

****Junior Cycle 2020** Advice to members**

Teachers' Union of Ireland



If you have further questions that are not addressed in this FAQ, or have comments/observations please send them to examqueries@tuimail.ie

Junior Cycle - State Certified Examination

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

By Government decision, the Junior Certificate written examinations have been cancelled and will not proceed this year. This decision was taken by Government upon advice provided by the health authorities.

Initially, teachers were advised that exam papers and marking schemes which had already been prepared by the SEC for the now cancelled written examinations will be given to schools following the re-opening in September. Has this plan changed?

Yes. The TUI considered the ramification of this decision by Government, consulted with members and was strongly of the view that requiring Senior Cycle (TY or 5th year) students to sit examinations designed for Junior Cycle makes no sense, would be regressive educationally and would further and seriously complicate what is likely to be a challenging and constrained process of re-opening schools. It would also be time-consuming, would cause unnecessary stress for students and would unacceptably increase the workload of teachers and school management.

The TUI submitted an alternative proposal to the DES and SEC on 23rd April outlining what we consider would be appropriate for Junior Cycle students. The final agreed arrangements – announced by the Minister for Education and Skills on the 29th April 2020 are in line with the TUI proposal.

Was the decision to change the assessment arrangements made because a very small number of schools went public about alternative assessment arrangements that they were making locally?

No. The TUI and other stakeholders announced on 10th April that alternative assessment arrangements would be part of further discussions and that a national approach would be best to ensure fair and consistent assessment of student achievement.

Any decisions made locally were therefore premature, unfair to students and unfair to teachers. TUI considered it unjust and wrong for individual schools to set out replacement assessment for state certification in the absence of the necessary consultation nationally.

The final agreed alternative assessment arrangements comply with the principles of fairness and equity and follow significant engagement and consultation with all the education partners – this is both right and proper.

The final alternative assessment document – released on 29th April by the Minister for Education and Skills - mirrors the proposal submitted by the TUI on 23rd April and as such is welcomed by the TUI.

Junior Cycle – TUI’s Alternative Proposal – submitted in writing to stakeholders on 23rd April 2020

What did TUI’s alternative assessment proposal state?

The TUI submitted a proposal regarding appropriate arrangements, in writing, to the DES and the other stakeholders attending the national advisory group talks. The TUI proposal stated that our members:

- are committed to maintaining the remote/online provision of service to all students, irrespective of year cohort*
- are engaging with the significant challenges this involves, not least in terms of the substantial additional time required for online delivery*
- have a particular commitment to final year Leaving Certificate (LCA, LC and LCVP) students who are preparing for state examinations*
- have been asked by the Union to engage with the process of school-based engagement for Leaving Certificate students (LC/LCA/LCVP) for a period of two weeks prior to commencement of the Leaving Certificate examinations on 29th July*
- cannot now have imposed on them an additional requirement to set, administer and mark assessments/examinations for third year students to replace the cancelled Junior Certificate examinations.*

- *will not engage with what are characterised as “appeals” whereby students could sit an examination in September, using the (unused) Junior Certificate/Cycle examination papers – or any variant thereof.*

It also recognised that there is an anticipation on the part of students and parents/guardians that a record of a student’s progress would be available at the end of Junior Cycle. The Union outlined, in writing, our willingness to give consideration to provision at school level of a report of progress.

This progress could derive from an evaluation, in respect of each subject, of the student’s completion of assigned work/learning assignments (up to the end of the penultimate week of the term), their level of achievement to date and work that could be undertaken by students during the period of school closure occasioned by the Covid-19 public health emergency.

The TUI also outlined, in our proposal, that there are student cohorts for whom state certification of achievement at Junior Cycle level represents either the final certification opportunity before they leave formal education or, in the case of adult learners, the first such opportunity. The Union was of the view that the SEC should make specific provision for these cohorts.

The assessment arrangements - announced on the 29th April by the Minister for Education and Skills - closely mirror TUI’s proposal.

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Details of Alternative Assessment Arrangements announced by Minister for Education and Skills – Junior Cycle 2020:

State Recognition

Will my Junior Cycle students get any state recognition for completing Junior Cycle?

Yes. In TUI’s submission to the stakeholders, we recognised that there is an anticipation on the part of students and parents/guardians that a record of a student’s progress would be available at the end of Junior Cycle.

Therefore, students will receive a State Certificate of completion of Junior Cycle from the Department of Education and Skills – not the SEC. Students cannot receive certification from the SEC as they are not doing exams set and marked by the SEC.

The State Certificate provided by the Department of Education and Skills will state that the student has completed three years of Junior Cycle education and, as recommended by the TUI, will list all subjects/priority learning units undertaken by students.

When will my Junior Cycle students receive the DES State Certificate?

The certificate will be provided early in the school year 2020/21.

Junior Cycle – School Report

Will my students receive a Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA)?

No. The use of the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) is not appropriate as a reporting and certification mechanism in 2020 and therefore will not issue.

If my students are not getting a JCPA, will they receive anything in addition to the State Certificate from the DES as referred to above?

Yes. Students will receive a written school report on the broad range of learning that they have achieved in each subject, short course and/or priority learning unit at the end of Junior Cycle.

Subject teachers will assess this learning and the assessment will be based on each teacher's professional knowledge of each student's learning.

The report may also detail separately the descriptors awarded to classroom-based assessments (CBAs) and/or priority learning units (PLU).

The report should also provide an opportunity for schools to report on other aspects of achievement including the wellbeing programme completed by students.

Who will decide what is included in the school report?

Each school will adopt a whole-school approach to the assessment and reporting on student achievement, following consultation with the teachers of third-year students to determine the most appropriate method of assessment for the third-year group and relevant subjects.

TUI members should consult with their subject department colleagues to agree the most appropriate assessment in their subject area taking into consideration the cohort of students in their class and in particular, the ability of such students to engage in learning since school buildings closed to students on 12th March. Following this consultation, TUI members should advise school management of the appropriate assessment that will be used in their subject area.

Is there a template for the school report?

Schools may use their own report format. In this regard, the TUI is of the view that a school-devised report should mirror the report normally issued to students upon completion of term/house examinations – nothing more elaborate is required. There is also a reporting template, currently used for second year students available from the NCCA. Members are advised to check the TUI website where the NCCA template is available.

When will students receive the school report?

The school report will issue at the end of the 2019/2020 academic year.

Teacher's Professional Autonomy

What form of assessment can be used for inclusion in the school report?

For each subject, the evidence of learning to be used and any method of assessment chosen should be decided by the relevant subject teachers in the context of the whole-school approach.

Teachers may use a range of evidence to inform their assessment of students such as:

- *Evidence available from assignments, tests, tasks, journals, projects, practical and other work completed over the course of second year and third year*
- *Classroom-Based Assessments completed in second year and third year*
- *School-designed examinations, tasks, projects, assignments, essay style questions, presentations, or other tasks chosen by the teacher from the range of approaches agreed at school level.*

Some students may be unable to undertake any additional assessment tasks because of issues arising from the Covid-19 crisis. In such circumstances, the assessment of the students' learning, and the report of their achievement issued by the school, may be based solely on work completed prior to 12th March 2020.

Is the TUI recommending that teachers set additional assessment in May for Junior Cycle Students?

In line with the assessment and reporting document, the TUI recommends that members ensure, insofar as possible, equal treatment of students in a class. In that regard, TUI is of the view that greater weighting should be given to work that was completed by students in advance of the closure of schools from the 12th March 2020.

Although small assessments/assignments can be set by teachers in May, consideration must be given to the impact that school closure will have had on students' ability to engage with further learning after 12th March 2020. This impact is best determined at school level, by teachers of individual subjects. The level of a student's engagement in remote learning since the 12th March will be known by his/her teachers. The teachers will also be aware of constraints that apply.

Some students may be unable to undertake any additional assessment tasks because of issues arising from the Covid-19 crisis. In such circumstances, the assessment of the students' learning, and the report of their achievement issued by the school, may be based solely on work completed prior to 12th March 2020.

What factors should I take into consideration if I decide to devise an appropriate assessment to be conducted in May?

Teachers know their students best and can balance a variety of factors in arriving at the most suitable form of assessment to put in place for their students.

If teachers decide to undertake additional assessment in May:

- *It must be limited in scope – i.e. it must not be unnecessarily onerous for anybody concerned, student or teacher.*
- *It must take into consideration the fact that although teachers have used a wide range of approaches to mitigate the effects of the closure of school buildings, students have had a disrupted learning experience in 2020.*
- *The assessment format chosen should be accessible to all students in the class. Therefore, the method or format of assessment used (for example, written or electronic format) should take cognisance of students' accessibility to the mode chosen. All students in the class must be treated fairly and equally.*
- *The method or format of assessment used should be inclusive of students with special educational needs (SEN) and provide differentiated approaches to allow students with SEN to access the appropriate assessment mode and be adaptable to their particular context.*

Any assessment that is conducted in May will be marked by the subject teacher.

If the teachers in my subject area agree that we will set an additional assessment/assignment in May when exactly will it take place?

Any additional assessments will be set within a clearly defined timeframe. This timeframe will be agreed by the teachers at school level and should be reviewed at whole-school level to ensure that the timeframes are balanced and achievable.

In all cases, all assessments should be completed and marked before 29th May 2020.

The TUI, in our written submission to stakeholders, specifically stated that sufficient time must be permitted before 29th May to allow teachers to mark work submitted by students.

Am I being asked to grade students in the alternative assessment or award a descriptor?

The school report may include the provision of grades or descriptors. It may also detail separately the descriptors awarded to Classroom-Based Assessments (CBAs) and/or Priority Learning Units (PLU).

The decision of whether to use grades or descriptors should be a whole school approach decided upon following consultation with teachers on what would work best based on the cohort of students in the school.

It is important that a whole school approach is agreed in terms of what grading mechanism will be used across all subjects to ensure consistency and to provide clarity to students and parents/guardians.

Can school management decide what assessments are devised/used for inclusion in the school report?

No. Subject teachers know their students best and will be in the better position to balance a variety of factors in arriving at the most suitable form of assessment to put in place for their cohort of students.

TUI members should consult with their subject department colleagues to devise the most appropriate assessment in their subject area taking into consideration the cohort of students in their class and in particular, the ability of such students to engage in learning since school building closed on 12th March. Following this consultation, TUI members should advise school management of the appropriate assessment that will be used in their subject area.

Can school management dictate what is included in the school report?

No. As stated above, the details to be included in the school report must be decided in consultation with teachers. Teachers know their students best and can make informed decisions based on that knowledge.

What if school management does not allow teacher autonomy in determining what is included in the school report?

The alternative assessment arrangements agreed by all parties and announced by the Minister on 29th April 2020 clearly state that subject teachers will assess their students' learning and that the assessment will be based on each teacher's professional knowledge of this learning.

Management should respect a teacher's professional judgement. Should any issues arise they should be dealt with using normal consultation procedures. If the issue is not satisfactorily resolved the normal industrial relations procedures can be deployed. In this regard, you should inform your local branch as early as possible of any such issues.

Who will advise Junior Cycle students of the assessment arrangements being used by teachers?

A school's Board of Management should communicate with parents/guardians and students in relation to the proposed actions that the school intends to take in relation to the planned end-of-year assessments.

Junior Cycle – Adult Learners

Further to the TUI's recommendation, the SEC will put in place specific arrangements for adult learners who have the flexibility to study a subject or subjects at Junior Cycle level within one academic year.

These arrangements will ensure that these adult learners will be provided with an opportunity to take the final examination in the subject(s) for which they are entered. These examinations will take place in autumn 2020 and the specific timing will be determined as soon as possible.

These examinations will only be available to students who meet the specific qualifying criteria.

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