

Statement from Minister on Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle examinations

The Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh TD announced on Friday 10 April 2020 a series of changes to the 2020 State Examinations as part of measures to respond to Covid-19, including postponement of the Leaving Certificate examinations.

The decisions have been taken on foot of updated advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET).

Minister McHugh said plans were being put in place for the postponed Leaving Certificate examinations to begin in the last week of July or early August, subject to public health advice.

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.

A series of other decisions has also been taken –

- As part of the wider public health measures, schools are closed until further notice.
- Practical examinations for Leaving Certificate students which were due to have been held in May are deferred. They will be rescheduled for late July/early August.
- The new Leaving Certificate exam timetable will be confirmed in early June.

Minister McHugh said: “All decisions we are taking in relation to rescheduling exams are based on current public health advice and put the best interests of students first. The welfare of students and that of their families is front and centre in all decision making.

“The final arrangements for the exams, the exam centres, social distancing and other measures will all be determined by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) on foot of public health advice in June. I want to thank the SEC for its efforts to put in place these revised arrangements.

“Students and their families have been seeking clarity. Today’s announcement addresses that. It also provides them with several weeks of advance notice to prepare for the examinations. I hope it helps to alleviate some stress being experienced by students and their families at this time.

“Asking Leaving Certificate students and their families to refocus their attention from June to August is not something we do lightly. I know it will not be easy. However, I believe it is the fairest way of assessing students and giving them certification of achievement in school and a pathway to higher and further education and training, apprenticeship or work.”

Minister McHugh also said: “Students with special educational needs will be fully supported in sitting the rescheduled Leaving Certificate examinations in line with the reasonable accommodations as already arranged for them.”

Minister McHugh said the intention was to allow at least two weeks of class time, in school, before the Leaving Certificate examinations begin.

“Great work is being done by schools and teachers to connect with students and to keep them learning. We must give teachers, principals and school staff huge credit for their commitment to supporting students, in their schoolwork and in their wellbeing. And we want to provide students and teachers with an opportunity to build on that,” the Minister said.

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.

Minister McHugh acknowledged the positive engagement he has had with unions, management bodies, the further education and training and higher education sectors on all of these issues.

“I am grateful for the co-operation shown by all concerned, in what is a very challenging situation for our young people, their families and teachers. I am confident we can continue to work together in a supportive spirit to help secure the best outcomes for students,” the Minister said.

Minister of State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O’Connor said: “The third level institutions look forward to welcoming this year’s Leaving Certificate students who have applied to enter their courses. I appreciate the particular challenges these students have had to face and I welcome the flexible approach indicated by the sector to enabling these students to take up a place in the year ahead.”

The admissions process for higher education, managed by the Central Applications Office (CAO), will operate as closely as possible to the usual timeframe for offers and the entry date for first year students will be delayed. The Department has asked the Higher Education Authority and the higher education sector to explore ways of assisting access to higher education for students from under-represented groups.