

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

24 APRIL 2020, 11.30 – 13.30

Agreed Meeting note

Present

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

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members and thanked them for their active engagement in making their submissions for today's meeting.

2. Agree notes of previous meetings

- Note of meeting 17 April – recirculated and now agreed
- Note of meeting of 22 April – comments/suggestions to be submitted to the secretary to the Advisory Group, note will be recirculated and agreed at the next meeting

3. Contractual issues for teachers and other school employees

The Chair asked for an update regarding the above and the paper which is being drafted.

Management Bodies advised that the drafting of the paper is progressing and will be completed and circulated for discussion for the next meeting of the Advisory Group.

Agreed: The discussion of contractual issues for teachers and other school employees to be put on the agenda for the meeting on Wednesday 29 April.

4. Supports for well-being of students

Update provided by NEPS.

- 4-level support plan is being finalised
- Draft paper describing support that will be offered at Level 1 and Level 2 has been circulated to members; comments invited from members by lunchtime on Monday
- Taoiseach launching well-being campaign today for all citizens

Discussion among stakeholders:

- ISSU welcomed the development of the plan and the integrated nature of it
- Material welcomed by members

5. Junior Cycle Assessment – for discussion

The Chair thanked each group for their submission in relation to Junior Cycle (JC) Assessment. Papers were submitted by

- Management bodies
- Parents
- Separate papers from ASTI and TUI
- ISSU
- NCCA

The Chair highlighted some key themes and areas of agreement that seemed to be emerging from the papers:

- Timing – no support for assessment or examinations in September
- Importance of certification and recognition of students completion of the junior cycle programme, ideally at school level or above
- Desire for schools to be able to undertake some form of assessment of students' achievement

Stakeholders were invited to offer further thoughts and the following were noted:

- Preference expressed for low stakes school based assessment; school based assessment would be acceptable if equity issues were addressed
- Certification based on different school based assessment approaches will not be regarded as fair
- Teacher assessments of students' learning could replace the results traditionally awarded through state examinations
- Alternative options to replace the state examination include use of SEC papers by schools; use of school designed examinations; use of specially designed tasks
- Schools should have a level of autonomy within certain framework/parameter of options
- Teachers have assessed students on a number of occasions; teachers are in a position to assess the students' learning over a three year period
- Teachers continuing to support online learning, working under extreme pressure; need to be mindful of increased workload arising from this while trying to prioritise the Leaving Certificate; teachers will need a break over the summer
- Need to be mindful of JC students wellbeing, change in approach to JC may be stressful for some students
- Certification of the learning that has been achieved over the three years of JC is important, to include recognition of work completed to date
- NCCA template for reporting would be helpful
- Schools should be free to use their own template; a school-based assessment is not a national assessment and so JCPA cannot be used

The Chair summarised the discussion:

- Assessments should be completed in June and not in September
- State certification could be provided to each student indicating completion of the Junior Cycle programme including list of subjects studied and levels taken
- Reporting on students' learning would occur at school level. This reporting will:
 - Respect the autonomy of schools regarding their assessment policies
 - Use school-based reporting of students' achievement in end of year report based on school's judgement of the student's progress (drawing evidence from assessments and work completed including outcomes of CBAs, PLUs already completed)
 - Not involve the use of any prescriptive suite of assessment tools or approaches
 - Be supported by the provision of guidance that would include a number of possible approaches
 - Make sure that any additional assessment to be completed by students is limited in scope and cognisant of the disrupted learning that students have experienced in 2020

- Be similar to end-of-year reporting on students' progress and would not use the JCPA template other than for students taking PLUs only
- As school-based assessment was to be used, it would not be appropriate to issue the SEC papers in 2020
- Consideration would have to be given to the need for assessment and certification for adult learners

Agreed: DES to prepare paper based on this discussion for approval at the next meeting.

6. Update from SEC on conditions needed to run the examinations

SEC has prepared a document for engagement with management bodies and teacher unions on the practicalities of running the practical examinations, project work and written examinations, including implications for social distancing. SEC has worked with National Standards Authority and other agencies in preparing this paper.

Discussion among stakeholders:

- Any arrangements have to be in line with best practice in relation to health and safety; concerns about practicalities of running of examinations under health rules/conditions and social distancing requirements
- Need for compliance officers was expressed; concerns re. need for multiple officers (safety officers, compliance officers) in schools
- Offer of advice/experience from NAPD staff member re safety matters and considerations
- Reopening of schools will be as big a problem as running examination; training will be needed for all involved in re-opening of schools and running of SEC examinations
- An audit of teachers with underlying conditions will have to be completed if such staff are to be asked to involved in the running of the LC examinations
- Safety officer function will normally be carried out by principal
- Guidance from State Claims Agency needed
- Parents becoming more anxious about examinations as date nears; health issues; unfair access to education; growing concerns need to be managed; have to consider other options and be more creative rather than traditional examination approach; we should look at predictive grading approach with an opportunity to sit one or more examinations

Response from DES:

- Department is considering implications of schools' reopening
- DES Building Unit is involved
- Public health advice will be critical
- May consider access for staff to schools initially when they reopen
- Department will consult with all partners as planning evolves

Agreed: Running of examinations, including social distancing logistics, to be discussed at further meetings of the group.

7. HPAT results

Question raised by ISSU regarding change of date for issue HPAT results having impact on students' options to study abroad.

Noted by DES that the non-release of HPAT results until after the LC results was intended to reduce stress on students. ISSU advised to write to the Irish Universities Association and copy to the Department.

8. AOB

- Suggestion was made that Minister may attend meetings of the group. Noted by DES.
- Confirmed that options paper on the projects, coursework and practicals from SEC for next meeting will include section on LCA.

9. 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 meeting date is in doubt and will need to be rearranged
- Friday, 15 May 2020
- Friday, 22 May 2020
- Friday, 29 May 2020