

# FAQs on State Examinations 2020 and Continuity of Teaching & Learning

20 April 2020 [WEBSITE LINK](#)



The ASTI is receiving a significant number of queries regarding state examinations in 2020 and continuity of teaching and learning. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions and answers to them. This page is being updated regularly.

## STATE EXAMS 2020

On 10th April, 2020, Minister Joe McHugh TD [announced that the 2020 Leaving Certificate Examinations were being postponed](#). This government decision was taken on the advice of the National Public Health Expert Team. The prospect of holding them as normal is not a realistic possibility. In addition, he announced that the Junior Certificate examinations were cancelled and were to be replaced with school-based exams and assessments early in the new school year.

## Leaving Certificate Examinations:

### What is the outline of the Minister's decision with respect to the Leaving Certificate?

It is intended to hold the Leaving Certificate examinations in late July/early August. This is the earliest possible date in-line with the data and advice from the National Public Health Expert Team with respect to the potential for the holding of the state

examinations. The timetable for the examinations will be published in June and will be predicated on the medical advice at that time.

For two weeks prior to the examinations it is hoped that face to face contact will be arranged in schools with Leaving Certificate students.

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) also hope that teachers will maintain contact with their Leaving Certificate Students in the period prior to the two weeks face to face referred above. This is because the DES are worried about maintenance of motivation and engagement of students.

The DES gave a commitment to engagement with the ASTI and TUI on a viable plan for putting in place arrangements for some contact with students after remote teaching ends on May 29th and following the June break for teachers and students. These discussions have commenced together with discussions with all the other stakeholders in second-level education.

### **What is the situation with regard to practical examinations, projected components and other related work?**

#### **Practical exams: E.g. LC Construction Studies, Engineering, Art:**

These will be rearranged to take place in the late July/ August period of examinations.

#### **Project work: Several subjects including Agricultural Science, Constructions Studies, etc:**

The date for completion of this work is being set for just prior to the commencement of the late July/ August period of examinations.

Three Terminal Examinations in May: Link Modules 6th May, ICT 13th May and Computer Science 27th May:

These will be rearranged to take place in the late July/ August period of examinations.

#### **Leaving Certificate Applied: Orals and Practicals:**

These will be rearranged to take place in the late July/ August period of examinations.

#### **Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme Link Modules:**

The LCVP Link modules written examination will take place in the late July/August period of examinations.

### **What is the position of the ASTI on the Minister's announcements regarding the Leaving Certificate Examinations 2020?**

The ASTI welcomes *in principle* that the Leaving Cert examinations will go ahead this year.

Standing Committee met in the immediate aftermath of the Minister's announcement and again some days later.

It confirmed its support for the Minister's Leaving Cert exams announcement, notwithstanding a number of serious concerns raised by teachers all over the country. Those serious concerns remain to be addressed.

The ASTI will meet with the Department of Education and Skills and other relevant agencies in order to seek to resolve all issues raised by its members.

The decision was taken in the context that ASTI members are wholly committed to supporting their students at this time, as has been evidenced by their enormous efforts since the closure of schools for normal tuition. The efforts of teachers, which have involved huge extra workload, have endured despite the challenges posed by under investment in education, particularly in the area of information technology.

### **What is the outline of the Minister's decision with respect to Junior Certificate?**

The Junior Certificate will not take place this year.

The Minister's intention is that the papers will be distributed to schools in the autumn and schools will be asked to schedule them internally. There will be no Junior Certificate issued. The situation with regard to the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement has not been clarified. It is not clear how the proposed school-based examinations would run, who would invigilate them or how they would be corrected.

The Department of Education Press Statement of 10th April states as follows:

- *Junior Cycle examinations in June replaced with school-based exams and assessments early in the new school year*
- *Junior Cycle final examinations due to take place in June will be replaced by school-based exams and assessments held early in the new school year.*
- *As part of the changes to the Junior Cycle, discussions will take place with teacher unions and school management to allow these examinations, linked Classroom-Based Assessments, Assessment Tasks and project work to be completed as school-based assessments early in the next school year.*

### **What is the ASTI's position on the Minister's announcements regarding the Junior Certificate Examinations 2020?**

Regarding the Junior Certificate announcement and in the context of the Minister's decision to cancel this year's Junior Certificate examinations, the ASTI has called on the Minister to award a State Certificate to all this year's Junior Cycle candidates in recognition of their participation in and completion of the three years of Junior Cycle in June 2020.

We believe that the well-being of these students is best served by the freedom of these students to enjoy the summer of 2020 without the pressure of examinations hanging over them. The ASTI believes teachers and students will have fulfilled their commitment to Junior Certificate when the present school year ends on May 29th.

### **Are precedents being set?**

The ASTI is conscious of the enormous efforts that our members have already made since the commencement of the Public Health Emergency to maintain teaching and learning in our school communities. It is clear that this will continue to be the case. Members have expressed a worry that the situation will be exploited as a precedent when normal work recommences and in future industrial relations negotiations. Following representations, the Department of Education and Skills has confirmed the following in writing:

*“It is accepted that such temporary measures are being operated by staff on a without prejudice basis and will not be used in any way by the Department as a precedent in any subsequent industrial relations discussions.”*

The ASTI will be vigilant that this commitment will be upheld.

### **What happens now?**

ASTI representatives have attended the first meeting of a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister’s decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing the many issues and concerns that have been raised by members. We will seek to resolve them in-line with our policies and with due consideration to the well-being of our members and our students.

### **What will happen at the end of May?**

On the 29th May, all class groups except Leaving Certificate students, (LCA, LCVP/ Leaving Certificate) will commence their summer holidays. While a two-week break at that point has been mentioned, the ASTI believes that the entire month of June should be set aside as a complete break for students, teachers and their families. Bearing in mind that the projected completion date of the Leaving Certificate may mean a full calendar year of work will have transpired, laden with traumatic upheaval, this would be a timely juncture for all concerned to rest and recuperate prior to a final intensive push towards completion of the Leaving Certificate.

### **What level of contact will be required with students prior to the two weeks of face to face time in schools in July?**

Teaching remotely will have concluded at the end of May. For a period prior to the two-week engagement in schools in July, teachers are being asked to maintain a link with the Leaving Certificate students, not to teach remotely but to support students, helping them with queries they may have and providing support and guidance as they begin again to intensify their preparations for their examinations. The ASTI understands that the current advice of the health authorities precludes the possibility of schools being open. There is no suggestion of direct teaching taking place across this period of time.

### **How will the two-weeks of face to face contact with Leaving Certificate students in schools operate?**

Ensuring that appropriate and comprehensive public health measures are implemented to safeguard the health and safety of all school communities will be paramount. The ASTI will be pursuing the objective that the arrangements in place will enjoy the confidence of all concerned and be fully compliant with the recommendations and strictures of the National Public Health Expert Team. Protocols will have to be in place in every school to deal with all eventualities that might arise. These will include the large gamut of issues that will need to be addressed such as appropriate social distancing, hygiene, preventing gatherings taking place and dealing with all the ramifications of the presence of persons who have been or are affected in some way by the outbreak of Covid-19.

### **Will the normal exams timetable operate?**

Normal timetabling arrangements will not operate. The practicalities of the arrangements will be discussed with Management Bodies, Unions and the Department of Education and Skills at the on-going discussions of the working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for the State Examinations 2020.

### **What is the position if I am unavailable to attend school during the two weeks provision in schools?**

In feedback received, large numbers of members have indicated a willingness to be available where possible to assist with student preparation and face-to-face engagement prior to the examinations. However, it is acknowledged that not all teachers will be in a position to return to school in July.

There will be a significant number of teachers who will not be in a position to make themselves for a large variety of reasons. These might include underlying health issues, living with someone who is in the vulnerable persons category or a requirement to self-isolate etc. Members should consult their doctor where any doubt arises regarding health issues. There may be other individual circumstances that may prevent teachers engaging with this element of exam preparation.

**My Leaving Certificate students' incomplete project work remains in school. I have a concern that it will not be possible to complete it. What is the position?**

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

**My Leaving Certificate students have to prepare for and undertake a practical examination in a specialist room setting. I have a concern that it will not be possible to adequately prepare due to time constraints and it will not be practical to proceed with the examination as it is necessary to share equipment and machinery in a confined space. What is the position?**

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

**I am concerned that my Leaving Certificate Applied students will not be able to complete Projects or Practical Examinations due to time constraints. What is the position?**

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's

decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

## **Superintending and Marking of the Leaving Certificate:**

### **How is superintending of the Leaving Certificate being organised?**

The State Examinations Commission is organising and administering the superintending of the Leaving Certificate. For teachers who participate it is a separate contract from their teaching contract.

Those who have applied to the State Examinations Commission this year may continue with their application.

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

### **How is correcting of the Leaving Certificate being organised?**

The State Examinations Commission is organising and administering the correcting/marking of the Leaving Certificate. For teachers who participate it is a separate contract from their teaching contract.

Those who have applied to the State Examinations Commission this year may continue with their application.

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

### **What are the arrangements for marking of the Leaving Certificate examinations?**

The expectation is that once examinations are completed, the marking process will commence immediately under the direction of the SEC. The logistics of this together with how such arrangements will impact on the beginning of the next school year (2020/2021) will need to be addressed.

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

## **Junior Certificate:**

### **What is the position regarding the Junior Certificate Examinations?**

The Junior Certificate will not take place. The Minister's stated intention is that the papers will be distributed to schools in the Autumn and schools would be asked to schedule them internally. There will be no Junior Certificate issued. We have called on the Minister to award a State Certificate to all of this year's Junior Cycle candidates in recognition of their participation in and completion of the three years of Junior Cycle in June 2020.

We believe that the well-being of these students is best served by the freedom of these students to enjoy the summer of 2020 without the pressure of examinations hanging over them. The ASTI believes teachers and students will have fulfilled their commitment to Junior Certificate students when the present school year ends on May 29th.

### **What is the ASTI position with regard to the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement?**



The situation with regard to the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement has not been clarified. It is not clear how the proposed school-based examinations would run, who would invigilate them or how they would be corrected.

The Department of Education Press Statement of 10th April states as follows:

- *Junior Cycle examinations in June replaced with school-based exams and assessments early in the new school year*
- *Junior Cycle final examinations due to take place in June will be replaced by school-based exams and assessments held early in the new school year.*
- *As part of the changes to the Junior Cycle, discussions will take place with teacher unions and school management to allow these examinations, linked Classroom-Based Assessments, Assessment Tasks and project work to be completed as school-based assessments early in the next school year.*

The ASTI is of the view that all elements of the Junior Certificate are cancelled. ASTI will not ask members to invigilate and correct the papers when they are circulated to schools in September.

We have called on the Minister to award a State Certificate to all of this year's Junior Cycle candidates in recognition of their participation in and completion of the three years of Junior Cycle in June 2020.

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

## **Continuity of Teaching and Learning:**

### **What is the position regarding remote teaching and learning between Easter 2020 and the end of May 2020?**

It is expected that schools will not reopen before the end of this year's normal school tuition calendar. Remote teaching and learning will continue. Prior to the Easter break, the ASTI wrote to the Department of Education and Skills and sought to achieve agreed operational guidelines to assist in this whole new way of delivering second-level education. Unfortunately, the Department of Education and Skills did not respond to that request and proceeded to issue a document entitled 'Guidelines on Continuity of Schooling - For Primary and Post- Primary Schools' dated 2nd April

2020.

This document was issued without any consultation with teacher unions despite the ASTI's request and a number of representations having also been made to the Department by others. The ASTI protested this approach and an apology was issued.

What has been presented by the Department of Education and Skills is a poorly crafted document which is inconsistent and in a number of instances advocates unrealistic approaches and unwarranted outcomes, which will add greatly to the stress experienced by all concerned at this time.

ASTI believes that an important opportunity has been missed to provide agreed guidance that would be truly beneficial to all interested parties at this time. The published document enjoys no standing from an ASTI point of view and must be rejected as a purportedly useful intervention to support the continuity of teaching and learning during this Public Health Emergency.

Since the issuance of this document, the Department of Education and Skills have relented and have agreed to try to achieve an agreed document that serves the needs of second-level teachers. If such document cannot be agreed in a short time-frame ASTI will issue its own guidance document.

## **What is the ASTI's general advice?**

### **Ensuring a work-life balance:**

Remote working or working from home is challenging – especially for teachers whose daily work is face-to-face engagement with young people, defined timetables and established school routines. It is easy to underestimate how important such routines are and to feel isolated in the current situation. The best advice is to maintain a specific time-bound work routine. Have a dedicated work space and allocate time each day to your teaching, including marking and responding to students online. Time boundaries are critical for work-life balance, especially when working from home. Use the technology you are most comfortable and competent with, follow the broad objectives of your termly subject plans and collaborate, get advice and encouragement from your colleagues. This is an unprecedented situation for every teacher, including those who are very skilled in ICT usage. Teachers working from home can only carry out a reasonable workload.

### **Remote teaching and learning:**

The best advice is to maintain a specific time-bound work routine:

- allocate a certain number of hours to work each day;
- take into account circumstantial limitations (such as availability of broadband in your home); utilise where possible the technology you are most comfortable and competent with – this can be as simple and as effective as email or other tools that you find useful;
- follow the broad objectives of your subject plans for the term; and

- get advice or encouragement from your colleagues.

It is also useful to keep up to date with the emerging supports provided by PDST, NCSE, Scoilnet, Webwise, etc.

Adapting to the idea of learning and teaching online is challenging: teaching is above all a relational rather than a transactional process. Face-to-face interaction with young people in a structured timetable is the norm. Teachers also have varying degrees of confidence, competence and knowledge of ICT. In these circumstances, teachers can feel under pressure, stressed and cut adrift, given the rapidity of school closure and the resultant limited capacity of schools to prepare a co-ordinated response.

Teachers have been thrust into a situation for which they have been ill prepared while continuing to provide an essential service. The ASTI's position, communicated to management and teachers alike, is that work should proceed in a context that encompasses reasonable expectations of all concerned, to the best of teachers' ability under the most challenging of circumstances.

### **Stay protected together online:**

It needs to be stated that online learning is not without its risks. Many home computers, including those of teachers, may not have adequate levels of protection. Teachers should be confident that their computers are adequately protected by appropriate anti-virus software before using them for teaching. Insofar as is possible, use ICT resources and platforms which are already in use in your school.

All schools are required to have an Acceptable Use Policy for students use of the internet at school that specifies the rights, responsibilities and privileges and sanctions connected with computer use. This policy complements the school's Digital Learning Plan.

The national internet safety site, [BeSafeOnline](#) has practical advice for all levels of usage of ICT devices.

Additional information, advice and education resources are also available from [Webwise](#) addressing a range of internet safety issues and concerns.

Teachers are in communication with their students using a wide variety of platforms.

Any contact between pupils and teachers should only be through a platform endorsed by the school and not through personalised accounts open to public viewing, comments or sharing.

ASTI advises members not to use or exchange personal email addresses or phone numbers with pupils.

Teachers should not be expected to carry out any online teaching with which they feel uncomfortable or in the absence of agreed protocols.

### **Real-time teaching or live communication:**

It must be borne in mind that real-time teaching or live communication can potentially give rise to concerns pertaining to privacy and child protection. There are no current agreed guidelines in operation regarding such engagement with students. There have been few or no risk assessments undertaken in the vast majority of schools with regard to these activities and whole school policies have not been developed. It is in that context that teachers should consider the usage of such facilities. Many schools are uploading material for students rather than engaging in real-time teaching or live communication.

### **Supporting Students:**

Teachers are regularly in contact with their students seeking to provide appropriate learning experiences in the extraordinary circumstances of this time. To the best extent possible, supports are being provided for students with special educational needs and those suffering educational disadvantage. Teachers should assign work that is relevant and manageable, mindful that such work will be carried out independently. The key objective is to ensure continuity of learning. Teachers should use their professional judgement in the assignment of independent work, whether written or practical, in line with the learning needs of students and available resources. Similar judgement should be exercised regarding feedback to students. While the ASTI is aware of the support that parents are providing, they cannot be expected to replicate the professional service that teachers provide.

Teachers are providing huge social support to their students by providing consistent online teaching and communication. Some students are experiencing multiple stressors. The most appropriate response to students communicating distress is to refer students to the established school structures for pastoral care and guidance counselling and where necessary to follow the Child Protection Procedures for Post-Primary Schools. Teachers should contact their schools Designated Liaison Person (DLP), and report their concerns in the normal way. Further information is available on the [Tusla website](#). The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) has developed [guidance and advice for teachers, students and parents](#).

### **Inequality of provision:**

It should also be remembered that there are also issues with access that arise for students. Some students do not have a quiet place to work or may have to take care of younger siblings or perform household chores. The ASTI is aware of difficulties for many families where siblings and parents working from home are experiencing difficulties with internet access and availability of equipment – hardware and software. Broadband provision may be inadequate, in rural areas in particular. The ASTI has demanded that measures are put in place to ensure that the digital divide across the country is addressed to enable all teachers and students to engage appropriately.

The ASTI has urged the Department of Education and Skills to provide resources and to ensure that every reasonable accommodation is made to prevent wider educational disadvantage occurring.

**I have a concern regarding the work of my current 2nd year students and 5th year students. What measures will be put in place to deal with deficits that arise that impact on their Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate Examinations respectively in 2021?**

ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

**When will schools re-open for all students to commence the 2020/2021 school year?**

Decisions regarding all operational matters in schools are entirely guided by the advice of the public health authorities. In addition, it is also the case that the reopening of schools will be impacted by a necessity to delay return in the context of the late Leaving Certificate Examinations in July/August 2020 and the marking requirements. The demands of the present school year will undoubtedly impact on the new school year. Sustainability is a primary concern for the ASTI and we are seeking a break from all school activities at the beginning of September.

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

## **Contracts of Employment / Leave:**

**My contract of employment was to cover for a teacher on approved leave and will expire at the end of May 2020. Am I being asked to continue working with my Leaving Certificate students and attend school for two weeks in July?**

As the date of expiry of your contract arises before the period of engagement with Leaving Certificate Students in July then you are not expected to participate.

**My contract of employment is to cover for a teacher on approved leave and will expire on a date later than the end of July 2020. Am I being asked to continue**

**working with my Leaving Certificate students and attend school for two weeks in July?**

You may participate in the two-week period of school-based provision in July.

**If my contract expires at the end of May but it is still unclear whether the teacher on approved leave whom I am replacing will be in a position to return thereafter, can I be asked to continue working with my Leaving Certificate students and attend in school for two weeks in July?**

At the discussions at the working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020, ASTI will be pursuing this matter. Where a school wishes to extend the contract of a teacher where the contract of employment has concluded in May, ASTI will be insisting that appropriate arrangements are put in place to renew/extend the contract and appropriate payment provided.

**I am on maternity or other approved leave. It concludes prior to the two-week reopening of schools in July. Am I being requested to participate and attend in school for two weeks in July?**

You may participate and attend in school for the two weeks face to face engagement in July. However, it is acknowledged that not all teachers will be in a position to return to school in July. There may be a number of teachers who will not be in a position to make themselves for a large variety of reasons. These might include underlying health issue or a requirement to self-isolate.

**I will not be able to organise childcare to cover the two weeks in July. What is the position?**

The ASTI has entered discussions at a working group that has been set up by the Department of Education and Skills for contingency planning for State Examinations 2020. The group is a forum where the second-level education stakeholders can all contribute their views and concerns regarding the implementation of the Minister's decision for the running of the examinations.

The ASTI will be pursuing this issue of concern that has been raised by members.

Further information will be provided as soon as it is available.

**Got a question?**

Email questions re. State Exams to [examqueries@asti.ie](mailto:examqueries@asti.ie)

Email other queries to [info@asti.ie](mailto:info@asti.ie)