

Teachers' Union of Ireland

State Examinations 2020

Frequently Asked Questions in the context of Covid-19



Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied/LCVP

Who made the decision to postpone the Leaving Certificate/LCA/LCVP?

The decision to postpone and re-schedule the Leaving Certificate Examinations was taken by Government on the advice of the health authorities.

Will this decision hold?

While it is the clear intention that the examinations will proceed in late July/early Aug, there is not and there cannot at this stage be a guarantee that the new/rescheduled date will hold. That will entirely depend upon the advice to be given by the health authorities in early June. If the advice is that it is safe to proceed with the Leaving Certificate/LCA/LCVP examinations in late July, they will proceed. If the advice is that it is not safe, they will not proceed. Everything is subject to considerations of public health.

In this regard, it is not simply a question of the risk of infection spreading between students. Risk to families, school staff and the broader community will also be factored in, as will risk associated with travel to and from schools/examination centres and the risk presented if students congregate before and/or after exams.

All of these factors will be considered by the health authorities and Government.

What consideration has the TUI given to the ‘proposals’ to re-schedule the Leaving Certificate/Leaving Certificate Applied(LCA)/Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme(LCVP)?

The rescheduling of the Leaving Certificate examinations is not a ‘proposal’. It is a decision made by Government based on the advice of the public health authorities. It is not open to negotiation. The TUI decided to engage constructively with the decision in the interests of students, their future and social solidarity in this unprecedented crisis: the Covid-19 public health emergency.

Students and teachers were preparing towards a set time to sit the Leaving Certificate examinations i.e. June. Postponing the date is hugely challenging for students and teachers. Has the TUI raised this with the authorities?

The key fact to bear in mind is that, because of the Covid-19 public health emergency, the examinations cannot be conducted in June. This is the clear assessment of the public health authorities and it is this view that informed the decision of Government. The decision of Government is not amenable to negotiation or change.

Therefore, the question as to when (or indeed whether) the examinations could be held arose. Advised by the health authorities, Government decided that the earliest that the examinations could possibly be held would be late July – August. An exact commencement date cannot be set at this time.

Why has a revised timetable for the Leaving Certificate Examinations not issued?

It is not possible at this point to be absolutely definitive about these dates. The health authorities will have to consider the issue in early June in the light of the health situation at that point and advise Government as to whether or not the examinations can safely proceed and, if so, under what conditions.

It is for this reason that the State Examinations Commission cannot yet issue an examinations timetable. It will do so in early June if the health authorities give the go-ahead to running the examinations, taking account of what social distancing and/or other public health requirements are specified at that time.

Should the Leaving Certificate examinations be cancelled and replaced by predicted grades?

The TUI has consistently expressed the strong view that the best option in the current extraordinary situation is that the Leaving Certificate examinations would proceed. The Government, DES, SEC and school management bodies all share this view. There are commentators who have asked for the abandonment of the Leaving Certificate examinations and the use instead of predicted marks or Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs). We do not regard those as preferable options and believe that they would exacerbate inequalities and would not enjoy the trust of the public or the teaching profession.

Therefore, accommodating the Leaving Certificate examinations, albeit on a delayed basis, is by a distance the best available option at this time.

It is fully recognised that, as an option, it has its difficulties, not least being that it will require students to re-focus and adjust to a much longer lead-in period.

The Minister for Education and Skills clearly recognises that there are difficulties and logistics to be addressed and has committed to a full and intensive engagement with the unions and other relevant education partners in this regard. That engagement has commenced.

Will the LCA tasks go ahead as planned?

The LCA Personal Reflection Task, scheduled for completion by 1st May, will now be completed by the commencement of the written examinations in late July/August.

The following will also be rescheduled for the late July/August period.

- *LCA Oral Examinations*
- *LCA practical performance tests in Hotel Catering & Tourism; Office Administration and Customer Care; Active Leisure Studies; Hair & Beauty; and Agriculture/Horticulture*
- *LCA ICT practical performance and written examination.*

When will the LCVP Link Modules written examination be held?

The LCVP Link modules written examination will be rescheduled to take place in the late July/August period.

Teaching and Learning

Students and teachers are working very hard at present, engaging in remote teaching and learning which has placed huge demands on all of us. Has there been any consideration for the well-being of teachers and students?

The Unions and the Department were very clear in emphasising the well-being of students and teachers and, in this regard, the Minister and the Secretary General of the DES unequivocally stressed the need for a break during the Easter holiday period and, again, following the conclusion of the third term at the end of May.

There is, of course, a risk that some students and/or teachers might not heed this advice or that school management may in some instances apply unhelpful pressure or set unfair and unrealistic expectations. It is, therefore, a matter that will require to be addressed in the discussions with the Department and the school management authorities.

The TUI will ensure that the interests of members are protected against ill-conceived expectations or pressures.

Has consideration been given to the significant inequalities that have been exacerbated by the current national emergency i.e. poor WIFI coverage, students who do not have computers at home, students living in houses where there is only one laptop/Chromebook/device that has to be shared with parents who are working from home and other siblings, students living in direct provision

or in wholly unsuitable temporary accommodation, students who simply cannot work independently without teacher guidance due to family circumstances, lower levels of ability, lack of confidence or SEN?

Yes; and this was directly referred to by the Union in the statement that issued following the announcement by the Minister that exams are to be postponed. The TUI will be working with the relevant bodies to ensure that every reasonable accommodation is made for students who find themselves disadvantaged further in the current climate. The Minister has committed to comprehensive engagement with the unions in the coming weeks and this will be a priority issue for us in that engagement.

Am I expected to continue with remote teaching from 29th May until the Leaving Certificate examinations begins?

This was not requested and is not envisaged. It has not been suggested that teachers should continue the current remote provision of tuition into and through June and July.

The TUI and other parties have expressed serious concerns regarding disengagement by some students, particularly those with poor access to ICT facilities/broadband and/or those for whom creating the conditions for study at home is a challenge and/or those with special educational needs. Consideration is being given as to how contact with these students can best be maintained and how they can be supported.

The Minister has asked that teachers return to school for at least two weeks in July before the exams commence. Is this an instruction?

The Minister did not issue a command or instruction. The DES and the Minister are seeking the co-operation of teachers and schools in the context of the national response to the Covid-19 public health emergency. At the various meetings held so far with the DES, both unions were of the view that, in solidarity with our students, their families and our communities, this is a request to which teachers are likely to respond positively in the current circumstances. The unions also took the view that, as a practical expression of solidarity with colleagues, it would be best undertaken as a whole school response to the needs of students.

What students will be in the school/centre in July?

Final year Leaving Certificate students only i.e. LCA/LCVP/Leaving Certificate.

Will my normal timetable be followed during the two weeks in July?

No. The time will be used in a manner that is of greatest benefit and support to the Leaving Certificate students of the school, given their particular needs and the school's context. The practicalities in relation to this will be discussed with the Unions, management bodies and the DES. The TUI will also consult with our Principals' and Deputy Principals' Association in this regard.

What is being asked of me in June and July?

The third school term (in the sense of remote teaching of classes) will close/finish on Friday 29th May and the Minister has asked that everyone at that point take a break for two weeks. He has asked that a line of contact with schools/teachers be available remotely after these two weeks, not for the purpose of teaching remotely as you do during term time but to maintain a link with Leaving Certificate students and help iron out issues or queries that they may have. This, like everything we are being asked to do, is unprecedented and exceptional.

It is our clear understanding that, based on the current advice of the health authorities, schools will continue to be closed at this time. Therefore, no direct teaching in a school setting can take place – or is being requested.

This is a time for students to engage in individual study, revision and consolidation but with the caveat and strong advice of the TUI – and indeed of the Minister, Department and school management authorities – that they pace their work carefully and take regular breaks.

It is then expected that, from mid-July, there will be, as the Minister has said, two weeks of school-based engagement for final year Leaving Certificate students. Teachers are being asked to engage with their students for these two weeks. We know there will be perfectly valid reasons why some teachers cannot return to school at that time. We will, of course, make representations on behalf of such members to ensure that they are accommodated.

I teach a subject that has a practical component but I have a concern that my students will not be able to complete this work in two weeks in July. What happens?

Discussions have commenced with the DES and the SEC on all areas of concern that have been raised by teachers of practical subjects or subjects that have an additional assessment component. Further information will be provided in due course as these discussions proceed.

I am concerned that it will not be possible to complete the LCA projects/practical exams in the two weeks in July. What happens?

Discussions have commenced with the DES and the SEC on all areas of concern that have been raised by teachers of LCA. Further information will be provided in due course as these discussions proceed.

I do not teach final year Leaving Certificate students this year. Am I being asked to return for two weeks in July?

The TUI is strongly of the view that the envisaged school-based engagement in July should, in a spirit of solidarity with colleagues and students, be on a whole school basis, i.e. involve all teachers (other than those whose individual circumstances require specific accommodation).

Moreover, as social distancing will still be in operation, it will not be possible for a teacher of a Leaving Certificate class of 30 students to have all those students in a classroom at one time.

Therefore, additional teachers will be needed to supervise these students, offer them support in areas such as study skills and/or otherwise assist them.

I am in a new school that doesn't have a final year Leaving Certificate group this year. Am I being asked to return in July?

No. Teachers are being asked to return to support the learning of those students sitting the Leaving Certificate State examinations.

I am due to get married in July and therefore will not be in a position to return to school in July. What happens?

Individual circumstances will be taken into consideration and it is acknowledged that not all teachers will be in a position to return to school in July.

I am in the 'at risk' category or I am living in a household with someone in the 'at risk' category. Am I being asked to return to school in July?

Public health advice is paramount. If you are unable to return to work due to health reasons (for you or for your family) you must take the advice of the health professionals.

I am covering for a teacher on approved leave. My contract expires on 29th May. Am I being asked to return to school in July?

If the period of approved leave of the teacher for whom you are covering ends before the return to school in July and you are no longer employed or paid (by the school), you are not expected, on an unpaid basis, to cover for that teacher. The returning teacher assumes responsibility.

If the period of approved leave of the teacher for whom you are covering continues to or beyond the end of July and under your contract you are being paid in respect of that period of time, you can be asked to participate in the two week process of school-based engagement.

If, in relation to the period of engagement, a school wishes to retain the service of a teacher whose contract with the school has expired, the TUI will seek in the forthcoming discussions with the DES to agree an arrangement whereby a contract can be renewed or extended for a specified purpose/period and appropriate payment made to the affected teacher.

My maternity leave (or other approved leave) ends before the school re-opens in July. Am I being asked to return?

If your leave ends then you are being asked to return unless, on the advice of the health authorities, because of your particular circumstances, you are not in a position to do so.

I do not have childcare to cover the two weeks in July. Am I being asked to return?

This is a significant issue for many members. It will be discussed in the engagement between the Unions and the DES. In this context we see childcare as including cover for children of primary school age also.

I teach Leaving Certificate/LCA in a setting other than a mainstream school i.e. Youthreach, VTOS etc. What do I do in for my Leaving Certificate/LCA students?

It is expected that, from mid-July, there will be, as the Minister has said, two weeks of centre-based engagement for final year Leaving Certificate students. Teachers/Resource Persons are being asked to engage with their students for these two weeks. We know there will be perfectly valid reasons why some teachers/resource persons cannot return to their centres at that time. We will, of course, make representations on behalf of such members to ensure that they are accommodated.

Will necessary PPE/hygiene products be provided to schools/centres for school-based engagement in July?

If the public health authorities stipulate that PPE equipment or other health/hygiene products and/or procedures are needed to ensure that students and school/centre staff can return to their schools or centres safely then these will be provided/implemented.

Will there be clear guidance on the sharing of practical equipment?

Yes. Further information will issue once it becomes available in line with the advice of the public health authorities.

Will there be a clear protocol in place for teachers and students who develop symptoms or who may be in contact those with suspected Covid-19 cases?

Yes. Further information will issue once it becomes available in line with the advice of the public health authorities.

What provisions will be in place for students diagnosed with Covid-19 or bereaved due to Covid-19 during July/August in relation to school-based engagement and/or exams?

This will be discussed between the Unions, the management bodies, the SEC and the DES. The SEC has unequivocally committed to making the necessary accommodations for such students so that they will have the opportunity to take the Leaving Certificate examinations. In circumstances where this is not possible the provision of suitable alternative arrangements will be considered.

How will schools/centres prevent Leaving Certificate students gathering before/after school and at break times?

Whatever social distancing is stipulated at the time will have to be applied and the practical implications of this will be a very significant matter for discussion between the Unions and the other relevant parties.

Superintending and Marking of State Examinations

Am I being required or asked to superintend the Leaving Certificate examinations?

No. Superintending of the Leaving Certificate is organised and administered by the SEC. Teachers who engage in this work do so by way of a separate contract. It is additional work to that which you are contracted for as a teacher.

If you have applied to the SEC to superintend this year you may continue with your application. Although the Junior Certificate Examination has been cancelled, there will be a requirement for more superintendents for the Leaving Certificate examinations to accommodate whatever social distancing is stipulated by the Public Health Authorities.

Am I being required or asked to mark/correct Leaving Certificate examinations?

No. State examination marking is organised and administered by the SEC. Teachers who engage in this work do so by way of a separate contract (Assistant Examiner/ Advising Examiner). It is additional work to that which you are contracted for as a teacher.

Those persons who have applied to correct the Junior Certificate may be invited by the SEC to correct Leaving Certificate examinations instead.

When will the exams be marked?

It is envisaged that once an exam has been completed, the marking process in respect of that exam, under the auspices of the SEC, will begin without delay.

Junior Cycle

Are the Junior Certificate written examinations going ahead in June or are they delayed also?

By Government decision, the Junior Certificate written examinations have been cancelled and will not proceed this year.

IMPORTANT:

All matters arising from the Government decision regarding the Junior Cycle will be the subject of discussion between the Unions, the DES/SEC, and the school management bodies. Such discussions will have full regard to the advice of the health authorities at any given time. The Minister and Department have formally and publicly committed to such discussion. All queries and comments received from our members in relation to the Junior Cycle will inform those discussions.

Am I being asked to examine my current Junior Cycle Students in September?

The papers and marking schemes which have already been prepared for the now cancelled written examinations by the SEC will be given to schools following the re-opening of schools in September.

No state certified Junior Certificate examinations will take place this year and teachers are not being asked to mark exams for state certification.

Will my students have to pay a fee for Junior Certificate Examinations this year?

The Minister has stated that the Junior Certificate fee for 2020 will be waived.

General Questions

When will schools re-open for all students?

This is a matter for Government to decide in the context of the advice from the public health authorities. At present it seems possible that schools will not re-open before September (other than for the purposes of the two-week period of engagement from mid-July and conduct of the Leaving Certificate examinations in late July/August).

The position of the TUI is that any arrangements in relation to the re-opening of schools must take account of the advice of the health authorities and must be organised in a fashion that does not impose unreasonable demands on teachers/school management or students. This too is a matter that will be discussed between the Unions, the DES, and the school management bodies.

Will remote teaching and learning or other measures applied for the purposes of dealing with the Covid-19 public health emergency continue to be used when the emergency is over? Will what we are now doing be used as a precedent by the DES/school management?

No. The DES has acknowledged the great work being undertaken by teachers to maintain teaching and learning during this unprecedented time of a national health emergency and has confirmed, in writing, to the Unions that a precedent will not be established. The DES has stated '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 TUI will ensure that this assurance is honoured and that the terms and conditions of teachers are protected.

This document will be updated on a regular basis so please continue to check the website (www.tui.ie), TUI's social media and the TUI App following the initial publication.