



An Roinn Oideachais  
agus Scileanna  
Department of  
Education and Skills

# Oireachtas Members' Questions: Covid-19

Answers Due: Monday, 11 May 2020

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# 1. Introduction

The Oireachtas has put in place an 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 fifth 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.

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. Section 6 sets out, for information, any questions received, or forwarded, on transfer from, or to, another Minister\Department.

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.

This is the final week of the interim questions process as the Oireachtas Business Committee has determined that the Parliamentary Question system will be operable from Wednesday May 13<sup>th</sup> with replies being provided weekly on Wednesdays thereafter until July 15<sup>th</sup> and the Dail passed the necessary Motion in this regard on May 7<sup>th</sup>.

## 2. State Examinations Questions

### 2.1. Approach to State Examinations

No.	Question	TD
5.069	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills if he will respond to questions in correspondence from a person in Co Cork (details supplied) in relation to the decision to postpone the Leaving Certificate exams until July 29th as a result of Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Michael McGrath
5.312	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if his decision to not have the leaving certificate examinations before the end due to Covid-19 of July is final; what steps are being taken to reduce the mental stress this and the lack of contact with schools teachers and colleagues is causing among leaving certificate students; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Éamon Ó Cuív

#### 2.1.1. Response

All decisions taken in relation to rescheduling and postponing the Leaving Certificate examinations have been based on current health advice and will put the best interests of students first. The welfare of students and that of their families is front and centre in all decision making.

Following a decision at Cabinet, I announced last Friday (May 8<sup>th</sup>) that all students are to be offered the option of receiving Calculated Grades for the subjects they are studying and the alternative of sitting the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a date in the future when it is considered safe to hold the examinations.

The decision has been taken following an assessment of public health advice, advice from NEPS and other information including the State Examinations Commission's considerations of the implications for holding the exams in July and August. There has been broad consultation with the Education Stakeholders through an Advisory Group I established some weeks ago to review these issues and includes representatives of students, parents, Principals, both teacher unions, school management, the SEC, the HEA, NEPS, the NCCA and the Department.

I had made every effort to run the 2020 Leaving Certificate as close as possible to the way the examinations were originally intended to be held. My desire had been to allow students to undertake the written and practical examinations in July and August but I have compelling evidence, based on medical advice and other assessments, that the Leaving Certificate examinations cannot be held in a reliable and valid manner, nor in a way that would be equitable for students.

The reality of the impact of Covid-19 has led to a decision that has never happened in our country before. I fully appreciate the magnitude of this issue, for the students and their families, for the teachers and for school principals.

This decision is taken with the best interests of students at heart. I have a responsibility to find a fair way to address the disadvantage that some students are facing and the impact a lack of time in school has had in recent weeks.

The system being put in place will allow a student to progress to the next stage of their life in a timely fashion. The fairest and most equitable way to do that in the current circumstances is to offer students the option of Calculated Grades for the 2020 Leaving Certificate but also to guarantee them the right to sit the examinations at a later stage when it is safe to hold them in the normal way.

The decision has to be taken now to remove the anxiety that many students have been experiencing.

## 2.2. State Examinations Logistics

No.	Question	TD
5.145	To ask the minister to outline in detail how he intends to proceed with the Leaving Certificate examinations in July - to request him to outline in detail, for the sake of Leaving Cert. students - how the department intends to manage this situation	John Lahart
5.182	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills actions the Department of Education is taking to provide additional supports and compensations to students with existing medical conditions which may result in them being placed at a greater disadvantage for Leaving Certificate.	Thomas Byrne
5.218	To ask the Minister for Education in the event of the Leaving Cert exams proceeding as planned for end of July early August what happens if we have a second surge of Covid 19 cases around the time of the re-scheduled Leaving Cert, will all Leaving Cert Students be tested for Covid 19 prior to the exams starting, how will social distancing be enforced in exam halls, will the proposal to cancel the Leaving Cert and put in place the predictive grades and appeals procedure be considered an option by the Department of Education in the event of the written exams not proceeding and what supports will be put in place for a Leaving Cert student who has Covid 19.	Jackie Cahill
5.238	To ask the Minister for Education what provisions, if any, are being made for Leaving Certificate candidates who due to no fault of their own, are unable to prepare for the new exam date to the best of their ability, due to circumstances in their homes? For example, where a student is reliant on classroom-based learning or supervised study where their home life is disruptive.	Cathal Crowe
5.246	To ask the Minister for Education if his Department are supplying schools with sanitisers for students sitting the leaving cert exam or have the schools to source their own and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Jackie Cahill

No.	Question	TD
5.342	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the position with regard to the preparation of guidance for exam halls in line with public health advice, guidance for pupils going to and from exam halls, and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Thomas Byrne
5.343	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if his Department is engaging with schools with limited space to secure venues suitable for social distancing during State Exams and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Thomas Byrne
5.344	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the position with regard to students who exhibit symptoms which would cause them to self isolate or who are already self isolation during state exams.	Thomas Byrne
5.345	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the position with regard to a situation for a group of students where a student tests positive or must go into self isolation for the rest of the group. Can the Minister advise that guidance will be issued on this matter.	Thomas Byrne
5.346	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the position with regard to the provision of additional transport to pupils travelling to and from exams who normally use public transport, if additional transport will be provided which follows public health advice and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Thomas Byrne
5.347	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on contingency plans for pupils with underlying conditions during State Exams and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Thomas Byrne
5.348	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if recognition will be given to students with limited broadband or access to limited ICT equipment in State Exams this year.	Thomas Byrne
5.349	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills for an update on practical exams for which a detailed timetable has yet to be issued.	Thomas Byrne
5.350	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to provide an update on the position of LCVP exams which are due to take place in May.	Thomas Byrne
5.355	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if some exam year students will take State Exams in isolation centres, if this will be taken into account in grading and if he will make a statement on the matter	Thomas Byrne

No.	Question	TD
5.377	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if predictive grades are being considered at the moment and if so, what plans are in place for predictive grading for students taking subjects outside mainstream school.	Noel Grealish
5.381	To ask the Minister for Education if he has sought public health advice from NPHE, or the HSE, regarding whether it will be safe to run a written leaving cert in July August, and also regarding their advice whether or not it will be safe to reopen schools for exam classes or not in June, and to ask him to publish this advice	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
5.383	To ask the Minister for Education if he will now outline the contingency plans he has in the event the leaving cert will not take place, and how grades will be awarded and college places allocated in that event	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
5.398	To ask the Minister for Education what preparations are being made for supervising and correcting the Leaving Certificate exams; if adequate people are available and trained and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Aindrias Moynihan
5.421	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he can confirm that the Leaving Certificate examination will commence on 29 July and can he outline what social distancing measures will be in place to keep students and staff safe during these exams and will he make a statement on the matter?	Roderic O'Gorman
5.425	To ask the Minister for Education that given the Leaving Certificate Art practical coursework exam was on-going when schools closed on the 12 March and the finish date for this exam work was 3 April, how is this time going to be made up to complete the art practical exam work and also prepare for both the life drawing element of the exam (due to take place in school in early May) and the art history element of the exam with suggested class contact time with the art teacher before the exam and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Aindrias Moynihan
5.431	Is the Department of Education still considering the predicted grade model for leaving cert students or is it definite the exams will go ahead in July August as already announced.	Robert Troy
5.512	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the alternative arrangements for students unable to attend State if in isolation as a result of Covid-19.	Mary Lou McDonald
5.639	To ask the Minister for Education what preparations are currently being made for back-up plans for the eventuality that an August sitting for Leaving Certificate exams is deemed not possible;	Aindrias Moynihan

No.	Question	TD
	what milestones have to be reached before such a decision would be made and if he will make a statement on the matter.	
5.664	To ask the Minister for Education what preparations are being made for supervising and correcting the Leaving Certificate exams; if adequate people are available and trained and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Aindrias Moynihan
5.671	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills when a decision will be made regarding the holding of the Leaving Cert this year.	Darren O'Rourke
5.690	What provision of care is being made for Leaving Cert. students / Supervisors who may have underlying conditions or have family members with underlying conditions? What specific measures are being put in place to cater for their needs for the duration of the exams and the proposed two week return to school prior to exams?	Norma Foley

### 2.2.1. Response

I announced on Friday last (May 8<sup>th</sup>) the postponement of the 2020 Leaving Certificate. Following a decision at Cabinet, all students are to be offered the option of receiving Calculated Grades for the subjects they are studying and the alternative of sitting the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a date in the future when it is considered safe to hold the examinations.

The decision has been taken following an assessment of public health advice, advice from NEPS and other information including the State Examinations Commission's considerations of the implications for holding the exams in July and August. There has been broad consultation with the Education Stakeholders through an Advisory Group I established some weeks ago to review these issues and includes representatives of students, parents, Principals, both teacher unions, school management, the SEC, the HEA, NEPS, the NCCA and the Department.

I had made every effort to run the 2020 Leaving Certificate as close as possible to the way the examinations were originally intended to be held. My desire had been to allow students to undertake the written and practical examinations in July and August but I have compelling evidence, based on medical advice and other assessments, that the Leaving Certificate examinations cannot be held in a reliable and valid manner, nor in a way that would be equitable for students.

The fairest and most equitable way to do that in the current circumstances is to offer students the option of Calculated Grades for the 2020 Leaving Certificate but also to guarantee them the right to sit the examinations at a later stage when it is safe to hold them in the normal way.

The following is a breakdown of the process to be applied for students to be given the option of Calculated Grades or to sit the examinations:

1. The 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations, previously scheduled to take place in late July and August, have been postponed.
2. There will be no Leaving Certificate fee this year. All exam fees which have been paid will be refunded.
3. Teachers will be asked to provide a professional judgment of each student's attainment which will be subjected to a rigorous in-school alignment process to ensure fairness.
4. The school principal will approve the estimated scores being provided and the rankings of each student in each subject in the school.
5. A special unit is being established within the Department of Education and Skills to process the data provided by each school and operate national standardisation, again to ensure fairness amongst all students.
6. The Department will finalise the grades for each student which will be issued to each student as close as possible to the traditional date. Formal State certification will also be provided.
7. Students will retain the right to appeal. This will involve checks on school-entered data; correct transfer of that data to the Department; a review that it was correctly received and processed by the Department; and a verification of the Department's processes by independent appeal scrutineers.
8. Students will also retain the right to sit the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a date in the future when it is deemed safe for state examinations to be held.

There is comprehensive information published on the website of my Department and I would encourage all students to refer to that information. My Department is working presently on putting the necessary arrangements in place which will lead to students who opt for calculated grades to receive their Leaving Certificate results to allow them transition to further study, the world of work or other pursuits.

### 2.3. State Examinations Advisory Group

No.	Question	TD
5.508	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to confirm the current membership of the Department's advisory group of stakeholders set up to assist in planning for the State Examinations since the outbreak of Covid 19 and the mechanisms in place for students to input to the work of the advisory group.	Mary Lou McDonald
5.509	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to provide the dates on which the Department's advisory group of stakeholders met to discuss the State Examinations since the outbreak of Covid 19 and if he will publish the minutes of the meetings and recommendations of the group.	Mary Lou McDonald

As part of planning for the State examinations, I established an advisory group of stakeholders, including representatives of students, parents, teachers, the management and leadership of schools, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the State Examinations Commission, and officials of my Department, including the National Educational Psychological Service. A representative of the Higher Education Authority also attends all meetings of the Advisory Group as an observer. This group has provided very useful feedback and assistance

regarding the decision-making about the examinations. I wish to acknowledge the positive engagement with unions, management bodies, the further education and training and higher education sectors on all of the issues involved.

The Advisory Group has met on 6 occasions to date: 17, 22, 24 and 29 April, and 1 and 6 May. Further meetings are planned from later this week. Details of the Advisory Group on Contingency Planning for State Examinations 2020 have been published on the Department of Education and Skills website. The webpage contains details on the purpose of the group, the terms of reference and the membership of the group. The webpage also includes a link to meeting documentation. Please note, only the minutes of meetings that have been agreed by the Advisory Group have been published.

The webpage can be found here: <https://www.education.ie/en/The-Department/Regulation-of-Lobbying-Act-2015/Groups-Committees-exempted-under-the-Transparency-Code/advisory-group-contingency-planning-for-state-exams-2020.html>

In addition, the Department of Education and Skills is required under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 to publish, on a regular basis, a list of all designated public officials (DPO) who may be lobbied by external bodies or individuals registered on [www.Lobbying.ie](http://www.Lobbying.ie). In addition, the Department is required to publish details of all meetings held by groups/committees which are exempted from the Lobbying Regulations under the Transparency Code. The Advisory Group on Contingency Planning for State Examinations is one such group.

## 3. Schools Sector Questions

### 3.1. Continuity of Learning

No.	Question	TD
5.212	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills to provide a copy of the guidelines issued by the Department of Education & Skills to Primary School teachers for the teaching of students during the covid-19 pandemic.	Darragh O'Brien
5.313	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what firm arrangements were made with secondary teachers in relation to providing classes on line for their pupils, particularly leaving certificate pupils, during the school closure period because of Covid-19, to ensure that pupils had the maximum support at this time; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Éamon Ó Cuív
5.314	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what discussions his department had with RTÉ and TG4 regarding the provision of educational programmes in both Irish and English directed at pupils doing the leaving certificate this year, due to the closure of the schools because of Covid-19; did the Department discuss providing the two state broadcasters funding for such an undertaking; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Éamon Ó Cuív
5.525	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills if he will respond to a matter raised in correspondence (details supplied) in the context of the Roadmap for Reopening Society & Businesses published by the government in response to the Covid-19 emergency; and if he will make a statement on the matter.  (Re: collection of school books from school)	Michael McGrath
5.553	To ask the Minister for Education why the burden of accessing Education and resources has solely landed with Parents during COVID-19; which will ultimately lead to parents being financially burdened and distressed	Violet Anne Wynne

#### 3.1.1. Response

Since the announcement that schools would close and the extension of that closure, my Department has made it clear that teachers and other staff in the education sector would continue to work and to engage with their students. 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.

An Taoiseach announced on May 1<sup>st</sup>, as part of Phase 1 of the roadmap to lifting current restrictions, school and college buildings will be opened for access by teachers for the organisation and distribution of remote learning from May 18<sup>th</sup>.

Guidance on the continuity of schooling for primary and post-primary schools issued on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> April. Further guidance issued on April 22<sup>nd</sup> with a particular focus on supporting students with special educational needs and students at risk of educational disadvantage. All guidance documents are available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/covid-19/#guidance>

The guidance documents set out strategies for schools to use in engaging with pupils and ensuring that there is continuity of learning for all learners. The role of Tusla Education Support Services (TESS) is highlighted.

The guidance is informed by feedback from school surveys and prompted by a growing demand in some schools seeking such guidance. The reaction from schools is that this material is particularly useful as they navigate the challenges associated with the new teaching and learning environment that has emerged through enforced closures of schools during the public health crises.

The nature of distant learning has required schools to take on a range of approaches to support their students. Schools and teachers have demonstrate great innovation in adapting to the new situation. Many schools are using digital resources and remote teaching as well as communicating with parents through email and digital apps to provide work for students. The Department is aware that many schools are using 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 the transition to distant learning are being provided by the Department support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), at <https://www.pdst.ie/DistanceLearning>. Scoilnet the Department's educational portal provides access to a wide variety of resources and information developed by various services including: the PDST, Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT), the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), the National Council for Special Education. These resources can all be accessed at <https://www.scoilnet.ie/support/>. Scoilnet also provides access to extensive educational resources including Worldbook Online, at [www.scoilnet.ie](http://www.scoilnet.ie)

RTÉ has developed the RTÉ 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. In addition, TG4 has launched "Cúla4ArScoil" to support learning at home for pupils of Gaeltacht schools and Gaelscoileanna. These broadcasts are a supplement to the ongoing learning being provided by teachers.

As part of the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, funding of €210m for ICT Infrastructure will be distributed to schools over the five years of the Strategy. €110m has issued over the lifetime of the strategy to date. €50m is issuing now in the form of a grant payment to all eligible schools.

In the context of the current public health crisis the funding can be focussed on assisting schools to address ICT needs to support the provision of remote learning. This can include the purchase of ICT devices that can be shared with students who do not have access to devices, essential learning platforms and other ICT infrastructure to support the provision of remote learning.

The Department will continue to work with the education partners to provide solutions in areas where digital and remote learning options may not be possible.

### 3.2. Special Educational Needs Provision

No.	Question	TD
5.111	To ask the Minister for Education to instruct his officials to process an overdue application for technology (details supplied) due to the COVID outbreak, and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Peter Burke
5.152	To ask the Minister of Education, Joe McHugh, what measures he or the Department of Education are putting in place to provide continued educational support and structured educational provisions over the summer for children with special needs in response to the disruption of their education by Covid-19.	Paul Murphy
5.286	To ask the minister for education what arrangements are in place in relation to July provision, if this much needed service will still be available despite the covid pandemic, and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Patrick Costello
5.336	I know that during the current lock-down that parents have been really struggling. Children with Autism need familiarity and routine and it is near next to impossible to provide the support that they, and the parents, need via remote internet contact. This is true for all children with S.E.N. I am concerned that the schools will now not open until September which will put impossible pressure on the parents. I don't see why an exception cannot be made for Special Schools and Special Classes as the numbers per class are very small. I am also concerned about the July Provision this year as it is a vital support for children with Autism and Severe & Profound Learning Difficulty. I think the July Provision really needs to go ahead.	Michael Healy-Rae
5.362	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills the current position with regard to the July Provision Programme in light of Covid-19; to confirm if contingencies are being examined to ensure it goes ahead; to confirm the application arrangements that apply; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Michael McGrath
5.429	To ask the Minister, on the basis that schools will be open in September has he considered ensuring that the July provision be planned for and implemented, if not July then an August	Joan Collins

No.	Question	TD
	provision be planned for? Considering the children that can avail of the provision have been particularly effected by the restrictions.	
5.429	To ask the Minister, on the basis that schools will be open in September has he considered ensuring that the July provision be planned for and implemented, if not July then an August provision be planned for? Considering the children that can avail of the provision have been particularly effected by the restrictions.	Joan Collins
5.430	Many children with learning difficulties have been stuck in their homes with no contact with their SNA's. Has the Minister any plans to link SNA's with these students, obviously with agreement and discussions with the SNA's?	Joan Collins
5.434	Can the Minister for Education confirm the July Education Programme will be available in 2020 for children with a severe or profound general learning disability or children with autism	Paul McAuliffe
5.537	If he will clarify how the transition from playschool to primary school will be managed for those children with special needs who will be without supports for over five months by the time they start primary school in September.	Jennifer Whitmore
5.554	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to clarify if July provision will go ahead for children with ASD this year. Recognising the additional supports necessary for families with ASD coping with Covid-19. Can the Minister make a statement on the matter	Rose Conway Walsh
5.693	Will the Minister confirm his intention to continue the July Provision initiative this Summer and provide details of same.	Norma Foley
5.694	Will the Minister provide an update on the July Programme, a school based initiative for children who avail of ASD Units. Is it his intention to run this Programme this Summer or perhaps incorporate it into the July Provision?	Norma Foley

### 3.2.1. Response

The timeline and arrangements for re-opening schools is being guided by the public health advice applicable at a given time. The Taoiseach announced on May 1<sup>st</sup>, as part of the roadmap to lifting current restrictions, that there would be a number of phases with the re-opening of schools to be in the later phases in time for the new academic year. The Department will engage with relevant stakeholders to assist with the development of contingency plans for the operation of schools in an environment that may require social

distancing, hand washing arrangements etc. This work will be informed by guidance and experience from other jurisdictions.

While it had been the Department's intention to run the extended school year (ESY) scheme – also known as the July Provision Scheme – this year if possible given the current school closures and public health restrictions, and the Department is now reviewing this.

The Department is considering contingency measures, including changes to the format of the scheme. Any changes will be communicated widely.

The decision to close schools was taken on foot of public health advice and no distinction was made between different types of schools. The decision to reopen schools, including special schools, will be done within the parameters of the public health advice.

The Department of Education and Skills is responsible for the school system, and has lead responsibility for managing issues around transition into primary schools at the start of the new school year, while the Department of Children and Youth Affairs has responsibility for the pre-school system.

Both Departments are conscious that in the context of the Covid-19 public health situation, there is a need to review the supports available for the transitioning of children with special educational needs (SEN) from pre-school settings to Junior Infant classes in September. It is acknowledged that the Covid-19 restrictions present new challenges for the children and families concerned, for their pre-school settings, and for the primary schools where the children will enrol.

Both Departments share a common policy objective of ensuring that as far as possible children progress with their peers to the next stage of their education i.e. Junior Infant classes in primary school. This is based on the finding of research commissioned jointly by both Departments from the National Disability Authority (NDA) and published in March 2019, which showed that it is in children's best interest to enrol in primary school with their peers, and subsequently to transition to becoming a teenager with their peers. The two Departments are working together so there is a shared understanding of the challenges involved in the current public health situation and the kind of solutions and supports that may be required to ensure a smooth transition from pre-schools into primary schools, having regard to the policies of both Departments and public health guidance. At this time the Departments are working to:

- Explore the issues and challenges likely to be experienced by the children with SEN and their families concerned, the pre-school settings and the primary schools
- Identify the nature of supports required to address these challenges; who will develop and deliver these supports and how
- The resources required to deliver these interventions
- What agencies need to be involved

Outcomes from this work are expected to include:

- Key messages for parents/guardians and schools
- Signposts to available resources
- Need for additional resources and supports including training

The target is to complete this work as soon as possible (during this month) so that appropriate actions can be defined and communicated to parents and guardians, schools, pre-schools, and other stakeholders.

### 3.3. Technology and broadband access

No.	Question	TD
5.040	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if his attention has been drawn to the poor upload speeds on home broadband plans affecting students in completing formal education and extracurricular learning online during the Covid19 emergency.	Holly Cairns
5.191	If he will elaboration how funding to address the digital divide among students during COVID19 will be allocated (ie: DEIS schools or based on need across the whole student population)?	Jennifer Whitmore
5.305	I am contacting you on behalf of ... Co Tipperary regarding funding recently announced for schools for laptops (Details supplied)	Niall Collins
5.356	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to provide an update on the provision of funds for ICT equipment to schools announced last week including the procurement of equipment via the Department.	Thomas Byrne
5.552	To ask the Minister for Education what measures can be introduced for rural families with no access to Broadband; who have children/teenagers now under COVID-19 pressure that parents are seriously concerned for their mental health and well-being	Violet Anne Wynne

#### 3.3.1. Response

Schools have been asked to be conscious of students who may not have access to online facilities and to consider this actively in their responses.

As part of the implementation of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment, funding of €210m for ICT Infrastructure will be distributed to schools over the five years of the Strategy. €110m has issued over the lifetime of the strategy to date. €50m is issuing now in the form of a grant payment to all eligible schools.

In addition to a €40 million fund to support technology in schools I announced a special €10 million fund to support the purchase of technology and devices for disadvantaged students on guidelines. A total of €7 million additional funding will be provided in the post-primary sector and €3 million in the primary sector. A circular to schools has issued providing the details governing the funding for the grant and the top-up funding.

Officials in my Department continue to liaise with colleagues in the DCCA to raise the issue of barriers to connectivity impacting access to remote learning. Minister Bruton has announced

a package of additional supports from the telecoms companies, including that access to healthcare and educational resource websites identified by the Government will be zero-rated for all customers where technically feasible.

The Department is 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 Department will continue to work with the education partners to provide solutions in areas where digital and remote learning options may not be possible, and will continue to provide guidance to schools about how best to use digital and other solutions to provide ongoing learning for students at this time.

### 3.4. School Transport

No.	Question	TD
5.507	To ask Education and Skills if his Department has engaged with School Transport Scheme operators to discuss the impact of Covid 19 on services and to confirm the supports now in place for operators to sustain service provision when schools reopen.	Mary Lou McDonald

#### 3.4.1. Response

School transport is a significant operation managed by Bus Éireann on behalf of the Department. In the current school year there are over 120,000 children availing of school transport, including over 14,200 children with special educational needs, at a cost of over €219 million in 2019. The purpose of the School Transport Scheme is, having regard to available resources, to support the transport to and from school of children who reside remote from their nearest school.

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

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

In light of the most recent announcement that schools will remain closed until further notice I decided that contractors will continue to be paid at 50% while schools are closed in the current school year as a result of the public health restrictions.

### 3.5. Staff Relations – SNA Redeployment

No.	Question	TD
5.067	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the arrangements for the temporary reassignment of SNAs to other parts of the civil service/public service as some SNAs are suffering from serious anxiety and distress as a result of the announcement.	James Browne
5.357	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to report on the meetings with representative organisations regarding SNA redeployment which have taken place in the past 7 days.	Thomas Byrne
5.363	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills the position in relation to the planned redeployment of Special Needs Assistants in the context of Covid-19; to confirm if there has been consultation with the relevant trade unions; to confirm whether any role they may be asked to fill would be suitable for their skills and experience; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Michael McGrath

#### 3.5.1. Response

The Minister announced on April 1<sup>st</sup> a contingency plan for all Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) to be available for a new temporary assignment scheme as part of the Government's response to Covid-19. The HSE has now finalised the details of a new service which SNAs will provide during the school closure period. It is expected that the HSE will very shortly begin matching SNAs to families and children identified in their services.

There has been close cooperation between the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the HSE in establishing and managing the scheme to date. The Department has been made aware of concerns raised in relation to the assignment process. The Departments and the HSE hold weekly meetings with Fórsa (the trade union representing SNAs) to resolve any issues of concern. The latest meeting was held with Fórsa on Tuesday May 5<sup>th</sup> and this ongoing dialogue will continue as the assignment process continues.

SNAs will be asked to provide support to those students in receipt of HSE Disability services by way of remote working through the use of telephones, smart phones or laptops. They will work under the guidance and direction of the child's 'key point of contact' who will be a clinician such as a speech and language therapist, psychologist or occupational therapist who is familiar with the student and will explain what support each student and family might require. The key point of contact will provide strategies for working with the child / family and will signpost the SNA towards any resources required. Communication channels between the school and the SNA will be facilitated where appropriate to ensure that SNAs can receive guidance where educational issues arise during the course of the suite of supports being provided by the HSE teams during this period.

SNAs will be matched with students, and wherever possible this will be their own allocated student(s). If this is not possible, SNAs may then be matched to support children with whom they are not familiar. Students and families requiring the greatest level of support will be prioritised.

To ensure that SNAs receive appropriate support and have regular opportunities to engage with the HSE's multidisciplinary teams, SNAs will be able to access resources at the relevant HSE or disability service premises and will be provided with a letter identifying them as an essential worker to facilitate travel to these centres.

It is intended that the work of the SNAs will be underpinned by dedicated ICT supports. Therefore, where the SNA prefers to work remotely or has an underlying health condition or particular circumstances that impact on their ability to leave their home and has access to the appropriate technology this can be facilitated with the agreement of the Service Manager and key point of contact.

The HSE will provide induction for all SNAs who are asked to participate in the new service. Where possible they will ask SNAs to attend one of their offices to do this but where SNAs are self-isolating, have underlying health conditions or have childcare or other caring responsibilities, the induction can be done remotely.

The HSE is providing a dedicated IT platform which will allow the HSE to match SNAs to children / families. This platform will also allow the SNA to log their interactions with the family and to report on same. SNAs can use their own phone, tablet or laptop to carry out this work, and access to appropriate resources and technology will also be available at the HSE / disability premises.

At all times during this temporary assignment scheme the HSE will continue to comply with contemporaneous public health advice provided by the National Public Health Emergency Team.

## 3.6. Wellbeing

No.	Question	TD
5.510	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the progress of the proposed NEPS supports for exam year students since the outbreak of Covid 19 and the assessment mechanisms in place.	Mary Lou McDonald

### 3.6.1. Response

NEPS psychologists continue to be available to provide advice and support to school principals, teachers and school communities. NEPS is proactively exploring a number of innovative ways to continue to provide educational psychological services to school communities at this time.

NEPS has developed advice and resources for keeping Children and Young People well during Covid-19. These resources aim to support children and young people's learning and wellbeing at this time. All of these resources are aligned with the main messages from the Government and the HSE. These resources include:

- Advice to young people while schools are closed
- Plan for the Day
- Relaxation Techniques (including podcast)
- Guide for Parents Supporting Children with Routines
- Advice for parents and schools on talking to children and young people about Covid-19

The resources are on the Department's website. In addition, resources have been made available by other organisations including the HSE, Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) and the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). The resources will also be made available on Scoilnet.ie. Scoilnet is the Department of Education and Skills' official portal for Irish education.

The three key messages to young people at this time are:

1. Stay responsible and informed
2. Stay active and connected
3. Stay positive and calm

School closure and social/physical distancing are very challenging for our young people and there are evidence-based strategies that children/young people can use, and can be helped to use, in order to manage themselves, and their physical and mental health. NEPS advice is built around building daily routines that include physical activity, social activity (on-line), enjoyable/creative activity and schoolwork. Routines provide a sense of control and of security and safety which are essential to support wellbeing at this time. NEPS has included this in the guidance.

My Department has worked closely with the Department of Health and the HSE on the *In This Together* campaign which aims to help everyone in Ireland to Stay Connected, Stay Active, and look after their Mental Wellbeing throughout the Covid-19 Emergency. The *In This Together* campaign draws together the huge range of advice and support that is available for people of all ages. To support the wellbeing and mental health of our Leaving Certificate students at this time, a dedicated page on the *In This Together* site contains online advice for Leaving Certificate students. This includes a series of supports on managing wellbeing, stress and anxiety, developed by NEPS.

This webpage includes links to more individualised support for students to access, should these be needed. It is recognised that some vulnerable groups of students may require a more focused, stepped-up level of intervention and the Department has worked with the Department of Health and HSE to ensure the most appropriate services and resources are clearly signposted for those students.

During this challenging time the school building may be closed but schools have structures in place to support students. It has often been the case, that the first port of call for Leaving Certificate students who are experiencing distress has been their school. Schools have developed excellent and flexible systems of support. Many schools have a designated Student Support Team, while other schools have equivalent systems and structures, but may use different terminology to describe their arrangements, such as 'Care Team' or 'Pastoral Care Team'. Either way, the structures schools have in place will continue to have a key role identifying issues and students for discussion by the Student Support Team with appropriate

action/ follow-up. In these uncertain times, the familiarity of these school structures and personnel will offer continuity and reassurance to students.

There is specific advice from NEPS for Leaving Certificate students available on the Department's website which was published immediately following the Minister's announcement on the Leaving Certificate on Friday last. It can be accessed at <https://www.education.ie/en/Learners/Information/State-Examinations/wellbeing-mental-health-young-people-leaving-cert-covid-19.pdf> .

### 3.7. Re-opening of Schools

No.	Question	TD
5.354	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to outline the contingency plans for school admissions in September if further school closures must take place.	Thomas Byrne
5.424	To ask the Minister for Education if he can clarify whether schools and school buildings will be reopened to teachers in Phase 1 or Phase 2 of the Reopening Phases and will he make a statement on the matter?	Roderic O'Gorman
5.556	To ask the Minister for Education if he have any plans or proposals to issue specific guidelines to schools regarding safety especially around hand hygiene and school hygiene in order that school premises and School Boards will have to adopt to prevent the spread of COVID19 when schools reopen and pupils are allowed to return.	Sean Crowe
5.651	To ask the Minister at what reproductive number of the R0, and for what duration is he expecting it to remain at that figure, before he expects national schools and secondary schools to reopen?	Réada Cronin
5.691	As it is likely that social distancing measures will be in place for some time to come can the Minister confirm his intention to increase teacher allocations in both primary and second level schools to meet these health and safety requirements?	Norma Foley

#### 3.7.1. Response

I have always said that the timeline and arrangements for re-opening schools would be guided by the public health advice applicable at a given time. An Taoiseach announced on May 1<sup>st</sup>, as part of the roadmap to lifting current restrictions, that there would be a number of phases with the re-opening of schools to be in the later phases in time for the new academic year.

In Phase 1 of the roadmap, school and college buildings will be opened for access by teachers for the organisation and distribution of remote learning from May 18th.

The Department will engage with relevant stakeholders to assist with the development of contingency plans for the operation of schools in an environment that may require social distancing, hand washing arrangements etc. This work will be informed by guidance and experience from other jurisdictions.

The Department's engagement with stakeholders to date on supporting teaching and learning in the current on-line environment will assist with the contingency planning arrangements for reopening schools.

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.

## 4. Tertiary Sector Questions

### 4.1. Accommodation

No.	Question	TD
5.076	Regarding College Accommodation for Academic Year 2020/2021, a Constituent has contacted my office, as the first instalments are due mid-July for most College Accommodation. Most college accommodation is private and the first instalment is the biggest chunk of the Accommodation cost. The worry of course is if you don't pay, you lose your room. Will the Colleges be back in September, and will there be provisions put in place in case there is another outbreak of Covid-19 and the same issues occur regarding refunds for Accommodation?	Mattie McGrath
5.105	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to clarify the responsibilities of private providers of student accommodation as a result of Covid-19; if he is aware that an accommodation provider is refusing to offer a refund to students details supplied) and instead were offered a two week rent credit for next semester; and if he will make a statement on the matter. (Details supplied)	Padraig O'Sullivan
5.249	I am emailing you with regard to the delay of University of Limerick issuing refunds for student accommodation. I am aware the Minister raised this matter in the Dáil last week publicly asked the University to reconsider their position on refunding student accommodation fees. The Students however are still being told the university cannot commit to issuing refunds. I would ask the Department to contact the University and asked them again to reconsider their position.	Robert Troy
5.265	To ask the Minister for Education the extent of contact he has had with 3rd level Colleges who up to now haven't returned onsite accommodation rent to students who are no longer able to use it due to covid 19 restrictions, the response he has had from Colleges and if he will make a statement on the matter?	Aindrias Moynihan
5.270	To ask the Minister for Education if he will provide an update on the progress of discussions with University of Limerick and other providers of student accommodation on the refund of deposits and accommodation fees	Denis Naughten
5.311	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what discussions he or officials of his Department have had with the University of Limerick in view of their refusal to offer refunds for accommodation to students who had to leave campus accommodation due to Covid-19 when all the Universities were	Éamon Ó Cuív

No.	Question	TD
	closed by the Government; the result of these discussions; and if he will make a statement on the matter	
5.351	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on the current status of refunds of prepaid rents for purpose built university owned student accommodation.	Thomas Byrne
5.382	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if private providers of student accommodation are entitled to withhold the fees for those periods of the accommodation not taken up due to the Covid19 crisis and will the Minister make a statement on the matter?	Roderic O’Gorman
5.692	Will the Minister advise what progress has been made regarding the recouping of monies paid by Third Level students for accommodation no longer occupied by them due to COVID 19. What specifically is the current situation regarding UL campus accommodation , the only providers, it appears, of such accommodation not to refund fees. ( Subject to previous PQs by me also).	Norma Foley

#### 4.1.1. Response

The majority of students in Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) have 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.

The Department of Education and Skills is working with representatives from the higher education sector to address the challenges faced by students in this difficult time. The Department understands based on the information available to it that the six of the seven 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.

Universities are autonomous bodies and it is not within the remit of the Department to direct any university to offer a refund, however The Minister for Education has called on UL to join with the other universities and offer refunds to students who have left. We understand that the issue is currently under consideration by UL, and that a decision will be made shortly.

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, where private PBSA remains open for students, refund and cancellation policies are governed by the licences or contracts signed by the students. In other cases, the

students should engage with their accommodation provider in the first instance 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).

## 4.2. Tertiary Admissions

No.	Question	TD
5.359	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if additional places will be available to Irish students in universities in 2020 due to a decline in international students, if the Department has examined the number of places which will become available and the likely impact on CAO points and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Thomas Byrne
5.387	To ask the Minister for education if he can estimate how many additional places will exist in the third level institutions due to an expected much smaller number of international students not attending this year, and how he expects these places to be allocated or used, and if he has spoken to the Universities regarding this	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire
5.445	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills if he is aware that certain Leaving Certificate students missed the deadline to apply for the CAO; if he will arrange for late applications to be accepted given the extenuating circumstances these students are dealing with arising from Covid-19; and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Michael McGrath
5.511	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the contingency plans to oversee the admissions process for further and higher education for the 2020/2021 academic year.	Mary Lou McDonald
5.555	To ask the Minister for Education, given the potential for increased unemployment as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, if he would make a statement on the decision by the CAO not to reopen applications to allow those impacted to enter full time education in the next academic year should they choose.	Sean Crowe
NA	Due to the delays facing first year college students in starting college this September, some of these spaces on courses are occupied by EU Students. Has any decision been made as to whether EU Students coming from much more affected countries than our own will be allowed take up courses in our colleges this year.	Michael Healy-Rae

#### 4.2.1. Response

Higher education Institutions (HEIs) are autonomous with regard to management of their academic affairs including admissions procedures. The CAO processes applications for undergraduate, and some postgraduate, courses on behalf of the HEIs. HEIs will be working with the Higher Education Authority to consider relevant issues relating to the allocation of places in programmes which are subject to particularly high demand. In doing so it will be necessary to consider a range of detailed factors including the impact of social distancing measures on the current capacity of these programmes, the expected decrease in international students participating on these programmes, the extent that the programmes are in priority skills areas and the funding required for some additional places in circumstances that they are provided.

The timings for the CAO process is a matter for the HEIs and the CAO, but the Department understands that it is not intended to re-open CAO applications. The CAO timelines will run as close as possible to normal to allow for students to take up offers and to transition to third level.

We understand that this is a time of uncertainty for students hoping to progress to third level and work is ongoing in ensuring that the third level entry process can progress as smoothly and equitably as possible.

### 4.3. Continuity of Learning at Tertiary

No.	Question	TD
5.148	To ask the minister for Education and skills what steps he will take to support colleges to ensure that the Covid Pandemic does not disrupt the training of social work students which will lead to difficulties for social work dependent on these graduates.	Patrick Costello

#### 4.3.1. Response

The HEA asked the 22 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) under its remit to confirm that appropriate and workable systems were in place in relation to availability of campus facilities and that arrangements were in place to facilitate students continuing with their studies, to facilitate staff to continue with their work and to facilitate campus company operations.

All institutions responded as follows:

- All have campus facilities that are available to those who need to access them.
- All have arrangements in place to facilitate students continuing with their studies online;
- All have arrangements in place to facilitate staff to continue with their work online;
- 19 HEIs have arrangements in place to facilitate company operations in place while 3 HEIs confirmed that they do not have any campus companies.

Universities and colleges have finalised alternative assessment arrangements, with options including online exams, written assignments or rescheduling. 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.

Building on the HEA's contact with institutions, the Department is also proposing to collate further, more specific information from the higher education institutions with a view to establishing the measures on the ground that institutions have put in place to ensure continuity of education provision and to ensure adequate supports/contingency plans are in place for learners and lecturers alike. This information will cover a number of areas including class provision and quality, student access, international students, IT support, accommodation, student and staff welfare and access to campus and physical infrastructure. The Department is engaging closely with the HEA, IUA and THEA in relation to the collation of this data to ensure as comprehensive a view as possible while seeking to minimize any duplication of information requests and administrative burden to the institutions.

Since the onset of this crisis, significant work has been undertaken by a stakeholder group chaired by the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and including the representative bodies of education providers to engage with Professional Recognition Bodies (PRBs). These engagements have focused on the implementation of alternative arrangements, where appropriate and necessary, to meet the educational accreditation standards established by the PRBs for access to certain professions. In the case of Social Workers, this engagement is with CORU as the statutory regulator for this profession. This engagement is ongoing to ensure that standards of education and training are maintained so that students graduate with the relevant professional competencies in order to register with CORU.

## 4.4. Financial Sustainability of the Tertiary Sector

No.	Question	TD
5.358	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he has met with universities to discuss a support package to allow them to maintain current staff levels and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Thomas Byrne

### 4.4.1. Response

I am committed to the continued provision of higher and further education and training. All payments due to providers are continuing to safe guard our providers at this time.

My Department is fully engaged in an effort to identify and respond to exchequer and National Training Fund (NTF) funding implications in higher and further education and training as a result of COVID-19. It is expected that there will also be a significant impact on other funding sources for providers. My Department has established a multi-agency working group and are liaising closely with key representatives of the tertiary sector to provide a comprehensive approach to identifying, tracking and monitoring the financial implications of the emergency measures and the potential impact for the future.

Since the onset of the crisis, significant work has been undertaken by a stakeholder group chaired by the Higher Education Authority and including the representative bodies for the universities and the institutes of technology to collect information on the increased costs and projected income losses advised by HEIs arising from the crisis. A group chaired by the

Department of Education and Skills has also been established with the key stakeholders, including representatives of Higher Education Institutions, to examine the impact of and plan responses to the projected impact of Covid-19 on international students numbers.

The impact of Covid-19 on HEIs, the Tertiary Education system as a whole is now being assessed by the Department of Education and Skills as part of its ongoing analysis of the impact of Covid-19 on the education sector overall. In this context, the provision of additional financial support to different areas of the education sector is a matter for consideration in the context of overall expenditure management and budgetary policy taking into account the dramatic impacts of Covid-19 on all sectors of the economy and employment levels.

The Deputies may wish to note that there has been a significant programme of investment into the higher education sector over the past five years to underpin high-quality teaching & learning which will help to rebuild the economy.

- Budget 2020 will increase planned current higher education spending by over 30% compared to 2015 – an increase in excess of €450 million.
- Budget 2020 will bring total planned current expenditure on higher education to €1.87 billion as compared to the low point of €1.42 billion in 2015.
- The 30% increase in planned current expenditure on higher education over the five years since 2015 follows the 20% decline in current State investment in higher education over the period from 2008 to 2015.
- Planned current spending in 2020 of €1.87 billion represents the restoration of the peak level of expenditure on higher education achieved in 2008.
- In continued response to this growth, Budget 2020 will deliver an additional 2,700 new undergraduate student places through targeted investment of €19m in 2020. This is part of a €60m increase in current funding to provide for increased student numbers over the three year period 2018-2020.
- Additionally it will create places for about 3,000 new students through the Human Capital Initiative (HCI) Undergraduate and Graduate conversion places. The HCI will invest €300 million in Higher Education over the period 2020 to 2024.
- A three-year €90m Technological University Transformation Fund has also been established to underpin the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Technological Universities Research Network (TURN) Report

In addition, a review currently underway under the European Commission DG Reform's Structural Reform Support Programme on Increasing the Future Sustainability of Higher and Further Education Provision in Ireland. The review encompasses the review of the funding options for higher education included in the 2016 (Cassells) Report of the Expert Group on Future Funding of Higher Education. The study responds to the request of the Oireachtas Committee on Education and Skills for an economic evaluation of the Cassells' funding options.

## 4.5. Student Financial Supports

No.	Question	TD
5.011	To ask the Minister for Education in view of the changed circumstances of a great many households can SUSI assessments be modified to take into account current household incomes where income levels have had drastic changes due to the huge financial impact which the Covid 19 pandemic has incurred on these households as the current review process in place will inevitably delay decisions on applications and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Aindrias Moynihan
5.012	To ask the Minister for Education if he feels the current SUSI system will be adequate to deliver timely decisions for students who now have changed income circumstances due to Covid 19, the modifications he proposes to make in view of the large number of students who will require current financial circumstances to be taken into account and to make a informed decision on their SUSI eligibility and if he can make a statement on the matter.	Aindrias Moynihan
5.013	To ask the Minister for Education that the current income criteria for students on their SUSI applications can have the excluded income (holiday earnings) time scale extended as third level institutions are closed and some students currently are working as essential workers on the front line in retail and the health sectors and if he can make a statement on the matter.	Aindrias Moynihan
5.081	To ask the Minister for Education if he will amend the SUSI scheme to discount overtime payments to parents of applicants for the 2019 tax year to reflect current employment levels and income adjustments	Seán Sherlock
5.082	To ask the Minister for Education if he will instruct SUSI to discount overtime earned by applicants for SUSI earned during the COIVd restrictions.	Seán Sherlock
5.353	To ask the Minister for Education the position with regard to a review of the SUSI grant criteria in light of changes to a large number of household incomes.	Thomas Byrne
5.436	Many College students, who normally so summer work to pay for their college fee's are in a situation now that they cannot work. Has the Minister factored in that students who last year did not apply for the SUSI grant and what measures have been put in place to provide access to SUSI for these students?	Joan Collins
5.438	Can the Minister for Education outline what measures Student Universal Support Ireland will put in place to respond to the different income levels which families of applicants will	Paul McAuliffe

No.	Question	TD
	experience in 2020 as a result of COVID19 but which may differ in previous or future years.	
5.524	To ask the Minister for Education & Skills if he will ensure that clear guidance will issue in relation to eligibility for SUSI grants where income circumstances have changed from the last year and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Brendan Smith
5.558	To ask the Minister for Education if he is aware of full time ERASMUS students who were forced to return home from abroad in March due to COVID-19 restrictions not fitting the criteria for the COVID-19 payment or other payments such as Job Seekers benefit as they are technically in full time education; what guidance he offers for those individuals; and will he agree to liaise with the Department of Social Protection to try and introduce some new additional supports for this cohort of citizens.	Sean Crowe
5.011	To ask the Minister for Education in view of the changed circumstances of a great many households can SUSI assessments be modified to take into account current household incomes where income levels have had drastic changes due to the huge financial impact which the Covid 19 pandemic has incurred on these households as the current review process in place will inevitably delay decisions on applications and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Aindrias Moynihan

#### 4.5.1. Response

Financial supports in the tertiary education sector are provided through SUSI grants, training allowances or other complementary supports operated by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection such as the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA).

The SUSI grant scheme opened for applications for the 2020/21 academic year on 23 April. Like last year, it is anticipated that SUSI will continue to accept applications until early November.

The SUSI grant scheme contains enough flexibility to address matters which may arise due to Covid-19. Prospective applicants who have experienced a fall in income can seek to have their application reviewed under the change of circumstances provision within the scheme, provided they can demonstrate that any change in income is *“likely to obtain for the duration of the approved course or for the foreseeable future”*.

Students studying in Higher Education Institutions outside of the State, such as Erasmus students, who are 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.

## 4.6. DARE Scheme

No.	Question	TD
5.183	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills his views on the provision of additional DARE places in 2020 in light of the current situation.	Thomas Byrne
5.287	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills what if any consideration will be made for students who applied through the DARE process in cases where all the deadlines had been met prior to the shutdown and paperwork forwarded and where the CAO would have all Medical Information from all the relevant consultants; if predicted grades from mock results or assessments could be used for this group who will not be able to physically distance and who may also have medical conditions; if such consideration is occurring and if so will he make a statement on the matter.	Catherine Murphy

### 4.6.1. Response

The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) is an alternative admissions scheme to higher education. The deadline for applications to DARE passed on 1 March, before COVID-19 restrictions were in existence. The submission of supporting documentation deadlines for both schemes closed on Sunday 15 March. As schools closed on Thursday 12 March, it is possible that a small number of applicants were unable to source supporting documents on Friday 13 March in time for the deadline. These students can appeal their application on a case by case basis through the CAO.

Whilst criteria for applications and the processes for application itself are centralised, admissions under the DARE scheme are regulated by the institutions themselves. Each institution determines its own admissions policy in relation to the schemes, the number of places it reserves and the allocation of those places.

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. In this context, issues regarding timelines and places for the DARE scheme will remain under review.

## 4.7. FET Training Allowances

No.	Question	TD
4.229	To ask the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection whether those under 18 years of age in receipt of Further Education and Training (FET) allowances will continue to receive this allowance during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Matt Carthy

#### **4.7.1. Response**

Learners participating in further education and training programmes who are in receipt of a training allowance will continue to receive their training allowance until their course is completed.

## 5. International Study & Students Issues

### 5.1. Irish Students Abroad

No.	Question	TD
5.302	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills to outline how students of the Leaving Certificate in 2020, who wish to go to third level Universities in the UK in 2020 are going to be assisted by his Department with accessing these colleges in 2020 given the deadlines for UCAs will now be missed, if he has discussed this with the British Education Secretary and if he will update me on the matter (Details supplied).	Frank Feighan
5.340	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update for students who require exam results in order to apply for third level places outside of Ireland for which deadlines will pass before exam results are currently planned to be released	Thomas Byrne
5.382	To ask the Minister for Education if in the instance of conditional offers made via the UCAS system, if the Minister will now allow schools to confirm, or certify in some manner the predicted grade submitted to the UCAS system, and the universities in question, given that the offer will be withdrawn if waiting on leaving cert results, given those results will now arrive after the deadline	Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire

#### 5.1.1. Response

I am very conscious of the thousands of students taking the Leaving Certificate who have applied to study in Northern Ireland, Britain, Europe and elsewhere.

Before the announcement on State Examinations on April 10<sup>th</sup>, I called the UK Secretary of State for Education Gavin Williamson to alert him to the change and to ask for as much flexibility as possible from UCAS on these issues. I also wrote to the Ministers in Northern Ireland on this issue. Departmental officials are engaging directly with UCAS to work through the key issues.

I have also written to each of his counterparts across the European Union to explain the decision regarding the Leaving Certificate and to ask for as much flexibility as possible for students coming from Ireland to study in other Member States. I would ask authorities in other countries for the same flexibility in these exceptional times.

The announcement of the postponement of the 2020 Leaving Certificate on 9 May means that all students are to be offered the option of receiving Calculated Grades for the subjects they are studying and the alternative of sitting the 2020 Leaving Certificate examinations at a date in the future when it is considered safe to hold the examinations.

The decision has been taken following an assessment of public health advice and other information and the implications for holding the exams from the previously rescheduled date of Wednesday 29 July 2020.

This means that results will be available as close as possible to the intended date on which the Leaving Cert examination results were originally due.

My Department continues to work on these issues with stakeholders with a view to resolution at the earliest possible date. Contacts with the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland bilaterally at official level continue, as will contacts with officials in the other devolved Governments in the UK. Our work with UCAS has also continued, and will continue, to achieve a solution for students seeking to study in Northern Ireland or Britain.

## 6. Transfers

### 6.1. Transferred to other Departments

No.	Question	TD	Transferred to
5.557	To ask the Minister for Education if he expects an unprecedented increase in applicants applying for the School Clothing and Footwear Allowance due to the COVID-19 virus and the subsequent impact on employment.	Sean Crowe	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
5.083	To ask the Minister for Education if any provision is being made for private school bus operators who are not able to operate at this time	Seán Sherlock	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport
5.341	To ask the Minister for Education and Skills the current supports provided by the Department to private school bus operators, if he will commit to engaging with them with a view to addressing their concerns and if he will make a statement on the matter.	Thomas Byrne	Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

### 6.2. Received from other Departments

No.	Question	TD	Transferred from
4.229	(Received May 5 <sup>th</sup> on transfer with a week 4 question number) To ask the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection whether those under 18 years of age in receipt of Further Education and Training (FET) allowances will continue to receive this allowance during the Covid-19 pandemic.	Matt Carthy	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection