

**ADVISORY GROUP FOR CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR STATE EXAMINATIONS 2020**  
**CLOCK TOWER, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SKILLS, MARLBOROUGH STREET**

**22 APRIL 2020, 14.30-17.30**

**AGREED MEETING NOTE**

**Present**

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation/Position</b>
<b>Chair</b>	Seán Ó Foghlú	Secretary General, DES
<b>Students</b>	Ciara Fanning	President, ISSU
	Alison Dervan	Student Voice Development Manager, ISSU
<b>Parents</b>	Aine Lynch	Chief Executive, NPC-P
	Mai Fanning	President, NPC-PP
<b>Teachers</b>	Deirdre MacDonald	President, ASTI
	Kieran Christie	General Secretary, ASTI
	Seamus Lahart	President, TUI
	John MacGabhann	General Secretary, TUI
<b>School managers and leaders</b>	John Curtis	General Secretary, JMB
	John Irwin	General Secretary, ACCS
	Nessa White	General Secretary, ETBI
	Clive Byrne	Chief Executive, NAPD
<b>Higher Education</b>	Alan Wall	Chief Executive, HEA (Observer)
<b>National Council for Curriculum and Assessment</b>	John Hammond	Chief Executive, NCCA
<b>State Examinations Commission</b>	Aidan Farrell	Chief Executive, SEC
	Andrea Feeney	Director of Operations, SEC
<b>Department of Education and Skills</b>	Harold Hislop	Chief Inspector
	Deirdre Shanley	Assistant Secretary General
	Dalton Tattan	Assistant Secretary General
	Anne Tansey	Director, NEPS
	Orlaith O'Connor	Assistant Chief Inspector
	Eamonn Moran	Principal Officer
	Ciara Molloy	Assistant Principal Officer
<b>Observers</b>	Philip O'Callaghan	Advisor to Taoiseach
	Mark O'Doherty	Advisor to Minister

## **1. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked all for their continued active engagement.

## **2. Agree note of previous meeting (17 April 2020)**

The Chair noted that an amended version of the meeting note from the last meeting had been circulated last evening. He asked that if any further amendments were required, that they be emailed to Ciara Molloy for incorporation in the meeting note.

The finalised meeting note to be approved at the next meeting and subsequent publication on DES website.

## **3. Options Paper on Project/Coursework and Practical Examinations**

SEC spoke to a draft paper on this issue.

### **Discussion among stakeholders:**

- Identification generally of considerable obstacles to holding of the practical examinations (in Construction Studies, Art Life Sketching and Engineering)
- Recognises different views regarding whether it is possible to allow students to complete project work/course work; would be contingent on teachers and school management being able to access buildings to allow students' work to be taken home; some concern re integrity of work completed at home; DES will have to check with Health authorities on access matter and revert to future meeting
- While group sees benefits of detailed subject by subject analysis of project and coursework, there is also a question whether there is sufficient time to conduct this exercise in the detail required; also a recognition that many students whose work is close to completion would prefer to complete/have this work recognised
- Belief that there are risks with public drip-feed of decisions; better to get all of the decisions re projects and practicals out at the one time
- Final decision needs to have regard to risk of worsening existing disadvantage, recognising also that no decision will be unanimously welcomed.

### **Agreed:**

- SEC to revert on this matter at next Wednesday's meeting, for final decision on advice to be provided, covering projects, practicals and course work
- SEC recognises that there are common challenges which will arise in relation to LCA and LCVP, will address all aspects of the LCA and LCVP assessment for next Wednesday's meeting – SEC to do so in consultation with teachers and management bodies

## **4. Running of written examinations**

The Chair noted that the discussion of the written examinations would be broken into a number of topics.

**i. Start date for examinations**

**Issues noted by stakeholders:**

- Conscious of uncertainty caused by lack of definitive date
- Based on existing knowledge of health situation, Minister is suggesting Wednesday, 29 July with tuition available in schools from Monday 13 July to Friday 24 July
- Possibility of commencing examination earlier had been put forward but having considered public health issues and advice, Minister suggested aiming for 29<sup>th</sup> July was better option
- Certainty of date of 29<sup>th</sup> July supported

***Agreed: Group believed proceeding with start date of 29 July would be preferable***

**ii. Identifying cohorts of students who may be unable to take the written examinations**

**Stakeholders, via mentimeter, offered:**

- Suggestions made regarding cohorts of students who may not be able to take part in examinations
- Suggestions on how these cohorts could be dealt with were also identified

***Agreed: DES would record comments and present them for discussion at subsequent meeting***

**iii. Social distancing:**

SEC provided update on work it has commenced re the practicalities of social distancing for the examinations, with further updates to be provided at later stage

- Conversations have commenced with small number of schools and with DES School Planning Section
- Capacity of rooms will be typically halved; maximum number of people in a room is also a factor to be considered
- SEC is examining a number of possible models
- Requirement for 6,000 special centres also has to be considered; current arrangements for assignment of superintendents will have to be considered, including travelling of superintendents to other areas; need to consider health and safety of personnel
- Risk of visitors coming into schools

**Issues noted by stakeholders:**

- Health and safety of all involved is a priority
- Need for a plan/guidelines/training for schools on arrangements for examinations – how to deal with vulnerable candidates; transport; PPE if required; entering/exiting buildings; enhanced cleaning of buildings; candidates who become ill during examinations
- Need for a compliance officer to be in place for each institution involved in running the examination, these officers would need to have training in advance
- Option of examination and predicted grades to give students an option was proposed – Chair noted this will be discussed at a later meeting

## **5. Contractual issues for teachers and other school employees**

Management Bodies provided oral update:

- Management bodies and unions have commenced work on these matters
- Progress has been made and a paper will be ready for future meeting
- Issues will include: contract for teachers whose contracts end in May 2020 yet who have been the teachers of the cohorts of LC students during the year; need for extension of examination aide scheme in 2020

**Agreed: Paper on contractual issues to be tabled for meeting on Friday**

## **6. Equity of access to teaching and learning –**

Oral update was provided from DES chair of Continuity of Teaching and Learning Group:

- Priority has been to ensure equity of access for all students especially those from disadvantaged background and those with special educational needs (SEN)
- PDST quickly created a learning page for teachers re distance learning
- Examples of good practice identified in many schools by Inspectorate, management bodies and other partners
- Some general guidance created by DES as quickly as possible; was only starting point
- New guidance developed on SEN and pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds; will be published this week
- Further guidance in preparation; will be developed in consultation with partners; tailored guidance will be provided for primary and post primary levels
- Equity of access issues are being examined carefully
- New source of funding for ICT will be announced today for schools and will be allocated directly to schools
- Range of other measures being taken
- Contact with telecommunication companies re contracts for data and donations of devices; also seeking progress re zero-rating educational websites – will continue to engage on this work and contact

### ***Discussion among stakeholders:***

- Welcome for additional investment and members would welcome clarity on how ICT funding is to be allocated
- Need to address cases of disadvantaged students not in DEIS schools (in response, DES advised funding is both for DEIS and non-DEIS schools)
- Suggestion that there was a need to examine whether definitions of vulnerable groups need to be extended; for example, some children are now also acting as carers
- Evidence was cited that showed that many schools and teachers had worked extremely hard to support students' learning while schools were closed; there was evidence, however, that some students had difficulties in accessing online learning and the level of schools' engagement with students varied.

- Would welcome cheaper contracts for data from telecommunication companies

## **7. Supports for well-being of students**

Oral update provided by NEPS:

- 4-level model has been developed to support students; information will be presented on dedicated web-page
- The Level 1 Area of the page will set out support available and what is being done to bring further clarity to students on questions regarding examinations
- Level 2 will involve one-to-one support, probably delivered largely in schools; draft guidance document is in preparation and will be circulated to partners for comment
  - NEPS prioritising support to post-primary support teams
  - Also supported by NGOs
- Levels 3 and 4 will be more specialised one-to-one support for more serious cases requiring ongoing support
- Working with HSE and Department of Health is ongoing.

## **8. Clarification on issues concerning Junior Cycle**

Chair explained this agenda item was not intended to signal a detailed discussion of JC but to facilitate a number of members who wished to raise issues concerning the recent decision made by a second-level school regarding its Junior Cycle assessments and the implications of that decision.

### **Stakeholder comments:**

- Some members expressed concern re extent of adherence of all members of the group to commitments made by group members (and recorded in the “Purpose” document agreed at the first meeting); the decision of the principal of one school who held office in one of the organisations represented in the Advisory Group (NAPD) made a difficult situation more difficult for other members of group
- Some members believed that the decision of the school to run separate assessments for JC had caused much confusion and much stress; students see potential for inequity in JC being run at different times and in different ways in schools
- Several members noted that it would be useful if guidance could be given to schools on what they can do in relation to assessment at JC, otherwise speculation and uncertainty will remain
- One member expressed disappointment that clarifications from DES were not provided in advance to partners, yet information was provided to schools
- DES noted that the Minister’s preference was that the JC examinations of June would be replaced by school based examinations in September; that the Minister had referred the issue of Junior Cycle assessment in 2020 to the group for advice; and that it was his strong preference and that schools should not make decisions regarding their own forms of assessment until the advisory group had discussed the matter.

### **NAPD response:**

- Accepts statements of concern made by members of the advisory group
- Noted that the decision taken in an individual school is not an NAPD decision or position

- Noted that it was not possible for him as CEO of NAPD to disassociate himself from the comments of an individual principal (who was NAPD President)
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- Regrets that decision taken in school has caused upset; assured the group that no contact was made by the school to the media; noted that the context was not helped by recent commentary re potential re-opening of schools
- NAPD wants to continue to make positive contribution to the meetings
- NAPD executive has been scheduled to discuss the issue shortly

Chair summarised the DES position:

- Minister's preference is well known for JC to take place as school based examinations in September
- Minister would prefer if schools waited for the conclusion of the discussions in the advisory group before making school-level decisions regarding junior cycle assessment
- Minister cannot assume to himself decisions re examinations/assessment that he is not entitled to take
- Noted the unfortunate timing and circumstances of decision in the particular school in question but accepts that the decision was not an NAPD decision.

**Agreed: Junior Cycle will be discussed at Friday's meeting – this meeting will consider possible approaches to JC assessment**

**10. Dates of future meetings, all at 11.30-13.30 unless otherwise agreed:**

- Wednesday, 29 April 2020
- Friday, 1 May 2020
- Friday, 8 May 2020–[This date is in doubt and may have to be re-arranged]
- Friday, 15 May 2020
- Friday, 22 May 2020
- Friday, 29 May 2020

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