

State Examinations Commission

Meeting No. 156

Friday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Approval of Minutes



Pat Burke, Chairperson

7/9/2018.  
Date

Meeting Start: 10.00am

Meeting End: 3.00pm

State Examinations Commission

Meeting No. 156

10<sup>th</sup> August 2018 @ 10am in SEC, Athlone

Commissioners: Pat Burke, (Chairperson)  
Mary Ryan, (Deputy Chairperson)  
Dr Richard Thorn  
Dr Teresa O'Doherty  
Martin Sisk

Executive: Aidan Farrell, (CEO)  
Andrea Feeney, (Director Operations & IT)  
Majella Smyth, (A/PO)  
Tim Desmond, (HEAD)  
Hugh McManus, (AHEAD)  
Jackie Wade, (HEO)

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**1. Commission pre meeting**

The pre meeting of the Commissioners commenced at 10am and concluded at 10.30 without members of the Executive present. It was noted that additional time will be allocated to the pre meeting on September 7<sup>th</sup> in order to consider strategic priorities for 2019.

**2. Conflict of Interest Declaration**

The Commissioners confirmed that there were no conflicts of interest to declare.

**3. Minutes of last meeting and matters arising**

The minutes of meeting no. 154 were approved and signed, along with a minor amendment to the minutes of meeting No. 153.

As discussed under AOB at the previous meeting, the Executive circulated a draft report of a comparative overview of the outcomes of appeals of grades in Ireland and the UK 2015 – 2017 which shows that the Irish system of appeals compare very favourably with those of the UK. This analysis was considered very valuable in terms of publicly affirming the Irish system.

Minutes of meeting no. 151 dated March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2018 were approved for publication on the SEC website.

#### **4. Executive Report**

The Executive Report was taken as read.

The Commission was briefed on a new Unified Government ID which has to be applied to all communication campaigns from now on. While the SEC has not to date engaged in such campaigns, the policy also has implications, which will be assessed by the Executive, for the corporate identity of the SEC.

#### **5. 2018 Examinations**

##### Operations Update on the 2018 Examinations

The Executive reported on the operational processing of the LC Results. The ongoing issue with contract staff supply had a significant impact on the processing of scripts for allocation, and re-allocation, to examiners; the standard setting and marking processes; and the processing and keying of results. The Executive confirmed that the same level of QA was applied in the resulting process. The following points were noted for the attention of the Commission:

- Number receiving Leaving Cert Results was 1,000 candidates less than in 2017, 70 candidates less in the case of LCA.
- The range of possible system failures notified to the SEC for review. As of the date of the meeting, 47 of these had been conceded with a further 15 awaiting decision. This is in line with previous years.
- There were four deceased cases this year. Letters of sympathy are being prepared for issue.
- The Executive reported that following investigation in relation to possible Breaches of Regulations, 30 results have been withheld, with a further 16 results withheld provisionally pending ongoing engagement with schools.
- All arrangements, including contingency preparations, are in place for the printing and issuing of the results.

##### Leaving Certificate Established 2018 Provisional results

*The Leaving Certificate Established Provisional Results 2018 – EAD Confidential Report* was presented to the Commission. The Executive provided commentary on subject outcomes, noting that the provisional results are broadly consistent in almost all cases with those achieved in recent years. The level of migration to Higher Level following the introduction of the new LC grading and CAO points systems in 2017 was less evident in 2018. The Commission was briefed on errors which had come to light in Accounting and Art, which were addressed in the marking scheme and accordingly candidates were not

disadvantaged. Changed assessment arrangements in Art and the first examination in Politics and Society were noted.

The Commission approved the release of the Leaving Certificate Established results.

#### Leaving Certificate Applied 2018 Provisional results

*The Leaving Certificate Applied Provisional Results 2018 – EAD Report* was presented to the Commission. The Executive provided commentary on subject outcomes noting that the provisional results are consistent with those achieved in previous years. It was noted that a subject specific review in 3 curricular areas is currently underway in the NCCA, with a more systemic review to take place as part of the overarching review of the Leaving Certificate Cycle.

The Commission approved the release of the Leaving Certificate Applied results.

### **6. Issues of Strategic Importance**

#### a) Digital Transformation

- (i) On-line Marking: The Commission was briefed on the preparation of the Request for Tender (RFT) for online marking. The Executive has engaged the SEC's accountancy firm to provide expert advice on the RFT process and to be an external member of the tender evaluation committee. The RFT will also be subject to legal review prior to publication, expected at end-September.
- (ii) On-line Fees: Nothing to report.
- (iii) SEC Website Redesign: RFT expected to be ready by early autumn.

#### b) Contract Staff Supply

The Executive confirmed that they are keeping the Department informed of the on-going issues and will be engaging further in the early autumn. The SEC is meeting the Teachers Unions in early September to discuss their pay claim.

#### c) Review of Operation of the RACE Scheme

The Commission was updated on the increased numbers availing of the scheme, 1,000 more in 2018 compared to 2017. The number of special centres was marginally higher than in 2017, indicating a greater prevalence of shared centres in schools. Quality assurance reviews will be undertaken in respect of a range of schools. Progress on the greater use of assistive technology will continue in the autumn.

#### d) Senior Cycle Science Practical's Trialling Project

The final report has issued to the Department for its consideration.

#### e) Equity and Fairness Issues

This will be discussed further in the autumn.

## 7. HR

The Executive updated the Commission on the following issues.

**Appointments:** Three CO's have been recruited to fill vacancies since the last meeting, bringing the number of permanent staff to 152 of the total posts sanctioned of 162.

**Counter Claim under the Civil Service C&A Scheme:** The date for the hearing in respect of the Night-watchmen has been set for early October, with an outcome expected later that month.

**EAM vacancies:** The translator post has been accepted with the successful applicant due to commence with the SEC on September 10<sup>th</sup>. Interviews for the Construction Studies and PE EAMs have taken place and panels established. Following the withdrawal of the successful applicant for Mathematics, it is planned to reconfigure this post and re-advertise, as will be the case for Computer Science. In light of the failure to recruit for Geography and Biology a secondment model is being explored, which will factor in a confirmatory process to assure suitability for the role.

## 8. Corporate Affairs (including Risk Management)

(i) Code of Practice for Governance of State Bodies

The 2017 SEC Protected Disclosure annual report, showing no instances, was approved for publication on the SEC Website. The Commission was briefed on a disclosure that was made to the Department of Education and Skills in respect of a school, which the SEC is providing assistance on in relation to certain general allegations regarding the examination process.

(ii) Corporate Risk Register

An update on the Risk Register which reflects the Contract Staff supply issue was circulated, with the Commissioners to respond by email with any observations.

(iii) Leaving Certificate Results 2018 Press Release and Ministerial Report

The draft *Leaving Certificate Press Release and Ministerial Report* were discussed, noting that they were subject to change following the finalisation of the Leaving Certificate Results. The Commission approved both subject to any necessary editorial amendments to be made by the Executive. A reference will be made in the Editors' notes to the Standard Setting document on the SEC website.

## 9. Audit and Risk Committee

The C&AG have completed their fieldwork with some follow up work to be finalised.

An Internal Audit on the implementation of actions/recommendations of each internal audit conducted over the course of the 3 year Internal Audit Work Programme is due to commence at the end of August.

The Executive confirmed that IPA were covered under the OGP to carry out the External Evaluation of the Commission. A proposal with Terms of Reference will be sent to the IPA. It is hoped to have a firm proposal in place for the next meeting in September.

## **10. Finance**

The Executive briefed the Commission on D/PER's policy on accumulation of travel across the public service. This emerged following queries received by the SEC in relation to the aggregation of mileage for the purposes of applying the appropriate payment band in accordance with D/PER Circular 5/2017. Further clarification is being sought from DPER and it is intended to develop a mechanism for contract staff to make a claim, where appropriate, in accordance with the regulations. This will be done on a retrospective basis later in the year.

The Executive met with Revenue on the 20<sup>th</sup> July regarding the new PAYE Modernisation changes which come into effect from January 2019. A certain amount of work has been completed in relation to preparations for these changes, with further scoping work ongoing.

The Q2 Management Accounts were circulated to the Commission, which noted that expenditure to date in 2018 is in line with profiles. These accounts will be reviewed to provide point in time comparisons between 2017 and 2018, and recirculated.

## **11. IT**

The standalone QPU network will be commissioned in September for use in the 2019 paper preparation process.

The Executive briefed the Board on a phishing email which was received by a staff member, which referred to an SEC password (2 years old). It was noted that this did not pose any security threat, but was a reminder of the need for vigilance.

## **12. Procurement**

Receipt of the formal agreement between SEC and the OGP to allow the SEC to directly procure mission-critical material was noted.

## **13. AOB**

The Commission was briefed on a data breach which occurred in Fees Section as a result of a follow up email issuing to a group of recipients (less than 100) regarding their

applications for a Medical Card exemption from fees. While this breach contained no financial or personal details, other than email addresses, it was considered appropriate to formally notify the Data Protection Commissioner, while also issuing an apology to the recipients.

The Commissioners expressed their thanks in acknowledgement of the work completed for the 2018 Examinations.

Meeting Concluded