Education	Harold Hislop	Chief Inspector
	Yvonne Keating	Deputy Chief Inspector
	Orlaith O'Connor	Assistant Chief Inspector
	Eamonn Moran	Principal Officer
	Paul Keating	Assistant Principal Officer

	Neville Kenny	Principal Officer
	Declan Power	Higher Executive Officer
	Aine Doyle	Advisor to Minister
	Anne Tansey	Director, NEPS
	Clíodhna O’Neill	Principal Officer
	Christy Mannion	Advisor
DFHERIS	Keith Moynes	Assistant Secretary General
	Niamh Devine	Assistant Principal Officer
Higher Education	Breda Corr	HEA (Observer)

1. Welcome

The Joint Chair (DT) welcomed the Minister and the members of the Group and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The Minister expressed her thanks to the Group for their work to date in relation to state examinations and what has been achieved in recent years through the engagement of the Group. The Minister welcomed the opportunity at today’s meetings to listen to the different views and perspectives on state examinations 2022, in order to progress matters and provide clarity for all stakeholders as soon as possible on the 2022 examinations.

2. Minutes

Observations on the minutes of the meeting held on 20TH December 2021 were requested to be submitted by cob 28th January 2022.

3. Tour De Table – Updates Leaving Certificate 2022

Members of the Group thanked the Minister and the Joint Chairs for the opportunity to discuss their respective views and perspectives on state examinations 2022 and acknowledged the important role that the Group has had in recent years and continues to have in order to identify successful solutions to meets the needs of stakeholders.

Updates from School Managers and Leaders

The general view from school managers and leaders was that the best interests of all students should be central to state examinations and the integrity and fairness of the exams

should remain intact. The public health guidelines have to be adhered to at all times. There is concern around grade inflation in recent years and possibly for future exams. Without clarity on the format of state examinations there is a growing concern on the issue of “drift” amongst some students that is leading to disengagement with the education system. This “drift” is not related to Covid-19 rather it is related to the fact that students are under the impression that if there are no Traditional Examinations there is no need to attend school.

There was acknowledgement that there has been a number of adjustments announced since August 2021 in relation to state examinations 2022 that provided clarity for all stakeholders. There was concern raised by some that exams such as the Junior Cycle and the Leaving Certificate Applied appeared to be playing second fiddle to the established Leaving Certificate.

The view was expressed that students should be given the opportunity to display their skills learnings and competencies, particularly through the 2nd and 3rd components and there is concern that there are growing gaps in learning and it will be hard for students and teachers to make this up. It was stated that clarity is needed as soon as possible for students and teachers and in order to maintain equity and fairness. There should be a traditional Leaving Certificate with further adjustments to be made in addition to those already announced.

Across the ETB system the view is that the integrity of the exams has to remain and there needs to be an element of flexibility allowed around areas such as project work. Different cohorts of students face being left behind due to the ongoing uncertainty on exams and clarity is needed as soon as possible. The survey results from the NAPD members have not provided consensus on the best format model for exams 2022 but ideas on additional measures could be put forward. There is an urgent need to provide clarity for all concerned as soon as possible.

Updates from ISSU

The ISSU detailed some results from its recent survey of students in relation to LC 2022 and the results showed that over 67% of students surveyed want a hybrid model for LC 2022. There is a view amongst some students that they want to be on a level playing field similar to those students who sat LC in 2020 and 2021. Students have had varying experiences in terms of online teaching, teaching and learning losses due to Covid. This has all taken a toll on the wellbeing of some students. The ISSU welcomed the opportunity in due course to make a presentation on their survey to the Advisory Group and are committed to finding a

solution as soon as possible that provides clarity for students who in some cases as per the survey results are demanding a hybrid model for LC 2022.

Updates from parents' representatives

The view was expressed that a recent survey of parents shows that the majority of parents want a hybrid model for LC 2022, similar to 2021 and a form of a hybrid model in future years. It is viewed as being unfair and inequitable not to have a hybrid LC 2022 due to the loss of school time experienced by students.

It was accepted that the Advisory Group has provided solutions in recent years to state emanations and should be able to do so for 2022 state exams. All students have been affected through loss of school time, some more so than others and the current adjustments and arrangements do not go far enough.

Updates from Teacher Unions

It was agreed that what is best for students should be at the heart of all decisions that are made in relating to exams 2022. It is hard to find a solution that will please all stakeholders. Issues regarding grade inflation, lack of data for some students who did not sit the JC, along with the fact that the JC was never intended to be used as it has been in recent years, are some of the challenges.

While there have been a number of adjustments and measures introduced since August 2021 for state exams 2022, these may have to be revisited to explore any additional adjustments and or measures that can be added.

Not all students are happy doing a hybrid model for the LC 2022 and while the traditional LC is not perfect it would be better to build on what's already in place than go the hybrid model. The Junior Cycle Examinations should go ahead in 2022 along with necessary supports and also the LC Applied is part of the discussion on exams 2022. There needs to be clarity on not just state exams 2022 but for future state exams as already we have current 5th year students facing the issue of grade inflation next year.

A recent survey by the TUI showed that 75% of respondents think that the current adjustments and measures to state exams 2022 do not go far enough and that further adjustments should be made, on time for questions and the questions themselves, and that the 2nd and 3rd components should go ahead.

The effects of grade inflation on future years will be a challenge and so too will the lack of data for any possible standardisation through a hybrid model of exams.

The Advisory Group needs to be mindful not to seek to have a commitment made on exams that cannot be delivered or relied upon.

Comments from Joint Chairs/Minister

The Joint Chair (DT) thanked all members of the Group for their contributions and advised that these contributions would require to be further reflected upon, noting that there was no consensus on a single approach. He also supported the views expressed regarding the importance of the confidentiality of group discussions. He informed the Group that a Press Release would be issued shortly after the meeting and a copy sent to all Group members in advance.

The Joint Chair (AF) also thanked members and agreed that issues of integrity, fairness and wellbeing would be key in informing decisions made on a solution to the issues under discussion. She also noted the concerns raised regarding grade inflation. This latter point was also noted by the representative from D/FHERIS who stated it will be a downstream issue for the higher education sector. The Joint Chair (AF) also stated that planning for the examinations will take account of prevailing Public Health advice.

The Minister echoed the views of the Joint Chairs and said she welcomed and listened to the perspectives, the survey results and the views of members of the Group, and that these perspectives would feed into ongoing discussions on state exams. The Minister stated that a series of bilateral discussions to further consider the matters raised would be set up in the coming days. She thanked the members for their continued positive and collaborative engagement.

4. AOB

The Joint Chair (DT) concluded by thanking all members for their contributions and looked forward to ongoing engagement through bilateral meetings before the Group meets again. He echoed the views of members on the importance of confidentiality regarding the work of the Group.

5. Date of next meeting

The Department will be in contact regarding a date for the next meeting.

ENDS

**Curriculum and Assessment Policy Unit
April 2022**