



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

# Oireachtas Members' Questions: Covid-19

Answers Due: Friday, 17 April 2020

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## 1. Introduction

Earlier this month, Minister McHugh and Minister of State Mitchell O'Connor, supported by senior Department officials led by the Secretary General, provided a briefing to education and skills spokespersons and other representatives of the political parties and groupings on the education and skills sectoral response to the challenges posed by Covid-19. A single briefing document was subsequently provided to each of the Deputies present at that briefing session which covered the issues raised at the session. It has also been published on the Department's website.

The Oireachtas has put in place a new and interim process whereby Covid-19 related queries can be submitted by TDs on a weekly basis and forwarded to Departments for reply in lieu of the Parliamentary Question process which has been temporarily suspended. The Minister's responses to queries received will be presented in a single document for circulation to all Deputies and for publication on the Department's website subsequently.

This document is the first of the weekly response documents prepared under the revised question system. It has been prepared within particular constraints, namely in a context of significantly increased demands, in circumstances where Departmental officials are having to work remotely without access to offices and files and against a background where the Department itself has had to redeploy staff to meet crisis-related pressures in other parts of the public service.

Over seventy questions were received with a small number transferred to the appropriate Minister/Department. Similar and related questions have been grouped for answer to allow this response document to be as concise as possible whilst also addressing each question received. It should also be noted that the deadline for the submission of questions was prior to the Minister's announcement regarding the State Examinations on April 10th.

The Department also maintains a special page on its website for updates on matters related to Covid-19: <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Announcements/information-for-schools-preschools-and-third-level-institutions-on-the-coronavirus.html>

All major announcements are also available on the Department's website in the "What's New" section on the Department's homepage (when issued) and also in the Press release section of the website for older items.

## 2. State Examinations Questions

### 2.1. Arrangements for State Exams

No.	Question	TD
156	To ask the Minister to outline his plans for the 2020 Leaving Certificate Examinations and the 2020 Junior Certificate Examinations	Dara Calleary
185	<p>... with regard to a number of queries received from concerned leaving cert students, ... Students need confirmation of whether the Leaving certificate is going ahead this year and if so, when?</p> <p>Some feel they are not best prepared and are worried given how important the exam is. If the Leaving Certificate does go ahead, will there be any change to the CAO college placement process.</p> <p>I appreciate the department is very busy as present but students not knowing where they stand is causing great anxiety.</p>	Robert Troy
623	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills when he proposes to finalise details for the holding of the 2020 Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Brendan Smith
688	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the arrangements in place to enable students to sit the Leaving Certificate examinations; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Catherine Connolly
698	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what contingency plans are in place in order for leaving certificate exams to take place and what effects this will have on students attending college, and if he will make a statement on the matter?	Roisin Shortall
736	To ask the Minister for Education, if he will provide clarity regarding when and how State examinations will take place this year and if he has been in contact with Irish Second-Level Student Union which launched a Campaign for Clarity, to urge the Department of Education not only provide information on how the Junior and Leaving Certificate will run, but also to include student voice in the making of these contingency plans; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Jennifer Whitmore
754	To ask the Minister for Education to provide immediate clarity on the Leaving Certificate.	Mattie McGrath

No.	Question	TD
823	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills when it is hoped to make a final decision on the holding of the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations this year due to Covid-19; whether consideration is been given to defer the dates of the exams to a later date; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Éamon Ó Cuív
905	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the contingency plans for the Leaving and Junior Certificate.	Mary Lou Mc Donald, Paul Donnelly, Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
925	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills has he developed a contingency Plan in the event that the NPHEC decides that the leaving cert cannot proceed in June and to outline what this plan would entail?	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
926	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills in the event that the leaving cert proceeds as planned in June; will the Minister outline how this will be delivered; how many venues will be needed; how many invigilators will be required; what changes will be made to usual procedures; what the time scale for marking will be; how social distancing will be established; how students who are meant to cocoon will manage to undertake exams and how scribes and assistants will be able to operate within social distancing.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
928	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what contingencies are being put in place in the event that the Junior Certificate will be suspended / cancelled	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 2.1.1. Response

I announced on Friday last (April 10<sup>th</sup>) a series of changes to the 2020 State Examinations as part of measures to respond to Covid-19, including postponement of the Leaving Certificate written examinations. The decisions were taken based on updated advice from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHEC).

More than 61,000 students are expected to sit the Leaving Certificate or Leaving Certificate Applied in 2020 which includes 44,396 students sitting the established Leaving Certificate and 13,668 for the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme and 2,999 sitting the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Leaving Certificate oral language and some Leaving Certificate and Junior Cycle practical performance examinations had been scheduled to take place between 23 March and 3 April. These were cancelled and candidates awarded 100% for these components.

Plans are being put in place for the postponed written Leaving Certificate examinations to begin in the last week of July or early August, subject to public health advice.

The 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 in September.

The postponement of the written Leaving Certificate examinations from June also require that practical examinations for Leaving Certificate students which were due to have been held in May are deferred. They have been rescheduled for late July/early August.

The revised Leaving Certificate exam timetable will be confirmed in early June.

The final arrangements for the exams, the exam centres, social distancing and other measures will be determined by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) on foot of public health advice in June. The postponement of the examinations is considered the fairest way of assessing students and giving them a certification of achievement in school and a pathway to higher and further education and training, apprenticeship or work.

I am very conscious of the need to ensure that students with special educational needs will be fully supported in sitting the rescheduled Leaving Certificate examinations in line with the reasonable accommodations available to them. The Department's Planning and Building Unit is also examining exams centres to ensure that there are no scheduled building works during the proposed exam period.

It is my intention to allow at least two weeks of class time, in school, before the Leaving Certificate examinations begin.

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.

I want to acknowledge the positive engagement with student bodies, unions, management bodies, the further education and training and higher education sectors on all of these issues. This engagement has continued this week to advance the planning for the revised arrangements.

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.

My 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.

## 2.2. Impact on Admissions to Tertiary Courses

No.	Question	TD
148	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he has considered compensating measures for those Leaving Certificate students that are not taking language subjects to ensure fairness in	Mick Barry

No.	Question	TD
	relation to CAO points; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	
904	To ask the Minister Education and Skills to outline what impacts are possible on college courses and this years CAO points system due to the decision to award all current leaving Certificate students 100% in this years oral examinations and if any appeal mechanisms will be put in place	Thomas Gould
916	To ask the Minster for Education and Skills in the instance that the leaving cert is postponed; what the implications of this will be for 3rd level admissions and what provisions are being made for this (given all states in a similar position medically) by international universities, and under the UCAS system.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 2.2.1. Response

On 19<sup>th</sup> March the Minister announced that the Leaving Certificate oral language examinations that had been scheduled to take place between 23<sup>rd</sup> March and 3<sup>rd</sup> April would be cancelled and candidates awarded 100% for these components. This was considered the best and fairest decision that could be taken at that time. In deciding to award full marks for the oral component of the Leaving Certificate language subjects, it was noted that students taking these subjects in general perform very well in the oral component. Consequently, it is not anticipated that any inflation in overall marks for language subjects and therefore in CAO awarded points will significantly impact on the points necessary for students to secure third level places through the CAO system for the coming year

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. The Department is also engaging with the UK authorities on admission of Irish students to universities in Northern Ireland and Britain.

## 2.3. Exam Fees

No.	Question	TD
927	To ask the Minster for Education and Skills will the Minister consider deferring the charging of fees for the Junior Cert and the Leaving Cert during this period and in light of the financial difficulties facing families at present.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### **2.3.1. Response**

Given that the Junior Cycle final examinations due to take place in June will be replaced by later school-based examinations and assessments, fees for Junior Cycle examinations will not now be charged by the State Examinations Commission (SEC). Fees already paid in respect of those examinations will be refunded by the SEC



## 3. Schools Sector Questions

### 3.1. Capital Programme

No.	Question	TD
919	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what measures he has put in place with regard to School Buildings and planning; if the Department is monitoring the impact on school construction and also planning applications pending for new schools and if he is engaging with the Housing Minister during this period to ensure school building projects are not adversely affected.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

#### 3.1.1. Response

In line with National Public Health announcements by Government, all construction sites in relation to the Education Sector are now temporarily closed. The impacts around the closure of these sites are currently being assessed.

A sustainable and flexible construction sector is crucial to the delivery of Project Ireland 2040 and the continued contribution of public investment to our economic well-being. The Office of Government Procurement has published central guidance for managing the impact of Covid-19 on construction projects and construction procurement arrangements. This guidance provides a framework for dealing with the impact across the public sector including in respect of the school building programme. Individual schools and Design Teams are being informed accordingly and my Department is providing additional support through its responses to queries etc.

While construction sites are currently closed, the pipeline of projects in design continues to be progressed albeit in an online and remote working environment. The progression of this pipeline will help smooth the impact of Covid-19 on the overall rollout of Project Ireland 2040 within the education sector.

My Department is also engaging with School Patrons and relevant schools in relation to necessary school accommodation provision for the 2020/21 school year in light of any impact of COVID-19 on project delivery timescales and develop and implement contingency arrangements as required.

The Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government has provided flexibility to local authorities to extend time periods for the operation of the planning process. Officials from my Department have ongoing engagement with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the Local Authorities in relation to housing, development plans and planning applications for schools. This engagement helps to ensure that planning applications for schools are progressed as quickly as possible during this time.

## 3.2. Special Educational Needs Provision

No.	Question	TD
902	To ask the minister for Education and skills to outline any proposed or potential changes or extension to the July Education provision for children on the Autism Spectrum.	Sorca Clarke
907	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if Home School Tutors will continue to be paid during the Coronavirus whether they have been provided the facility of distance learning or not.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
920	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if additional supports have been considered and put in place for parents of children who in normal times attend SEN units and special schools and who are under enormous pressure at present with no respite available.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 3.2.1. Response

Since the announcement that schools would close and the extension of that closure, the Department has written to school management and asked schools to put in place arrangements to continue the delivery of education to students. A series of guidance notes to support schools in how to effectively support and engage with their students are being developed for schools to support continuity of learning in the current circumstances.

The next iteration will focus on matters relating to disadvantage and children with special educational needs. The cross-departmental SEN Oversight Working Group has discussed the guidance notes and engagement with the teacher unions in relation to these is underway.

The Department intends to run the extended school year (ESY) scheme – also known as the July Provision Scheme – this year if possible given the current school closures. The Department, in conjunction with the public health authorities, will keep the situation under ongoing review. The Department is considering contingency measures, including changes to the format of the scheme, should it prove necessary to delay the start of the scheme. Any changes will be communicated widely.

A collaborative effort, involving the Department, management bodies and other partners is underway to develop further support and advice and this will be made available on an ongoing basis.

Approximately 1,500 families are currently in receipt of funding for the provision of Home Tuition under the Departments Home Tuition Grant Schemes. Under the schemes parents use the grant to engage tutors / private providers to deliver tuition. Funding for the provision of Home Tuition will continue to be provided for the duration of the pandemic emergency where tuition is delivered by distance learning. The Department is making information and training available to all tutors and private providers to assist them in providing tuition through distance learning.

Where Home Tuition cannot continue via distance learning or where a parent wishes to cease Home Tuition for the duration of the pandemic emergency, s/he must inform the Department by email to [special\\_education@education.gov.ie](mailto:special_education@education.gov.ie). Parents can apply to the Department to use the hours sanctioned for this period to provide tuition later in the year. In such circumstances, the Department will accept that some of the hours may be delivered outside of the normal school day and/or on a Saturday if necessary. To provide for the Tutors involved, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection have a range of measures to provide income support to people affected by COVID-19 (Coronavirus). Full information on Home Tuition situation available on [www.education.ie/covid19](http://www.education.ie/covid19),

The National Council for Special Education has developed resources for parents of children with additional needs who may benefit from specific advice during the period of school closure. Other resources are being developed including online supports for teachers of children with special educational needs. All resources will be on the NCSE website and publicised through education partners and Twitter. The NCSE visiting teacher service continues to provide direct telephone/skype support to families and students.

The NCSE resources can be accessed at: <https://ncse.ie/online-resources> and include resources for parents and teachers such as class\age level activities; practical advice on how to take care of Assistive Technology in the Home and a suite of Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy resources (including a social story animation on attending a Covid-19 test Centre prepared by the HSE).

The Middletown Centre for Autism has developed a range of online resources for children and young people with Autism and their parents on education provision in the Home. The centre is hosting twice weekly webinars with in house and international speakers and issuing tips via social media on helping children and young people manage during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Resources can be accessed at: <https://www.middletownautism.com>

### 3.3. School Transport

No.	Question	TD
268	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills the reason why his department reduced its payments to self-employed contractors providing transport on behalf of Bus Éireann to 50% as a result of the Covid-19 crisis; if he has any plans to review the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Michael McGrath
654	In light of the substantial time which schools will be closed. Have the Department considered a rebate or credit system on the purchase of school bus tickets taking into account the period where no buses travelled.	Robert Troy
906	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the payments schedule for private school bus operators during the coronavirus crisis following a cut on the 29th March to 50% of their normal payments and will this continue for the duration of the crisis?	Paul Donnelly

No.	Question	TD
924	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills will the remote areas grant continue to be paid to parents during this time?	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 3.3.1. Response

The decision taken by the Government to close schools with effect from 13<sup>th</sup> March 2020 was taken in the interest of protecting our pupils, their families, teachers and the wider community and is one of the many measures taken to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19.

Following the initial announcement that schools would be closed from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> March to support efforts to contain the spread of Covid-19, and in light of the exceptional circumstances, it was agreed that contractors would be paid at the normal rate for the period up to 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

It was decided that a payment of 50% would be afforded for the week commencing Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March until Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020. Thereafter, the normal arrangements apply for the period of scheduled school closures associated with the Easter Holidays (6<sup>th</sup> April – 17<sup>th</sup> April inclusive).

In light of the most recent announcement that schools will remain closed until further notice it has been decided a payment of 50% will be afforded for the week commencing Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April until Friday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020. This is in line with previous arrangements relating to unscheduled school closures.

All arrangements will be subject to review after the 24<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

The situation relating to refunds of tickets will be kept under review pending decisions on the re-opening of schools and at which time the full impact of closures in the current school year will be known.

In regard to the remote area grant, it is paid to families towards the cost of school transport arrangements where they are eligible for transport but where there is no service. Payment is made on receipt of a statement of attendance form signed by the school confirming the number of days attended in the relevant school year. In light of the fact that schools are currently closed and families are not currently incurring a cost, and in line with normal practice, grant aid is not paid for the current closure period.

## 3.4. School Meals

No.	Question	TD
390	To ask the Minister for Education to issue a circular to all school principals to ensure that school meal parcels for vulnerable children are only issued and posted to the homes of the most needy children in their schools during the COVID19 outbreak as An Post have been overwhelmed in Co. Sligo recently due to the high levels of parcels, and as a result the most vulnerable	Frank Feighan

No.	Question	TD
	children may go without these school parcels in the future, if he can also look onto the fact that couriers are passing the job of delivering these food parcels to an post as they said they would distribute them for free. (Details supplied)	
703	To ask the Minister for Education and the Minister for Employer Affairs and Social Protection to outline the arrangements for the distribution of food parcels to families of children who receive school meals, especially in the case of DEIS schools which have large numbers of children in this category and will he make a statement on the matter.	Roisin Shortall
900	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the supports being put in place to ensure that the School Completion Programme and in particular the School Meals Programme is kept up amidst the COVID-19 restrictions; if they have had any issues raised with them by An Post in the delivery of school meals; and should An Post be unable to deliver meals in certain areas, the alternative arrangements being put in place.	Sean Crowe

### 3.4.1. Response

The Government has issued schools with updated guidance to help them operate the School Meals Programme amid the extended Covid-19 restrictions. In addition, schools are allowed to maintain the service during the Easter holidays should they wish to do so. Tusla Education Support Service staff are liaising with Principals to ensure that children/families in need of the School Meals Programme are identified and supported.

Schools have been asked to arrange a weekly pack of provisions which can be delivered to pupils. Schools have been provided with details of how to link into local community support networks and An Post have agreed to facilitate delivery of non-perishable food packets.

The Government's decision on school meals was announced on Thursday March 26<sup>th</sup> and detailed guidelines are available on my Department's website.

The School Meals Programme is under the remit of my colleague Regina Doherty's Department, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) and it provides funding towards provision of food services for disadvantaged school children through two schemes. In general, schools are funded to provide school meals and the sourcing of a provider for these meals is arranged by the schools. There are a variety of school meals providers throughout the country. There are a small number of main suppliers who supply significant numbers of schools, and also some smaller locally based providers.

The type and range of meals provided, as well as the method and logistics of supplying the meals, are decided by the individual local groups and schools that operate the projects.

The current initiative is school led. Schools have been asked to identify those most in need and to contact parents to ask if they wished to avail of the service during the school closure period.

The Department is aware of issues which arose last week in relation to capacity at some An Post offices where there were bulk deliveries by food suppliers for delivery via An Post. Due to local demand it may not be possible for An Post to meet all of the demand in some areas. The Department of Education and Skills is working with An Post to put in place a pre-booking system. Schools have been notified of alternative options available and are encouraged to use these where possible. Some schools have availed of support available via TUSLA Education Support (School Completion Programme and Home School Community Liaison co-ordinators) and others have availed of delivery arrangements via the local community and voluntary networks. An Post will continue to provide assistance directly to schools on a complimentary basis during the current crisis, within agreed limits, to supplement these arrangements where needed.

### 3.5. Access to school buildings by teachers

No.	Question	TD
914	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if guidance be provided regarding access of teachers to schools; Some teachers for EG art teachers have found it difficult to get access, which is frustrating to them, in terms of projects and guidance. What should the position be?	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

#### 3.5.1. Response

Under the public health measures all schools will be closed to staff until at least May 5<sup>th</sup> except in special limited circumstances. In accordance with public health measures, everyone is urged to stay at home for the period up to May 5<sup>th</sup>. An exception is in place for the schools in the School Meals Programme. This essential service can continue.

The Department has published circular 24/2020 requesting schools to prioritise the continuity of teaching and learning for all students, and to ensure that teachers are providing ongoing support in this area. As a follow on to this circular and in collaboration with the education partners, the Department has also published guidance on the continuity of schooling for all schools which aims to support the learning and wellbeing of students while out of the school environment.

Schools will endeavour to limit the impact of school closures by providing learners with access to support, classwork and feedback. Schools are also advised to ensure that arrangements are also in place where access to digital platforms are not possible because of poor connectivity in some areas or lack of digital devices.

The Department is working closely with the education partners and work is ongoing in developing further guidance for schools and parents during this challenging time. Guidance will also be provided by the State Examinations Commission in respects of projects and practical work due for examinations.

### 3.6. Construction Studies

No.	Question	TD
915	What advice is being provided to construction studies teachers currently – given this is a particularly practical and project based subject with limited written aspects.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

#### 3.6.1. Response

The response provided at 3.5 above is also relevant to this question. The postponement of the written Leaving Certificate examinations from June also require that practical examinations for Leaving Certificate students which were due to have been held in May are deferred.

A range of subjects involve project and course work elements – Computer Science, PE Performance, Technology, Art, Agricultural Science, Agricultural Economics, History, Geography, RE, Politics and Society, Music Composition, Construction Studies and Home Economics (Textiles). The deadline for submission of work will now be immediately prior to the commencement of the written examinations in the late July/August period.

A number of practical examinations, supervised by school appointed superintendents and scheduled for 27 April to 8 May in Engineering, Art Life Sketching and Construction Studies and a practical and written examination in Computer Science scheduled for 27 May will now take place in the late July/August period.

The revised Leaving Certificate exam timetable will be confirmed in early June.

### 3.7. Staff Issues

No.	Question	TD
910	To ask the Minster for Education and Skills regarding the redeployment of SNAs; can TDs get a briefing on what exactly is entailed in this proposal; I have been contacted by some who have not heard anything; Will childcare be provided for SNAs with children at home; Will it be remote work such as contact tracing or will it be entirely with families/children with special needs or will they be working with adults.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
912	To ask the Minster for Education and Skills if teachers who have sought to cancel parental leave are being prevented from so doing, despite the fact that the situation has changed radically, and a family may now be down an income, and be reliant on social welfare to sustain the household for that period. Can this be revised?	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

No.	Question	TD
917	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what consideration is being given to flexible arrangements for teachers to sign forms for workers paid under the ancillary grant and who will be responsible for signing them over the Easter fortnight.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 3.7.1. Cancelling of Parental Leave Response

Three recently-issued circulars (see below) address inter alia, the issue of cancellation of leave. All three circulars specify the following:

“The rules regarding cancellation of leave (e.g. Parental Leave) must be in accordance with the terms and conditions of the relevant Department publications.”

The provisions of the parental leave scheme are set out in Chapter 5, Section 12 of Circular 54/2019 (see below). The section sets out the conditions for suspension/postponement of parental leave by the teacher. Teachers are required to apply for parental leave at least 6 weeks prior to the planned commencement date. A teacher may revoke this application at any point prior to the signing of the confirmation document which is due to be completed 4 weeks prior to commencement date.

The conditions in which an employer can postpone parental leave are set out in Chapter 5, Section 13. Ordinarily, this relates to where the granting of leave would have an adverse effect on the operation of the school. Parental leave may be terminated by the employer if there are grounds to believe that the leave is being used for a purpose other than the care of the child.

#### Relevant circulars

Covid-19 Delay Phase: The cancellation of leave is addressed in the above circulars in sections 9, 11 and 11, respectively:

- 24/2020 – Arrangements for teachers and SNAs employed in recognised primary and post-primary schools: [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0024\\_2020.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0024_2020.pdf)
- 25/2020 – Arrangements for staff other than teachers/SNAs employed by ETBs: [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0025\\_2020.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0025_2020.pdf)
- 26/2020 – Arrangements for all public service employees: [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0026\\_2020.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0026_2020.pdf)

Leave schemes:

- 54/2019 – Leave schemes for registered teachers employed in recognised primary and post-primary schools: [https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0054\\_2019.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0054_2019.pdf)

### 3.7.2. Redeployment of SNAs Response

The Minister announced on April 1st a contingency plan for all Special Needs Assistants to be available for a new temporary assignment scheme as part of the Government's response to



Covid-19. However, it should be noted that the reassignment of other staff is also the subject of the circulars which have issued (see below links).

Two circulars detailing the main points of the possible temporary assignment arrangements are available on the Department's website as follows:

- 1) To Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary, Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and the Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

Circular 0027/2020: Temporary assignment arrangements for certain staff in the education and training sector:

[https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0027\\_2020.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0027_2020.pdf)

- 2) To The Higher Education Authority for dissemination to all Institutes of Technology, Technological University Dublin, the National University of Ireland, the Royal Irish Academy, Mary Immaculate College of Education, the National College of Art and Design and St. Angela's College

Circular 0028/2020: Temporary assignment arrangements for certain staff:

[https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0028\\_2020.pdf](https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0028_2020.pdf)

The Department has previously confirmed that we have agreed with the HSE that the arrangements are designed to facilitate the assignment of SNAs where required into community services for children with a disability and we have also indicated that SNAs may be asked to provide remote supports to families of children they are familiar with. This position is clearly set out in all documentation that has issued from this Department. The Department and the HSE are continuing to work with Forsa to provide further clarity on the roles to which SNAs will be assigned in order to address concerns.

The position is that all public servants who are not medically advised to self-isolate must be available to carry out work either to deliver services in their current post (as a priority) or for temporary assignment within the wider public sector. Where an SNA is in an At-Risk Group, the current advice is that employees in an At Risk Group should not leave their homes to travel to work with the exception of essential workers, until the May 5th. In respect of that group, and of SNAs with caring responsibilities, there may be potential for flexible hours and remote working, depending on the requirements of the role in question, and the availability of technical resources. The HSE will discuss this with the SNA in advance of their assignment.

If an SNA is already working with a family, they are still available for temporary assignment. This is to ensure an integrated approach to working with children with disabilities and their families, through the HSE.

### **3.7.3. Salaries paid from the Ancillary Grant Response**

The Department has committed to continuing the payment of grant funding as normal for the current period of school closure up to 19 April. A school's normal arrangements with regard to ancillary staff should accordingly apply until that date. Through the continuation of grant funding, DES has enabled schools to continue the normal arrangements for staff whose salary comes from Department grants, in the same way as if the school was open.

## 3.8. Deep Cleaning of Schools

No.	Question	TD
918	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he considers that now would be an opportune time to deep clean schools in advance of them returning and if he will allocate resources for same.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 3.8.1. Response

The decision to effect a deep clean of a school is a matter for the Board of Management of a school. It would be expected that a school would have regard to public health advice in taking a decision to have a school deep cleaned. Public health guidance is that the Covid-19 virus is not expected to survive for periods beyond 72 hours on surfaces, and shorter periods depending on the surface type (see below for a link to the Health Protection Surveillance Centre FAQs).

Health Protection Surveillance Centre FAQs here: [https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/frequentlyaskedquestions/FAQs\\_COVID19\\_v12.8.pdf](https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/frequentlyaskedquestions/FAQs_COVID19_v12.8.pdf)

Given the length of time schools have been closed the need for a deep clean can be considered in this context and the circumstances pertaining to a given school community.

## 3.9. School Tours

No.	Question	TD
465	To ask the Minister for Education if he has any plans to assist schools, parents, teachers and students as a result of the cancellation of educational school tours; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Catherine Martin

### 3.9.1. Response

Whilst it is acknowledged that significant numbers of schools organise both overseas trips for students as well as field and day trips within Ireland, the organisation of these trips is a matter for the school concerned. Funding is not provided by the Department for school trips. Schools are advised to consult with tour operators and organisers in relation such matters as refunds, re-arranged trips or insurance cover. The conduct of any such trips or tours at this time must have regard to the current public health advice in Ireland and also in any country to which any future proposed visit is contemplated with further advice also available on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website.

## 4. Vulnerable Persons\Disadvantage Questions

### 4.1. Educational disadvantage

No.	Question	TD
921	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills being conscious of the impact on children in family hubs, emergency accommodation and Direct Provision, which as a congregated settings or out of family homes settings is a very difficult environment, what measures he has taken during Coronavirus to minimise educational disadvantage.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

#### 4.1.1. Response

Since the announcement that schools would close and the extension of that closure, the Department has written to school management and asked schools to put in place arrangements to continue the delivery of education to students. A series of guidance notes to support schools in how to effectively support and engage with their students continues to be compiled to address challenges in providing programmes of continued learning in the current context.

The guidelines aim to address parental feedback about a lack of engagement by some schools, especially at primary level. The next iteration will focus on matters relating to disadvantage and children with special educational needs and are expected to issue imminently.

The Department has also worked with the National Parents Council - Primary on a survey of parents to ascertain their views on school closures. The survey includes a focus on wellbeing.

The nature of that work has primarily shifted to a model based on digital and remote teaching. The Department is aware of many schools that have used e-platforms to enable their teachers to provide work to students, particularly to students in examination classes, and to enable students to complete tasks and tests for assessment.

Resources to support this have been provided by the Department support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), covering distance learning at <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning> and providing access to extensive educational resources including Worldbooks, at [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie).

The PDST and the Teaching Council are also hosting a series of live webinars for school leaders, teachers, parents and students which commenced on 31st March with 1,000 participants, addressing their experiences and concerns at this time. Through live panels and live links, participants are engaging in conversations about the realities currently being faced as well as highlighting the major effort being made to maintain continuity in learning for

students. Subsequent webinars will be informed in response to emerging developments and the needs of the education community.

RTE has developed the RTE Home School Hub, which is an additional support for parents and primary school pupils. Pupils are able to watch, download and engage with curriculum-based content, project work, and fun activities to keep them entertained and learning. The presenters are bilingually qualified teachers, identified and engaged by RTE, and many aspects of the programme are delivered in both English and Irish. This broadcast is a supplement to the ongoing learning being provided by teachers.

The Department is also supporting a pilot initiative, under which Cisco and IBM are providing support directly to schools to operate the *WebEx* platform. This facilitates schools, with no alternative capability, with a collaborative platform to enable them engage with their students and staff.

The Schools Broadband Programme, whereby all schools are provided with broadband, remains fully operational, supported by a Schools Broadband Helpdesk. This service includes webhosting for those schools who are updating their websites with relevant information, and remote access for staff to school servers if required. Guidance information on relevant technologies can also be found on the PDST Technology in Education website.

Officials in this Department are also liaising with DCCA to engage on the issues of barriers to connectivity impacting access to remote learning across all parts of the education and training system.

NEPS has also developed a podcast to guide young people through some relaxation exercises at this time and this is available through the Department's website and at: <https://soundcloud.com/user-719669409/relaxation-techniques-30-03-2020>

The Minister is very conscious of the need to ensure that students with special educational needs will be fully supported in sitting the rescheduled Leaving Certificate examinations in line with the reasonable accommodations available to them. It is also the Minister's intention to allow at least two weeks of class time, in school, before the Leaving Certificate examinations begin.

A collaborative effort, involving the Department, management bodies and other partners is underway to develop further support and advice and this will be made available on an ongoing basis.

This support and advice will also include a specific focus on supporting children at risk of educational disadvantage. In addition, building on the cooperative engagement on school meals provision, my Department is working with DCYA and the Tusla Education Support Service to ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are adequately supported and work on exploring innovative initiatives which can assist is underway.

## 5. Tertiary Sector Questions

### 5.1. Accommodation

No.	Question	TD
598	Due to Covid-19 our 3rd level institutions have closed down, this has resulted in the majority of students going home leaving their student accommodation. While I acknowledge SOME accommodation have refunded students for the time they will not be using the accommodation, there is MANY places that have point blank refused to refund students. This simply is not good enough and involves an awful lot of money for so many families. Can you please intervene in this matter, thank you	Michael Healy-Rae
662	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills if they will consider making a public statement regarding payments made for student accommodation where the students have been forced to leave the accommodation due to Covid-19 and payments had been made up to May/June given the pressure parents are under; and if he will make a statement on the matter	Claire Kerrane
759	To ask the minister for education what supports are being put in place to support students and their families who are paying rent on student accommodation which they have vacated. Some colleges are providing refunds but where a refund is not being provided and students and their families are struggling or are seeking a refund, what supports are being put in place to support these students.	Mattie McGrath
780	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the measures he and his Department are taking to ensure third level students receive refunds for student accommodation costs incurred for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Rose Conway-Walsh
860	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills, if in light of the fact that the majority of Third Level colleges have refunded pro-rata accommodation fees to students, which were paid up front for University owned accommodation, but some are still refusing to do so even though students have been unable to attend college due to the current COVID-19 restrictions, can the Minister indicate what action, if any, the Department will take to ensure the return of these accommodation fees. Details Supplied.	Marian Harkin
898	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the measures he and his Department are taking to ensure third level students receive refunds for student accommodation costs	Darren O'Rourke

No.	Question	TD
	incurred for the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	
901	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to outline what steps he and his department are taking to ensure that 3rd level students are refunded for accommodation costs from when the institution closed for physical student attendance	Sorca Clarke
908	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if the Department have a view with regards to ensuring deposits and rent are refunded for accommodation that students are no longer using and has he engaged with Universities and Institutes of Technology to resolve this issue.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
909	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills has the Department engaged with the Universities regarding the financial impact of accommodation being underutilised, particularly in the context of language schools over the summer a key source of income.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
157	To ask the Minister what actions he has taken in relation to Third Level colleges where on campus accommodation costs have not been refunded to students or their guardians in spite of them not been able to use the accommodation owing to the Corona 19 restrictions	Dara Calleary
262	In relation to student accommodation fees. Can you state if there are plans for students to be reimbursed for rent already paid to colleges / landlords ?	Duncan Smith
271	I am emailing with regard to a couple of queries I have received from Third level Students regarding rent. I have a student , renting privately , has paid up until end of May. She has not been in the accommodation since the colleges closed on March 10th. Where does she stand with regard to a possible refund. Similarly I have a been contacted by a student who has paid up rent til end of May in student only accommodation in Gort an Corrib in Galway. How does she go about getting refunded for the time from when the colleges closed to end to the end of the college year in May.	Robert Troy
429	To ask the Minister of State for Higher Education what measures she is putting in place to protect students in digs accommodation and to provide support if necessary to ensure deposits are returned for students who are no longer living in their private rental or purpose-built student accommodation due to Covid-19; and if she will make a statement on the matter.	Catherine Martin

No.	Question	TD
463	To ask the Minister of State for Higher Education the measures being taken to ensure that all universities and third-level institutions offer refunds for students who have had to move out of their Purpose Built Student Accommodation due to Covid-19, given that all such educational institutions are closed under current government guidelines, and an educational institution (details supplied) is refusing to offer students who are no longer using the accommodation partial refunds; and if she will make a statement on the matter.	Catherine Martin

### 5.1.1. Response

The majority of students in Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) have now vacated their accommodation. A limited number of students have opted to stay due to circumstances such as vulnerable family members in the family home, difficulties to return to their home countries, or ongoing medical placements. The universities have confirmed that these students will be able to remain in their accommodation. My Department is working closely with the higher and further education and training providers to estimate and assess the financial impact of COVID 19 on the sector.

As of March 31<sup>st</sup>, 6 of the 7 universities (TCD, DCU, UCD, NUIG, UCC and MU) who own student accommodation have confirmed that students who have vacated their accommodation will receive pro-rata refunds of their accommodation fees. UL has informed students that they can claim back their deposit, but that their accommodation fees will not be refunded. The Department has engaged with UL on this issue to ask that it reconsiders its approach.

A number of reports have been received of private owners of PBSA refusing to refund accommodation fees in cases where students have vacated their accommodation. The Minister has indicated that he would like to see private providers of student accommodation provide pro-rata refunds.

At the moment, private PBSA also remains open for students, and therefore refund and cancellation policies are governed by the licences or contracts signed by the students. In the first instance students should engage with their accommodation provider to see if an arrangement can be reached in regard to a refund. If this is not possible, under the Residential Tenancies (Amendment) Act 2019 students have access to the Dispute Resolution Services of the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB).

## 5.2. Tertiary Level Assessment 'No Detriment Policy'

No.	Question	TD
5	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills whether he will consider implementing a 'no detriment' policy for third-level courses for the current academic year, where provided that students qualify to progress/graduate based on their marks obtained this year, then the third-level institution will ensure that students' final academic year average is the same as, or higher	Catherine Martin

No.	Question	TD
	<p>than, the average they have attained up to a specified point when the Covid-19 crisis began affecting the operational running of those third-level institutions; and if he will make a statement on the matter.</p>	
114	<p>To ask the Minister for Education if he will consider supporting the “No Detriment” campaign across universities to ensure that students will not be disadvantaged as a result of the Covid19 crisis and to make a statement on the matter.</p>	Richard Boyd Barrett
287	<p>To ask the Minister for Education whether the government will implement the ‘no detriment’ policy for all students across all university campuses to ensure clarity for students during this stressful time?</p>	Paul Murphy
448	<p>We are looking for a No detriment policy for third level students for this year’s semester exams, ... however for many third level students , the disruption to their study habits has been enormous. Many have had to return home to their families, and with all the family confined to being at home, they have limited quiet space for study, unreliable wifi or substandard laptops, which puts them at a significant disadvantage.</p> <p>In these unprecedented times, where students are experiencing high levels of stress and challenges such as not being able to avail of face to face learning, no university resources, and in many cases unsuitable study environment at home, I am calling on Universities, Institutes of Technology and third level colleges to introduce a No Detriment Policy to ease the pressure on students.</p>	Michael Collins
597	<p>In relation to a campaign by 3rd Level Students, a “No Detriment Policy”, can you confirm that due to the interruption of Covid-19 in our 3rd Level System that this policy will be put in place when or if 3rd level exams are taking place. This has been done in the UK and should be followed here also.</p>	Michael Healy-Rae
690	<p>Students across the country have launched petitions in their respective universities, calling on action to help safeguard their GPAs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Across campuses including TCD, UCD, UCC, DCU, NUIM, TUD and UL, the signatories for these petitions is now over 26,000.</p> <p>A ‘no detriment’ policy ensures that students’ academic performance is not unfairly affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The policy means that a student’s final grade will not fall below the average grade a student was receiving prior to the pandemic.</p>	Paul Murphy



No.	Question	TD
	This has already been implemented in some universities in Britain. ...	
	It is also clear that the pandemic is causing adverse mental health issues for many. Students now have to deal with the typical exam stress, on top of uncertainty about their rental arrangements, the health of their families and the impending economic crisis.	
	Introducing the 'no detriment' policy is a vital step in alleviating some of this strain on the future workforce.	
737	To ask the Minister for Higher Education, if she will commit to the 'No Detriment' demand by third level students and ensure that students' grades do not suffer as a result of disruption to education linked to the coronavirus pandemic; and if she will make a statement on the matter.	Jennifer Whitmore
758	To ask the Minister for Education if he plans to implement the No Detriment Policy for Third Level Students?	Mattie McGrath
903	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if engagement has taken place with 3rd Level Students bodies to support their calls for a "No Detriment" policy in relation to the impact Covid19 on their studies.	Sorca Clarke, Mary Lou Mc Donald, Donnchadh Ó Laoighaire
911	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if Post Leaving Certificate Courses are putting in place alternative arrangements for exams?	Donnchadh Ó Laoighaire

### 5.2.1. Response

Further and higher education institutions will not be holding written, oral or practical assessments in examination centres during the Covid-19 emergency. This was announced on April 8<sup>th</sup> by the Minister for Higher Education. Universities and colleges have finalised alternative assessment arrangements, with options including online exams, written assignments or rescheduling. The new assessment arrangements have been communicated to all their students.

The alternative arrangements have been put in place in a manner that ensures quality standards will be upheld giving confidence that qualifications achieved this year will be valued and regarded exactly as in any other year. Institutions will be ensuring that students suffer no academic disadvantage, with flexible arrangements in relation to exam formats, marking and re-sits. Students who are not able to participate in alternative assessment arrangements will not be penalised. They will have opportunities to complete their studies at a later point in time.

The development of the alternative assessment methods was a collaborative effort involving the Irish Universities Association (IUA), the Technological Higher Education Association (THEA), Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), Aontas, Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and our other sectoral stakeholders.

Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), will continue to provide guidance to all its education and training partners on both the immediate and longer-term impact of this current crisis. A guidance document to provide clarity and assurance about assessments and exams has been published by Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the national body responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in higher education and further education and training. It sets out:

- No written, oral or practical assessments in higher or further education will be physically held in an examination or test centre until the Covid-19 restrictions have been lifted.
- Alternative arrangements for assessment will be made where at all possible, including online exams or rescheduling.
- While the education and training of all students is continuing, students expecting to graduate this year are a top priority.
- While some students will not be able to complete their programme or graduate in the timescale originally expected, as many as possible will graduate this year as planned.
- Students who are not able to participate in alternative assessment arrangements will not be penalised. They will have opportunities to complete their studies at a later point in time.
- Standards will be upheld, and the integrity of awards will be maintained. Qualifications achieved this year will be valued and regarded exactly as in any other year.

Institutions have also been asked by QQI to be aware of the particular needs of students who are more vulnerable; those who contract Covid-19 or are caring for others; students from overseas; work-based learners; broadband access; students with disabilities or those with mental health issues.

This QQI guidance document is available at: <https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/>

### 5.3. SUSI Grant

No.	Question	TD
314	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills if students who worked part-time and are now receiving the Covid-19 pandemic payment will have that income from the payment taken into account in respect of their SUSI entitlements and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Michael McGrath
428	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills, if the department will extend the BETAS, VTOS and SUSI grants for 3rd level students who are not able to participate in alternative examination and assessment arrangements being implemented by third level institutions due to the COVID 19 restrictions and	Aodhán O'Ríordáin TD

No.	Question	TD
	will therefore have to avail of opportunities to complete their studies at a later stage.	
464	To ask the Minister of State for Higher Education what supports she intends to put in place for Irish students studying abroad who have been forced to return to Ireland as a result of Covid-19 impacts abroad; whether she intends to work to ensure they are eligible for some degree of government assistance; and if she will make a statement on the matter.	Catherine Martin
596	Minister, can you confirm that those students who may receive the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment of €350, this will not come against them in 2021 when applying for their SUSI Grant.	Michael Healy-Rae
913	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he can confirm that SUSI grants will continue to be paid out in full during the Coronavirus crisis and if applications for next years students will be opened up?	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
923	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if income currently being paid to student nurses for work on the frontline will affect their current SUSI grant payment or future applications and can this income be disregarded given the importance of this work during the Covid crisis.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 5.3.1. Response

Financial supports in the tertiary education sector are provided through SUSI grants and training allowances.

SUSI grants will continue to be paid as normal. The duration or value of the grant will not change. Where a PLC college or HEI institution has closed as a consequence of Covid-19, students will continue to receive their SUSI maintenance grants as normal. The duration or value of the grant will not change.

Students studying in HEIs outside of the State and in receipt of a maintenance grant, will continue to receive their grant payments as normal. The duration or value of the grant will not change.

Learners participating in further education and training programmes who are in receipt of a training allowance will continue to receive their training allowance. The payment of additional learner supports in e.g. travel, accommodation and meal allowances should be dealt with under normal arrangements for authorised absences.

The student grants scheme for 2020/21 will open on 23 April. Students and families whose income has been affected by Covid-19 can apply to have their applications assessed under the change of circumstances provisions in the scheme.

## 5.4. Fees

No.	Question	TD
929	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills whether third level institutions could refund part of registration fees, and whether they now still fall due for the remaining part of the year, or could form a credit for next year	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 5.4.1. Response

The tertiary sector has responded quickly and comprehensively in the face of unprecedented challenge as a result of the current health crisis, implementing a number of swift and positive actions in order to ensure the continuity of provision of education and to ensure that adequate supports are in place for their student and staff bodies.

Working closely with the Department and the relevant representative bodies, one of the primary objectives of the tertiary sector has been to minimise disruption to students and staff to the greatest extent possible. This has been achieved through provision of online programme delivery, putting in place alternative arrangements to facilitate student assessments and facilitating remote working for staff.

As there is a continuity of service delivery and both course delivery and alternative assessment arrangements are in place, the refund or reduction of fees in situations where course fees are applicable does not arise.

## 5.5. Covid Payment to Apprentices

No.	Question	TD
10	To ask the Minister for Education if the COVID payment will be made available to apprentices under the age of 18 who have been made unemployed.	Seán Sherlock
922	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what income supports have been made available for apprentices under 18 years of age who do not qualify for the COVID payment and if he will engage with the Department of Social Protection to rectify this.	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

### 5.5.1. Response

In common with other workers of the same age impacted by redundancy or temporary layoff, apprentices who are under 18 years of age are not eligible for the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment.

The Department of Education and Skills has raised the issue with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection who have confirmed that age restrictions on social welfare payments, including jobseekers benefit, jobseekers allowance and short time work support remain unchanged.

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## 6. International Students Questions

### 6.1. International students questions

No.	Question	TD
899	To ask the Minister for Justice & Equality what emergency measures have been put in place for International Students on temporary visas during the Covid19 pandemic to allow them to self isolate and if currently idle student accommodation could be considered for use?	Chris Andrews
364	To ask the Minister to respond to this serious public health issue raised by my colleague Clare Daly (submitted by email separately) [English language students ]	Joan Collins

#### 6.1.1. Response

International higher education students:

The Government has closely monitored the situation of international students studying in Ireland during the current pandemic. An International Higher Education Working Group, Chaired by this Department, has been established and has been working for a number of weeks on identifying and addressing issues and challenges for this valued cohort of students. The Working Group includes representatives from the public and private higher education sector, student union reps and other relevant State Departments and Agencies such as Education in Ireland, Visa/Immigration authorities, the HEA and Leargas.

Among the issues raised were -

- Student Accommodation – many international students have remained in campus student accommodation. Almost all of the higher education institutions have provided refunds of rent where students have gone home. Institutions have also agreed to consider accommodating international students who had been living off-campus where their accommodation has become unavailable or they request to be accommodated, subject to public health safety concerns. We continue to work with the sector on issues as they arise here.
- Visa issues - D/Justice provided clarity in relation to the visa application process for the next academic year, should the first semester be delivered online. Entry visas will be processed within the normal time frame for September, however, the permission will be post-dated for entry from the 1<sup>st</sup> December, granting the student entry for the second semester. With regard to the Third Level Graduate Permission Scheme. D/Justice confirmed that students will need to re-apply to enter the country but that they will be practical in their approach to dealing with this cohort of applicants.

- Medical Treatment - D/Health has confirmed that, as Covid-19 has been made a notifiable disease under the Infectious Disease Regulations, the HSE is required to make arrangements for the provision of services for the diagnosis and treatment of Covid-19 to all persons in its functional area. Therefore, international students studying in Ireland will be eligible to receive public health services for Covid-19(only) and these services will be provided free of charge. The IMO released a statement advising that GPs will facilitate those people who are not normally registered with the practice.
- Income supports during the crisis – many international students depend on part-time work to support themselves while studying here and their workplaces have closed leaving some students without income. Where a student has lost their job as a result of the outbreak, they are eligible to apply for the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment. For those students in Ireland who have not engaged in employment while in the State and are in need of assistance, DEASP has confirmed that it can offer support to these students under the Exceptional Needs Payments scheme.
- English Language testing for entry to Irish HEIs in next academic year – the pandemic has caused delays in international students being able to sit English exams such as the IELTS, which are necessary to prove proficiency in the English language as part of the conditions to obtain a visa to study in Ireland. At the request of the Irish institutions, the immigration authorities have agreed to accept proof of proficiency through the DUOLINGO system on an exceptional basis for next year.

#### English Language Education students:

There is also a cohort of students who have travelled to Ireland to study English who may be vulnerable at this time and face a distinct set of issues arising from the Covid-19 outbreak. These issues include a language barrier when accessing information, concerns surrounding their immigration conditions and the loss of employment arising from the Government restrictions that have been implemented.

The Department of Education and Skills has established a working group with key stakeholders in this sector to address the issues that are presenting for students. The Working Group is comprised of key sectoral stakeholders including the Department of Education and Skills, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Enterprise Ireland, sectoral representatives and learner advocates.

The working group has published material for students in a number of languages providing information on health advice, updates on newly introduced immigration measures and to advise them of their eligibility to apply for the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment. In its engagements to date, the Working Group has identified the following key issues of immediate importance for students in this sector:

- Health Advice: As English is not the first language of students in this sector and as a number would not consume the same media as domestic students, ensuring that information and messaging around the latest health advice reaches these students is considered key. This is especially the case as many of these students are reported to live in small, confined accommodation and

in close proximity which provides challenges for social distancing and self-isolating measures.

- Immigration Information: The Department of Justice and Equality has taken measures in this respect to automatically renew all immigration permissions including those of students due to expire between 20 March 2020 and 20 May 2020 for a period of two months. In addition, where a student's immigration permission is dependent on their attendance at language school, once they are registered with a school, they are now considered to have met this requirement while that school is closed on the basis of Government advice. Further to this, during the period where English language schools are closed, the Department of Justice and Equality is now permitting students with stamp 2 immigration permissions to work up to 40 hours per week as an interim measure. This increases the previous upward limit of 20 hours per week while a student is attending an English language programme.
- Social protection: Through engagement with the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, students have been informed that where they have lost their job as a result of the current pandemic, they are eligible to apply for the Covid-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment. They have also been informed that their employers can avail of the Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme which enables employees, whose employers are affected by the pandemic, to receive significant supports directly from their employer through their payroll system. Where students have recently arrived in the State but have yet to receive a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) and have been unable to find work due the Covid-19 outbreak, and they find themselves in a position of financial difficulty, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has confirmed that it can offer some support to these students on a case by case basis under the Exceptional Needs Payments scheme, which is administered under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme. However to access this, learners will need to have a PPS number. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection have recently streamlined the PPS number process which can now be completed online or by post. Learners need to provide proof of identity and/or proof of address.
- Accommodation: There is anecdotal evidence that some students are in unsuitable accommodation where social distancing may not be possible. The Department is engaging with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on issues related to accommodation. The HSE is putting in place facilities to allow for the isolation of individuals required to self-isolate but unable to do so in their normal place of residence.

The Department has also become aware of reports of cases where international students have recently arrived in the State but have yet to receive a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) and have been unable to find work due the Covid-19 outbreak. Should these students find themselves in a position of financial difficulty, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection has confirmed that it can offer support to these students on a case by case basis under the Exceptional Needs Payments scheme which is administered under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme.



The Department has published guidance for students in this sector on these matters in multiple languages and which has been distributed through the English language providers to their students using relevant channels.

The Working Group will continue to meet to further assess the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the sector.

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## 7. Transferred Questions

Transferred to	No.	Question	TD
Health	208	My Constituent is seeking consideration of speech and language therapy classes; and if speech and language therapy classes that have been postponed be moved online to enable these classes to get back underway.	James Browne
DCYA	769	To ask the Ministers for Education to outline the details of employment conditions of early years workers providing early years care and education to the children of frontline staff, who their employer will be, who will cover their insurance under any proposed initiative and what implications have been considered by the government in this regard, and if s/he will make a statement on the matter.	Anne Rabbitte
DCYA	771	To ask the Ministers for Education to provide details of the considerations given to the potential of early years workers and the children in their charge to potentially be exposed to Covid-19 through the provision of care, the steps that will be taken to minimise this risk, and if s/he will make a statement on the matter.	Anne Rabbitte

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The above questions were initially submitted to the Minister for Education and Skills but were subsequently transferred to the Ministers for Health and Children and Youth Affairs respectively as the matters raised are appropriate to the remit of those Ministers.