

Impact of School Closures on Examination Activities

Cancellation of Oral and Practical Performance Tests 2020

You may have seen the decision to cancel parts of this year's state examinations.

Below you'll find a few questions and answers to try and explain what the changes mean, who is affected by them and why this unprecedented action was taken.

There is no perfect solution to the difficulties our education system is facing as a result of school closures and the impact of measures to stem the spread of Covid-19.

But these decisions are being taken with the best interests of students and their families in mind. We know that this is a time of real stress and worry for you. In making the decisions yesterday we wanted to try and ease that worry.

What tests have been cancelled?

All Leaving Certificate oral language tests have been cancelled.

Those practical performance tests at both Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle that were originally due to run from Monday. (23rd March) to 3rd April are cancelled

That covers all of the Leaving Certificate orals for Irish, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian and Japanese.

And it covers the practical performance tests for both Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle Music and the practical performance test in Junior Cycle Home Economics.

Why have they been cancelled?

The decision was taken because we are in the midst of a public health emergency and schools are closed. These are exceptional circumstances.

The overriding aim is to do what we can to alleviate stress and anxiety for students who are already dealing with major upheaval and all the other challenges that life throws at them.

By taking this decision now we hope students will focus their efforts on the remaining components of the examinations.

What are these tests worth in terms of the overall result?

You probably know there are two different categories of exams – Higher and Ordinary.

Irish is unique as the oral is worth 40% of the overall mark.

For the modern European languages the oral is worth 25% if you're doing Higher and 20% if you're doing Ordinary. In Japanese the oral is worth 25% at both levels. Leaving Certificate Music is slightly different. Students taking Higher level can sit a practical performance test

worth up to 50% of the overall mark, depending on what you're being tested on. At Ordinary level the test is up to 50%.

Looking at the Junior Cycle tests - the Home Economics practical is worth 50% at Higher level and 60% at Ordinary. The Music test is worth 25% at both levels

*1 - (Scroll down and you'll see a handy table we've included at the bottom of the Q&A)

How will I be marked for the exams in these subjects?

All students who were due to sit these tests will be given full marks for these parts of the exams.

How did you reach that decision? Surely it is unfair on the students who worked hardest or have a natural flair for one of these subjects?

The truth is there is no perfect solution. Several options were considered and this we believe is the fairest. It guarantees that no student will score less than they would have done if they had actually taken the test. There is no other way to give this guarantee.

What other options were looked at?

1. We could have cancelled the tests outright and then awarded a grade based on the remaining written exams. As it happens, students on average score highly on the orals and practical performance tests so making that change would have been unfair on everyone.
2. We could have postponed the tests until later in the exam timetable, or after it. But that would have left these tests hanging over students for months.
3. We also looked at holding the tests via video link or some other digital technology but that would only have added a new layer of complexity and pressure. There is also no guarantee that systems would have run smoothly enough at such short notice.

There has been some talk about using mock results but the fact is that not all schools offer mocks in these tests and they would not have been in a position to provide standardised marking.

But there are lots of students who aren't taking these tests and they are left at a disadvantage when it comes to final results, like students with special needs. How is that fair?

We appreciate that but we are dealing with exceptional circumstances and it is the fairest approach.

Students who have special needs have access to what we call reasonable accommodations. These are designed to assist students to demonstrate what they know and what they can do. Eligible students with special needs will be provided with the appropriate supports in the written exams.

Can I change now to a higher level paper?

No. Students have already indicated whether they wish to take Higher or Ordinary level or, in the case of Irish, Foundation level, exams. Students won't be allowed to switch to a higher level.

But everyone affected by these changes will still have the option to change from a higher level paper to a lower level paper, including on the day of the written examination.

Can I apply now for one of the subjects in which the oral or practical performance test has been cancelled?

No. We are no longer accepting entries in these subjects.

In Junior Cycle Home Economics there is a project as well as the cookery test. How has it been affected?

The project is marked in the schools at the same time as the practical performance test in cookery. So, full marks will be awarded to both components.

Did you make any other changes? Our project work and coursework is due in the coming weeks and we are under pressure to finish it?

We have extended the deadline for these elements until 15th May 2020.

*2 - (Scroll down and you'll see the list of subjects to which the extended deadline applies)

What will happen with the practical exams due to take place after Easter?

We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and in your interests we will act at the right time, in the right way, based on the strongest expert advice.

Realistically, what is going to happen to the rest of the examinations and the Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle tests in June?

All our decisions are guided by the advice of the public health officials and how that impacts on schools. Unfortunately we cannot be any more definitive than that at this stage.

We know it is not the clarity you want right now.

And despite all the disruption we want you to keep preparing for the remaining examinations. We want you to act in your interests and rest assured we will return that by assuring you that we are acting with your best interests at heart.

We know it is not easy. But we are dealing with a rapidly evolving situation and the best thing you can do now is keep focused, keep working, support each other and heed the public health advice to help flatten the curve of the spread of Covid-19.

*3 - We've included a note below if you need to check dates for the remaining exams.

Will my school open again after 29th March or even after Easter?

This can only be answered by the Chief Medical Officer once his team have looked at the impact of Covid-19 on Ireland and made a call on reopening or continued closure.

1 - Here's the breakdown of the percentages for each of the cancelled orals and practical performance test:

| | Higher | Ordinary | | Higher | Ordinary |
|----------------------------|--------|----------|---------------------|--------|----------|
| Leaving Certificate | | | Junior Cycle | | |
| Irish | 40% | 40% | Home Economics | 50% | 60% |
| French | 25% | 20% | Music | 25% | 25% |
| German | 25% | 20% | | | |
| Spanish | 25% | 20% | | | |
| Italian | 25% | 20% | | | |
| Russian | 25% | 20% | | | |
| Japanese | 25% | 25% | | | |
| Music | 50% | 50% | | | |

2 - Here are the list of subjects for which **Project and Course Work** completion deadlines have been extended to Friday 15th May 2020.

- Leaving Certificate Computer Science, Physical Education, Technology, Art, Agricultural Science, Agricultural Economics, History, Geography, Religious Education, Politics and Society, Music, Constructions Studies and Home Economics;
- Junior Cycle Metalwork, Materials Technology Wood, Technology and Religious Education; Visual Art and Environmental and Social Studies.
- Junior Cycle Assessment Tasks in English, Irish, Modern languages, Science and Business Studies.

3 - Here are the dates for the remaining examinations.

- Practical examinations are scheduled for the end of April and early May and the final examinations are scheduled for May and June.
- The timetable from Monday 27th April to Friday 8th May includes practical examinations in Leaving Certificate Art Life Sketching, Engineering, Construction Studies, and Junior Cycle Metalwork.
- Leaving Certificate Applied students have their oral tests and practical performance tests in mid to late May.
- In May there are final examinations which will see these subjects being completed in their entirety before June (LCVP Link Modules on Wednesday 6th; Leaving Certificate Applied ICT on Wednesday 13th; and Leaving Certificate Computer Science on Wednesday 27th May).
- The written examinations are scheduled to start on Wednesday 3rd June.