

Minister Foley announces a new phase of planning for the State Examinations to include both the provision of Leaving Certificate examinations and also exploring a corresponding non-examination process. This will ensure a pathway for progression for 2021 Leaving Certificate Students.

- Bilateral discussions will begin immediately

Following a series of intensive engagements of the sub-group of the Advisory Group of stakeholders on planning for the State examinations, including a further meeting held today, Minister for Education Norma Foley TD has announced a new phase of planning for the State Examinations.

The Subgroup meetings have enabled education partners to come to a shared understanding of the challenges facing the State Examinations this year and the urgency in meeting them.

The Minister is now inviting these education stakeholders to participate in intensive, confidential bilateral discussions with Department officials to progress work on two distinct processes for Leaving Certificate 2021: planning for examinations and scoping out a corresponding measure, different to examinations that can also be offered to students. Discussions on Junior Cycle examinations will continue in these engagements.

These discussions will be focused and immediate. The Minister aims to provide clear plans and information to students as quickly as possible on how the examinations will be held and details of the corresponding measure to be offered to students.

Minister Foley said: “The pandemic has impacted greatly on the learning experience of our Leaving Certificate 2021 students over the last year.

“Even though our schools have made huge strides in remote learning, the closure of in-school provision has impacted on learning and preparedness for examinations, particularly for students at greater risk of educational disadvantage.

“We must provide our students with a clear way to progress to the next stage in life – further and higher education and training or the world of work.

“Students want certainty. They want fairness. They deserve both.

“I am inviting the education partners to now engage intensively with the Department in planning for the next steps, to enable decisions to be made and to bring much-needed certainty for students.

“We will be actively planning both to hold the Leaving Certificate examinations, and to put in place a corresponding measure that can also be offered to students. The discussions in the Examinations Advisory Subgroup have been hugely helpful in considering the many issues and challenges involved. Examinations need to be available to students. Given the impact on learning for students both last year and this year, there is also a need to explore a parallel approach which can be offered to students.

“Any corresponding measure should have the confidence of the education partners. Last year a process was put in place that involved schools generating estimated marks and the application of a national standardisation process. This allowed students to progress. Any corresponding measure this year would need to incorporate new features. In particular, the State Examinations Commission will need to be given the necessary legal powers to run the process. It will also need to provide more comprehensively for students studying outside

school. Recognition of the skills and competences associated with orals, practicals and coursework should also form a clearer part of any such measure.

“Due to the nature of the pandemic, and the need to always have regard to public health advice, in addition to planning actively to hold the Leaving Certificate examinations, it is necessary to have in place a parallel measure that can also be offered to students.

“I am committed to working with all the education partners to achieve this.

“I want to thank the members of the Examinations Advisory subgroup – students, parents, teachers and school management – for their continuing engagement, contributions and efforts in advancing the thinking on the right approach. I am now inviting these education partners to take part in focused, immediate and confidential bilateral discussions starting this weekend so that we can move towards a solution as quickly as possible.

“There is no perfect answer to what is a very challenging situation. The situation is not identical to last year and so any solutions that we consider need to be appropriate for this year’s cohort.

“My commitment to students and their families is that we will give as much further certainty as we can, as early as we can.

“We will ensure that we find ways that enable students to progress.”

The Department has indicated to the education partners that any corresponding process would need to include the following features:

- The State Examinations Commission running both the examinations and the corresponding process
- Better provision for out-of-school learners in the corresponding process
- Some cognisance of performance in “additional component” elements of examinations (coursework, orals, practicals, etc.)
- Timely progression to higher and further education using either examinations or the outcome of any corresponding process

The decisions on how to move forward will be informed by a recognition of the disruption to the learning of students caused by Covid-19 and the need for smooth pathways of transitions to their next stage for students.

Minister Foley said: “To all examination students: I recognise that this is a difficult period for you. We are working hard to provide the best possible solutions, so you can progress as you wish and deserve.

“The work of the Advisory Subgroup, has enabled the students, parents, teachers, managerial bodies to come to a shared understanding of the challenges facing the State Examinations this year. This next stage of confidential bilateral meetings with each of the partners is necessary to bring the work of the Advisory Group to a conclusion and forge a pathway for the students of 2021. I look forward to this engagement being completed in as short timeframe as possible.

“Be assured, we will keep you updated as we make progress. Thank you for your hard work and commitment, and for keeping each other safe.”

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