



An Roinn Oideachais
agus Scileanna
Department of
Education and Skills

Returning to school

Guidance on learning and school programmes for post-primary school leaders and teachers

July 2020

Note to school principals: Please provide copies of this guidance document to all teachers, relevant staff and members of the board of management. It is available on www.gov.ie/backtoschool

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Full re-opening of schools

The objective of the Department of Education (DE) is to open schools in accordance with the normal start of the new school year to the fullest extent possible, while minimising the risks from a public health perspective. In so doing, the plans and actions of schools to support students must be sustainable in a context in which Covid-19 is still present in the country while also being sufficiently agile and responsive to any changes in health advice that may occur over the coming school year.

1.1.2 Supporting learning during the 2019/20 school closure

By the time of the commencement of the new school year, post-primary students will have had a loss of direct class contact time from mid-March until the end of May 2020. During that period of school closure, school leaders and teachers continued to connect with parents/guardians and students to provide for the continuity of students' learning in a remote learning environment. Many parents/guardians and families were actively involved in supporting students' learning and wellbeing at that time.

In addition, teachers and school leaders demonstrated great commitment to professional development and upskilling in new technologies and distance learning approaches to support students' learning during the school closure period.

The Department provided a series of *Continuity of Schooling Guidance* documents to advise schools, principals, teachers and parents on how continuity in students' learning could be supported. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), and Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) also developed a range of resources for teachers and school leaders to support teaching, learning and assessment at that time. The Department's Inspectorate engaged with approximately 660 post-primary schools through phone calls to school principals to advise on how students' learning could be supported during the school closure period and to mediate the key messages of the Department's *Continuity of Schooling* guidance documents. The Department's National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) developed advice and resources for young people to help them to manage and stay well when schools were closed.

1.1.3 Curriculum considerations for 2020/21

As evident from information gathered from schools by various organisations including the Department's Inspectorate, the work of schools and students during the period of school

closure, given its rapid onset, varied in terms of frequency of teacher-student contact, curriculum focus, degree of parental/guardian involvement, and the nature and format of student engagement in learning.

Curriculum considerations for 2020/21 must therefore take account of the variable learning experiences of students during the period of school closure, the likely disengagement by students from particular aspects and areas of learning, and the practical contexts in which teaching and learning will be taking place in the new school year. In addition, explicit provision must be made for contingency curriculum planning for a situation in which there might be an unexpected period of school closure.

Provision for curriculum in 2020/21 must also take account of the likelihood that the impact of school closure on students' curriculum experiences were not uniform. Students with special educational needs, students at risk of educational disadvantage, students with English as an additional language (EAL) and students experiencing homelessness or living in direct provision are likely have been the most adversely affected by the lack of classroom contact time. Schools will need to ensure that those students continue to receive the necessary supports in their learning in the 2020/21 school year.

1.1.4 Purpose of this guidance

The Department has worked closely with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in developing this guidance document. This guidance is designed to support school leaders and teachers in preparing for the re-opening of post-primary schools in August/September, in mediating the curriculum during 2020/21, and in the preparation of students for the State examinations in June 2021. It builds on the *Continuity of Schooling* guidance documents provided by the Department to post-primary schools during the Covid-19 crisis.

There are, no doubt, challenges facing us all in September. These include ensuring that students can settle happily back into school, that all in the school community (students, teachers, special needs assistants, ancillary school staff, parents and members of the board of management) are safe and well and that the students can pick up and progress in their learning, experiencing as full and as enjoyable a curriculum as possible.

The general curriculum guidance is based, for the most part, on the premise that schools and teachers are best placed to plan the mediation of the curriculum in the unusual circumstances that present themselves this year. The more particular guidance on specific areas and programmes of the curriculum and their assessment is designed to reflect loss of learning time due to school closure as well as allowing for a contingency in which there may be an individual or localised school closure.

This guidance identifies some of the key challenges facing schools in the 2020/21 school year and suggests ways in which they might be addressed. It is also designed to assist schools in planning for a contingency situation where there may be a need to mediate the curriculum for students who cannot attend school for health reasons related to Covid-19, or a situation where a school may be faced with closure for a period during which the curriculum will need to be delivered remotely.

1.2 Structure

The context and practicalities of post-primary education provision in the 2020/21 school year are outlined in this guidance document under the following headings:

- Preparing for the return to school and supporting student re-engagement in learning
- Key curriculum considerations for 2020/21 and the role of school leadership
- Further advice and support for schools and teachers (including planning for the contingency situations noted above)
- Curriculum reforms.

1.3 Principles

Considerations under each of the above headings are underpinned by the following principles:

- Adherence to relevant health and safety requirements
- Supporting the wellbeing of learners and school staff
- Recognition of the autonomy of schools to determine how the curriculum is planned and mediated
- An approach to planning that is learner-centered, balanced, adaptive and responsive to students' needs
- Supporting all students where they are at in their learning and providing them with what they need in order to flourish and be successful
- Developing and supporting communication and collaboration with parents and agencies in order to maximise outcomes for all students in a fair and equitable way
- Recognising the diverse circumstances and situations of schools and students, and, in that context, being supportive in response and realistic in expectations.

2. Preparing for the return to school and supporting student re-engagement in learning

2.1 Introduction

School leaders will already have undertaken considerable preparation for the return of students for the new academic year. At a practical preparatory level, the school timetable will have been developed. Helping all students to settle back into school, to reconnect with their teachers and friends and to establish new school routines that support their health and safety will be a priority at the start of the new school year. That objective can be achieved through purposeful forward planning that adapts to the somewhat different start to this school year and to the challenges that may emerge over the course of the year.

2.2 Initial priorities

School leaders, the senior management team and teachers will all have a particular role to play in establishing secure and safe learning environments, in supporting the wellbeing of all, and in planning collaboratively for teaching and learning in a way that enables all students to progress and flourish in the 2020/21 school year. While the specific focus of planning will vary from school to school in light of the individual school context, there are some themes and areas that all schools will need to consider:

- Implementation of all health requirements that help to prevent Covid-19 from coming into the school or spreading among students and staff, including requirements regarding physical distancing
- Supporting all students in settling back to school, ensuring that students transitioning from primary to post-primary school, students with SEN, and students at risk of educational disadvantage are well supported
- Planning for how the curriculum can be mediated in a context that acknowledges that students have had different experiences while learning from home
- Progressing the school's priorities regarding wellbeing, teaching, learning and assessment
- Building on the experience of using digital technology during the school closure period to support contingency arrangements in the event that some students need

to continue their learning in a remote learning environment for a period during the 2020/21 school year

- Updating school policies to support effective digital learning; these should include the school's Code of Behaviour, Digital Learning Policy, Child Protection procedures, Data Protection and Critical Incident policies and the Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). Advice in relation to updating the AUP is available at <https://www.webwise.ie/teachers/acceptable-use-policy/keeping-your-schools-aup-updated-3/>

2.3 Managing transitions

As most post-primary students will not have been in their school building for a period of over five months, the start of the next school year may be regarded as a transition for all – a transition from home to school, a reconnecting with friends, a learning about the operation, geography and layout of the school that will be somewhat different from before in light of public health requirements. Some students and parents may be anxious. However, the physical return to school offers a welcome opportunity for students to revive social connections, to re-bond with their friends, make new friends, and to spend time with adults who are significant to them. For these reasons it will be important to:

- Communicate in advance with students and parents about the practicalities of the start of the new school year, welcoming them and assuring them
- Allow students to become familiar with the operation and layout of the school and the new health and safety measures and routines – for example, through a first-day orientation or a virtual tour of the school where safety measures and new arrangements can be explained and illustrated. Students and parents for whom English is a second language may require instructions and directions regarding safety measures in schools to be communicated in visual format and/or a range of languages
- Ensure that, at the start of the year, students have space and time to re-connect with their classmates and re-form relationships with staff
- Allow time to enable students to develop those relationships and connections so that they will be available and ready to participate in a meaningful way in their learning
- Create safe spaces where students can openly communicate their needs, thoughts and emotions, as well as their learning at the start of the school year and throughout the terms that follow.

2.3.1 Supporting students with special educational needs (SEN)

Students with special educational needs (SEN) will require particular support at the time of transition back to school. As they return to school, the quality of the social and emotional aspects of the curriculum will be critical to their successful re-engagement in school life and their learning across the curriculum. Particular attention will need to be given to supporting their wellbeing, reducing potential anxiety and planning learning experiences that take account of the effect of the school closure period on their progress and their engagement in learning. In addition, consideration may also need to be given to planning for diagnostic testing of some students.

Schools are advised to ensure that effective systems are in place such as the **Student Support Team** to identify students and their parents/guardians most in need of support.

Students with special educational needs, English as an additional language (EAL) or additional learning needs, students at risk of educational disadvantage, and students with medical issues sensitive to the pandemic context, are particularly vulnerable and will continue to need targeted support. Planning for improvement in learning for all students will, however, need to take account of students' varied experiences and engagement in learning since March, including their access to the language of instruction of the school. While the majority of students will engage in learning in an in-school context, for some, learning progression may continue to rely on distance learning environments, for various periods of duration, in the next academic year. In such instances, there will be opportunities to further support and enhance progress already made by teachers in adopting more student-centred pedagogies in onsite and online environments.

Approximately 15,000 students with SEN will have availed of the DE Summer Provision programme for children with SEN. All teachers delivering either the school-based or the home-based strands of the Summer Provision programme were required to complete a record of progress for each individual student and to make this available to the student's school. The record of progress has been forwarded to each participating school. It will be important for schools to consider this record when planning for the learning needs of students with SEN in the new term.

For many students with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), the impact of the school closure period will have been very significant. Accordingly, schools will need to plan carefully for the learning experiences, routines and sensory needs of students with ASD. It will be important to:

- Create a calm space for the students before they return to school. If it is not feasible to use sensory or quiet rooms, teachers may need to create an area where individual students can take a comfort break. In addition, individual packs could be created with appropriate sensory or movement materials. The website of the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) contains a comprehensive suite of resources designed to assist teachers to create such packs and materials
- Place an initial focus on transition and change to support the students as they adjust to new social rules and learning routines at school and at home. This can be achieved through, for example, the use of social stories that can be developed with the students on a one-to-one or group basis. More information about the use of social stories in a Covid-19 context can be found at:

<https://ncse.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2020/03/Supporting-children-and-young-people-with-ASD-during-the-Covid-19-pandemic-SocialStories.pdf>

- Establish a routine in supporting students to regulate their feelings and behaviour through, for example, schedules that highlight key transitions within their day and 'exit strategies' ranging from 'first/then' to a full-day visual or written schedule. This can be either paper based or added to students' devices where these exist
- Build on the good practice shared by teachers to date, and guided by the NEPS *Student Support File Guidelines*; subject teachers, in collaboration with the special education teachers (SET) team and special needs assistants as relevant, should adapt content and differentiate tasks and the modes in which feedback is provided to these students and to their parents/guardians
- Ensure that there is regular communication by the SET with parents/guardians so they are fully aware of the learning support, resources and approaches adopted by the subject teachers
- Use as fully as possible the role of the Home School Community Liaison teacher in DEIS schools to communicate and link with parents/guardians of students at risk of educational disadvantage.

2.3.2 Welcoming first years – supporting their transition

Starting post-primary school in 2020 is likely to generate even greater anticipation, anxiety and excitement than normal for students and their parents/guardians. In preparing for welcoming incoming first years, post-primary schools should have received or have requested the Education Passports from the relevant primary schools to assist in planning for the educational needs of their new students.

In light of the school closure and related health requirements, many schools have already adopted creative and innovative ways to introduce incoming first years to the school. Where students have not had the usual supports when moving from primary to post-primary school, the key skills of Junior Cycle such as Managing Myself, Managing Information and Thinking, and Staying Well should be prioritised through the school's induction and wellbeing programmes. Also of relevance in this regard are the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) resources developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) to support students' transition back to school. These include resources designed for first years, second and third years, and fifth and sixth years, and are available at <https://ncca.ie/en/updates-and-events/back-to-school-lessons-to-support-student-wellbeing>.

2.3.3 Supporting the transition of other year groups

To support re-engagement with school, it is advised that students move with their class group. Schools should, as far as possible, try to maintain the same **tutor groups** and **subject teachers** for students.

The practice of assigning students to specific levels at the start of a school year should be delayed to provide time for students to settle back, to readjust to the school environment and re-engage with learning before decisions are made about their **ability levels**. This is essential if decisions about levels are informed by results in assessments that were completed during the period of school closure, as the level of student engagement with learning during that period will have varied from student to student.

In general, gaps in students' learning arising from the emergency closure of schools should not result in a student **repeating** a year. Teachers will need time to assess students' needs and to adapt their teaching programme to meet those needs, the goal being to support all students in progressing in their learning.

Particular attention and guidance will need to be given to students as they move from junior cycle into senior cycle. In particular, those who opt to follow the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) will require a period of induction to fully inform them of the programme structure and how continuous assessment, regular attendance and completion of key assignments and tasks in the programme operate.

Many schools will have completed the process of **subject selection** for students moving into fifth year. Schools may need to take a flexible approach to procedures around facilitating students to change their subject choice, where possible, and these procedures should be communicated to the students as soon as possible on their return to school.

Schools may experience an increased demand for programmes such as transition year (TY) as some students may have reconsidered moving into fifth year directly from Junior Cycle. Schools may need to review their criteria for entry to the TY programme to facilitate such students where resources allow.

2.4 Wellbeing

Schools are an important source of support and care to their students. In planning for students' wellbeing, schools have always extended beyond the curriculum and have recognised the need for whole-school and whole-staff approaches to supporting student wellbeing. This will be particularly important in the transition back to school in August/September. Teachers will be cognisant of the emotional, physical and social impacts of Covid-19 on students as well as its possible impact on readiness to learn. Schools should continue to timetable SPHE, CSPE and PE across all junior cycle year groups and RSE and PE at senior cycle. The benefits of these courses for the emotional, social and physical development of students are significant. While it is desirable and necessary that students experience a wellbeing programme in schools, the challenge for some schools in timetabling 400 hours of wellbeing in junior cycle is acknowledged. **Accordingly, schools are being given the option to defer the increase of wellbeing provision at Junior Cycle from 300 to 400 hours by one year, until the 2021/22 academic year.**

2.5 Communication with parents/guardians

The interaction between the school and the home has never been more vital in supporting students' learning. Establishing and maintaining supportive two-way channels of communication will be critical throughout the coming period. Parents/guardians will need clear communication to ensure they understand how they can contribute to their child's learning at this time, in particular with regard to:

- Reassuring parents that teachers understand that students will have had different learning experiences during the school closure period
- Reassuring parents who are anxious about their son/daughter returning to school; communication in this regard should be factual, clear and based on the latest evidence and guidance
- Managing parents'/guardians' expectations so that they understand what learning will look like and why

- How parents/guardians can support their son's/daughter's learning in a remote learning environment, in the event that this arises at any stage in the 2020/21 school year
- Supporting parents/guardians in their understanding of what digital learning looks like.

2.6 Student voice

Schools need to enable students to communicate their own needs. Schools also need to acknowledge and respond to those needs. This will be particularly important as the new school year begins. Exploration of the views of students about their experience of school closure, their feelings about returning to school, and what they need to help them in the coming year, should be a central part of schools' preparation for the year ahead. Promoting student voice in every classroom will be important in this regard. Involving and communicating key policies contained in the school's Covid-19 Response Plan to all students will help students take ownership of and engage with new logistics in the school.

In their interactions with students, teachers can support them to look forward positively. Part of this communication should provide opportunities for students to give feedback on their learning experiences as they re-engage with learning and reintegrate with school. Schools can help students to identify their particular needs such as which teaching, learning and assessment approaches will best help them to make progress in their learning.

3. Key curriculum considerations for 2020/21 and the role of school leadership

3.1 Introduction

One of the priorities for all schools in the coming school year will be to provide rich and progressive teaching and learning experiences for all students and, in so doing, to ensure that those learners most impacted by the school closure period are enabled to reconnect with and progress in their learning. Teachers should focus on enabling students to learn again, on developing their learning readiness, and on promoting student confidence in and motivation for learning.

Progressing students' learning is at the heart of the decisions that are made by school leaders and teachers in managing the curriculum. In the context of the return to school, supporting students' wellbeing and helping them as confident and engaged learners are key objectives. These objectives can be achieved through purposeful forward planning that adapts to the challenges already experienced by schools and those that may emerge in the course of the next school year.

3.2 Identifying the starting points of learning

Students will have a variety of needs as they return to school and teachers will need to provide learning experiences to meet those needs. Accordingly, teachers will need to be alert to where their students are at; they will need to take time to evaluate students' needs, and may need to and wish to consolidate previous learning before introducing new learning. Key to this is an approach which builds on students' strengths. In that regard, some important questions for schools are:

- Have teachers reflected on the learning progress their students have made?
- Have teachers identified a range of formative assessment measures to assess the progress that students' have made?
- Have subject departments reviewed subject specifications and/or syllabuses and identified learning outcomes that are priorities for the return to school?
- Have cross curricular learning opportunities been identified and planned collaboratively to maximise learner outcomes?

3.3 Preparation for teaching and learning

Building on their assessment of students' learning as outlined above, teachers will make key decisions about what students learn, the sequence in which they learn, the pace at

which they learn, and the activities and experiences through which they learn. Teachers and schools are best placed to make these decisions and to exercise the professional judgement and autonomy they have in this context. **For this reason, curriculum specifications as such will not be changed for the school year 2020/21 although, in some cases, their contents may be affected by specific changes to assessment arrangements referred to later in this guidance.**

The following questions may support teachers to reflect on their preparation for teaching and learning:

- Has my lesson planning taken account of collaborative decisions about teaching and learning including decisions about essential learning, the sequencing of learning, the pace at which students learn and the activities and experiences through which they learn?
- Do the planned learning experiences provide for social interaction and collaboration between students?
- Do the planned tasks assess the learning outcomes or objectives that have been prioritised over a series of lessons?
- Are planned learning tasks and activities accessible to all students, including those with special and additional educational needs?

3.4 Learning approaches

It is essential that, right from the start of the school year, a broad range of active learning experiences is provided for all students. This should include:

- Prioritising practical lessons to enable students to demonstrate skills and knowledge developed during remote learning
- Providing learning experiences based on pair work and group work that support student interaction and engagement in meaning-making; this will help in achieving learning outcomes/objectives across the curriculum, particularly in the areas of language, mathematics, business, science and technology and the arts
- Integrating digital technologies in a responsive and innovative way into teaching, learning and assessment
- Questioning, tasks and student-teacher conferencing; these are practical and effective assessment approaches that will be helpful in identifying the priority areas in which students' learning needs to be progressed.

The fact that, at the start of the 2020/21 school year, students will be entering sixth year having missed a significant portion of direct class contact time in fifth year presents some challenges. It is possible but more difficult than in junior cycle to identify priority areas for

students to focus on, particularly where students are mid-programme and teachers have taken a variety of customised approaches to sequencing the learning. **Consequently, it will be necessary to make some additional arrangements, mostly in relation to choice within examination papers, for the Leaving Certificate examination of June 2021.** Additional details about this are set out in Section 4 of this document.

3.5 The role of school leaders

In planning for the next school year, school leaders and curriculum leaders at whole-school and subject level can take a number of specific actions to support student re-engagement with the curriculum. These include reviewing subject plans, reflecting on learning outcomes achieved in the last school year, and reviewing pedagogical approaches to maximise student engagement in the new school year.

To support student progress in learning, it will be important for school leaders to identify and consistently promote effective practices in teaching and learning in the school and to ensure teachers' engagement with the relevant support services, including PDST, JCT, NCSE and the Centre for School Leadership.

School leaders could also usefully consider the sampling programme for first years, if one is in place, so that the time allocated to the sampling programmes does not impact on the overall time available for the subject options chosen for progression to junior cycle.

Reflecting on key learning from school closures, school leaders should now build on effective practices that emerged during that period. This may require school leaders to plan for whole-school upskilling for teachers and students, on the effective use of the school's preferred sharing platform to support learning. A range of supports to assist with the effective use of platforms is available at www.pdst.ie/distancelearning/DigTech

3.6 Reflecting on and communicating about progress

As students re-engage with learning and as the year progresses, the in-school management team, teachers and special needs assistants (SNAs) should regularly review how well the school is meeting students' needs. Students' views could also be sought as part of this process. Opportunities should be provided for teachers to share their views on how approaches to teaching, learning and assessment are supporting students' re-engagement with school. Subject departments are advised to review and reflect on subject plans to ensure that they are effective in progressing learning and can be flexibly adapted should local school closures be required.

3.7 Considerations for Junior Cycle

The *Framework for Junior Cycle 2015* sets out what the educational experience will look like for all young people in the first three years of their post-primary education. A key feature of the Framework is that it allows schools and school management enhanced autonomy and flexibility to develop learning programmes and experiences that meet the particular needs of students in their particular school contexts. This feature supports the idea and the principle that school leaders and teachers are best placed to make professional judgements about the kinds of learning their students should experience, within certain agreed parameters as laid down in the Framework. Now, more than ever, the professional judgements of teachers and school leaders will be needed to decide on the kind of learning their students should experience. As we move from a period of emergency remote learning to resumption of face-to-face teaching, the professional judgements of teachers and school leaders will come to the fore.

The starting point for schools in discussing what kinds of programme might best suit their students' needs are the eight principles of Junior Cycle. These principles reflect the twin emphases on increased school autonomy in designing learning programmes and the balance in these learning programmes between knowledge and skills. The eight principles are just as relevant in the context of the new school year as they were in 2015 and should underpin all junior cycle programmes provided by schools including Junior Cycle Level 1, and Level 2, Learning Programmes. Information on the principles and key skills can be found at: <https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/framework-for-junior-cycle>

At the start of the school year 2020/21 students entering third year will have missed a part of direct class contact time. Consequently, there are a number of adjustments to the assessment arrangements for Junior Cycle assessments which are set out in section 4.3.1 below.

3.8 Considerations for Senior Cycle Programmes

3.8.1 Transition Year

The Transition Year (TY) is a one-year optional programme designed to act as a bridge between the junior and senior cycles. Each school designs its own TY programme, within set guidelines, to suit the needs and interests of its students. The health requirements in place in the 2020/21 school year will require schools to re-develop or re-design their existing TY programmes.

As schools re-open, much of what is most valued by teachers, parents and students can continue to be central features of the school's TY programme. Continuity with TY as experienced in other years can be maintained and sustained in many ways. It is, of course,

recognised that planning for TY in the coming school year will need to take account of some areas where the impact of the pandemic may be felt, for example, in the area of work experience or in the scale of external visits and external learning activities.

Planning considerations for Transition Year 2020/21

In planning for TY in the coming academic year, it will be important to:

- Plan for teaching, learning and assessment in a way that builds on and progresses students' learning from junior cycle. Given the likelihood that the school closure period will have impacted on students' learning in variable ways, schools can allocate additional time to teaching the core layer of the programme, with an emphasis on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills
- Ensure that the core layer provides for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Physical Education; schools may allocate additional time to this element of the core layer in 2020/21
- Ensure that learning for students in this year's TY, as in a typical TY, involves a strong engagement with knowledge, the development of personal, social and learning skills, a focus on wellbeing and a strong emphasis on creativity; all of these components should feature through a variety of learning areas and activities
- Identify priority areas for knowledge and skills development for students entering TY in September 2020 that bridge the learning between junior and senior cycle
- Build on the recent experiences of blended learning during school closures to include opportunities within TY courses and modules for a mix of teacher-led, student-led, self-directed and inquiry-led learning that will support progression to Senior Cycle
- Develop a specific programme on digital skills at the beginning of the school year
- Plan for alternative school-based or online activities to replace co-curricular and extracurricular programmes that may not be possible or which may need to be cancelled at short notice
- Use an interdisciplinary, cross-curricular approach to design activities that draw on students' interests and experiences of learning, wellbeing, social interaction over recent months

- Work with local employers to facilitate work experience where possible. If work experience is not possible, plan for school provision of alternative equivalent learning. This could include:
 - the non-experiential aspects of work experience such as careers investigations
 - modules in employment skills including, for example, online courses/modules on Health and Safety in work
 - virtual tours of workplaces, businesses and companies
- Recognise that many families may find it difficult to pay for activities associated with TY and prioritise low cost or no cost alternatives that all students can participate in. Students and their families should not be expected to pay upfront at the start of the school year for activities that may not be possible to complete owing to public health requirements
- Negotiate the plan for learning with students. The learning experiences designed should be relevant to the students' lived experiences and interests and should support the building of their confidence and competences
- Plan for a programme that is a minimum of 28 hours instruction time per week, inclusive of work experience
- Continue the existing good practice of planning TY programmes that are creative and innovative and not three-year Leaving Certificate programmes.

Examples of themes that might be useful for schools to develop that reflect students' recent experiences include:

- Health and safety in the school, community and workplace (sciences, technologies, social studies)
- Promoting and supporting the local economy (enterprise, mathematics, leadership)
- Diversity and inclusion – promoting equality (social studies, literature, SPHE)
- Biodiversity and sustainable development (sciences, geography, business)
- Music and motion (PE, music and digital technology)
- Keeping active and well (PE, SPHE, food science, arts)
- Home or away (heritage studies, modern foreign languages, Irish, business).

Additional details in relation to planning for TY in 2020/21 are available at www.gov.ie/backtoschool

3.8.2 Leaving Certificate Applied – Programme Arrangements

The Leaving Certificate Applied LCA is a two-year Leaving Certificate programme aimed at preparing students for adult and working life. The programme sets out to recognise the talents of all students and to provide opportunities for developing personal responsibility, self-esteem and self-knowledge, and helps students apply what they learn to the real world. The structure of the programme leads to recognition of the students' achievement through the completion of key assignments, tasks and examinations in vocational education and subject specialisms. The modular nature of the programme requires that revised arrangements are put in place for students who are entering Year 2 of the LCA programme in autumn 2020.

LCA Year 2 students will have already received credits for session 1 in 2019/20. As part of the Calculated Grades Model for Leaving Certificate 2020, calculated grades, which will be converted to credit equivalents, will be awarded for the assessment components that were due to be completed in **session 2**, 2019/20. In order to receive these calculated grades, students will have registered on the Calculated Grade Student Portal. As usual, credits for successful module completion will be awarded through the LCA portal.

Revised arrangements for students completing LCA Year 2 in 2020/21

Modules for LCA Year 2

- All learning outcomes for each module should be completed
- Students should complete a minimum of **two** Key Assignments to achieve the credits available for each module **and** maintain a minimum of 90% attendance
- If a student cannot attend the school due to a valid Covid-19 related restriction, the school should be flexible in its approach to monitoring and recording attendance
- In the event of a localised closure where learning is progressed remotely, schools should ensure that an appropriate system is in place to track students' engagement.

Student Tasks for LCA Year 2

- The number of tasks due for completion in session 3 will be reduced from **three** to **two** by requiring students to complete **either** the Vocational Education Task **or** the Contemporary Issues Task **and** the Practical Achievement Task.
- Students will complete Personal Reflection (Part Two) in session 4.

Final Examinations for LCA Year 2

- Subject-specific information about the written examinations and other assessment components will be provided before the start of the school year.

Advice for LCA Year 1 for the Academic Year 2020/21

Transition and induction programme

Owing to the school closure, students and their parents/guardians may not have had an opportunity to engage with transition into the LCA programme. Therefore, the induction programme that is routinely provided by the school for LCA Year 1 students is particularly relevant.

Curriculum

As outlined in Department *Circular 0061/2019*, four revised LCA module descriptors were due to be introduced in September 2020. These were: *English and Communications*, *Mathematical Applications*, *Introduction to Information and Communication Technology*, and *Information and Communication Technology – Specialism*. The introduction of these revised module descriptors **has been deferred until September 2021**. Teachers should continue to teach the original module descriptors for these subjects.

Satisfactory completion of modules

To achieve credits for the satisfactory completion of modules, LCA Year 1 students should complete all four Key Assignments and a minimum of 90% attendance should be maintained. If a student cannot attend the school due to a valid Covid-19 related restriction, the school should be flexible in its approach to monitoring and recording attendance. In the event of a localised closure where learning is progressed remotely, schools should ensure that an appropriate system is in place to track students' engagement.

In the current climate, it may be necessary to adapt how a key assignment is completed. This can be accommodated through individual teachers planning for key assignments in a way that takes the learning environment and Covid-19 restrictions into consideration. For instance, it may be possible to organise a virtual tour of a local library or restaurant rather than taking students on an out-of-school visit. Evidence of student learning in key assignments can be stored in hard copy or electronically using the school learning management system.

Student tasks

There is **no** change to the schedule for the completion of Student Tasks for LCA Year 1 students. LCA Year 1 in session 2 will be completing Personal Reflection Task (Part One). When planning learning activities, teachers need to consider how the skills of student reflection are being developed and will need to ensure that sufficient opportunities are provided for students to reflect on their learning over the year.

Final examination in languages

In instances where students are due to complete the final examinations in a language at the end of session 2 in May 2021, planning for teaching, learning and assessment should continue as normal.

Additional details of the arrangements for LCA Year 1 and Year 2 in 2020/21 are available at www.gov.ie/backtoschool .

3.9 Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme

A key aspect of the Leaving Certificate programme is the link modules that students complete over the two years. Learning in the two modules, *Preparation for the World of Work* and *Enterprise Education* is active and experiential. In the *Preparation for the World of Work* modules, students research and investigate local employment opportunities, develop job seeking skills such as letter writing, CV presentation, and interview techniques; gain valuable practical experience of the world of work; interview and work shadow a person in a career area that interests them. In *Enterprise Education*, students are involved in organising visits to local business and community enterprises; meeting and interviewing enterprising people on site and in the classroom; planning and undertaking interesting activities that build self-confidence, creativity, initiative and develop teamwork, communication and computer skills.

It is acknowledged that the active methodologies and community engagement that are central to learning in the LCVP have been restricted during the last school year and may continue to be restricted over the coming months. Students may not have been able to complete their work experience or other activities which support them in completing elements of their portfolio, including, for example, an enterprise activity or visiting local enterprises to complete research.

Given the likely reduced access to work experience, and on-site visits, schools will have to adjust activities and learning experiences to reflect the situation their students may face. These adjustments may involve reducing the number of external visits, replacing external

interviews with online/virtual ones, and developing alternative proposals for enterprise projects.

As the portfolio is worth 60% of the final assessment for the LCVP, greater flexibility will be required in planning for the learning outcomes in a way that supports teachers in engaging with activities most suited to their context and the COVID-19 public health advice in place at the time, particularly in relation to engagement with the wider community.

Accordingly, adjustments to the final assessment for LCVP will be made; these include a reduction in the number of portfolio items to be completed, additional choice on the examination paper and the earlier issue to schools of the case study.

3.10 Work Experience and Co-curricular activities

3.10.1 Co-curricular Activities

One of the key features of TY, LCA and the Leaving Certificate Vocational (LCVP) programmes in schools is the extensive co-curricular and extracurricular activities that support the programmes. These aspects often involve students travelling to locations outside schools on private or public transport to participate in the activities.

Restrictions that may exist in the context of Covid-19 could place considerable constraints on these aspects of a school's programme. In planning for these activities, alternative arrangements should be considered. For example, many of the usual providers of these activities/experiences have adapted to providing online access.

3.10.2 Work Experience

Two main approaches are taken by schools in scheduling work experience.

Block release: In cases where it is possible for students to safely complete their work experience in accordance with public health advice and social distancing requirements, they should do so. Where it is not possible for all or some students to do so during the block(s), they should attend timetabled classes as normal during the designated weeks.

One-day per week: While this approach is not encouraged, it is noted that many schools have adopted it. It is highly unlikely that students will be able to complete work experience on this basis in the earlier part of the school year. Students should be provided with access to asynchronous and/or synchronous teaching and learning opportunities on the scheduled work experience day. Attendance should be checked

and activities including the completion of work preparation modules, careers investigations, and journals should be planned for the day.

3.10.3 Visiting Speakers

A common feature of TY, LCA and LCVP programmes is the involvement of visiting speakers or outside agencies in delivering talks or programmes to students. In this regard:

- Virtual Visits' rather than face-to-face visits should be considered and appropriate arrangements put in place
- Visits to the school during the school day should be by prior arrangement
- Prior to the visit, speakers should comply with any advance health requirements in place at the time
- Visitors should be received at a specific contact point (for example the school office) and should be subject to the same controls that apply to staff entering the school
- Speakers should meet initially with teachers and the meeting should be facilitated in a way that observes social distancing requirements
- Physical distancing in line with the relevant health requirements should be maintained
- Visiting speakers' engagement with students should be in line with the school policy on visiting speakers and *Circular Letter 0043/2018* available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/88ca5c44bb1d45e09c2ac3152ea5bcb0/>

4. Assessment

4.1 Introduction

As schools begin the process of re-opening and students begin to re-engage in their learning, school management and staff will already have a school calendar that includes a schedule for in-school assessments. It will be important that school management and teaching staff are mindful of the purpose, modes and frequency of assessment planned for this school year. Assessment of students' learning should be geared towards the development of skills and competences that promote students' appreciation and understanding of their responsibility for their learning and their own role in the assessment of that learning.

4.2 In-school assessment

Assessment is integral to the teaching and learning process and is essential to inform effective planning to progress learning for all students. All assessment of students' learning should serve a clear purpose and be focused on improvement. It is, however, important that over-assessment is avoided and that an appropriate balance is achieved between formative and summative assessment. The provision of timely feedback to students will be particularly important in this school year given the context where, during the school closure period, the opportunities for and quality of feedback to students on their work varied from school to school and sometimes from subject to subject.

The assessment of students' learning should reflect the aims and learning outcomes of specifications, priority learning units and syllabuses as relevant, ensuring accessibility to the mode of assessment for all students. In planning for assessment, the use of self-assessment by learners of their own progress, as well as peer assessment could be usefully included as a strategy to support assessment activities.

4.3 Assessment for certification

Schools and teachers are best placed to plan for the delivery of the curriculum in ways that meet the needs and abilities of their students. They have significant autonomy in deciding how to sequence and pace learning for students in their school. Therefore, no one-size-fits-all approach involving a centrally prescribed adjustment of the curriculum and courses of study would be effective for students taking the certificate examinations in 2021. Consequently, the most appropriate way to reflect and take account of the challenges for students that have occurred in 2019/20 and may occur in 2020/21 is to incorporate adjustments to the certificate examinations in 2021. As the loss of learning

through school closures will have affected students' engagement with their course of study in different ways, the adjustments that will be put in place will play to student strengths by leaving intact the familiar overall structure of the examinations, while incorporating additional choice. In some cases, the adjustment measures will provide more time for tuition by, for example, reducing preparatory work for practical examinations. In addition, briefs for coursework will be issued early in the school term to provide certainty for students.

As assessment practices at the end of junior cycle and senior cycle are centrally determined, it is possible to adjust the arrangements to take account of the general loss of learning opportunity for those students who are due to sit leaving certificate and junior cycle examinations in 2021.

Changes to the national assessment arrangements have been made with due regard for the principles of equity, fairness and integrity as they relate to students, subjects and year-to-year comparisons.

The flexibilities will be proportionate to the loss of learning that students have experienced and will be offered within the following parameters:

- There will be the same focus on assessment of skills and the same overall standards as in other years
- There will be an assessment of a breadth of knowledge content that is proportionate to the reasonably expected impact of Covid-19 on the capacity of students and teachers to complete the full curriculum over the course of the cycle
- There will be changes to some coursework components for some subjects; for example, adjustments to the volume of preparatory work to be undertaken, the number of tasks and possible synergies across the components involved
- There will be changes to some written examination papers, such as adjustments regarding the choice available to students
- Overall, the changes, whether reduction in course content, or through course study time, can be viewed as reflecting and recognising a loss of learning opportunities in the 2019/20 school year in a fair manner, with some contingency for future learning loss that may occur during the 2020/21 school year also built in.

All elements of the approach outlined above are intended to provide clarity and certainty, to support student wellbeing, and to facilitate ease of communication in the exceptional circumstances prevailing.

4.3.1 Arrangements for Junior Cycle 2021

In May 2020 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published revised arrangements for classroom-based assessments (CBAs) for students entering third year in 2020/21. **The number of CBAs to be completed by junior cycle students entering third year in the school year 2020/21 has been reduced and the dates for the completion of CBA1 for that group of students has been extended into the new school year.** (*CBA revised arrangements for cohort of third-year students 2020/21*)
[ncca cbas-for-student-cohort-2018-2021](https://www.ncca.ie/en/cbas-for-student-cohort-2018-2021)

Detailed arrangements in relation to the junior cycle certificate examination in 2021 will be made available before the start of the school year.

4.3.2 Arrangements for Leaving Certificate 2021

In light of the disruption in learning for those students entering sixth-year in 2020, it is recognised that changes to the Leaving Certificate examinations in 2021 are necessary. This includes changes to the assessment and examination arrangements for the **established Leaving Certificate, the Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP).**

One of the key considerations in making the adjustments has been the need to maintain familiarity with the structure of the question papers and the assessment components for both students and teachers. Therefore, there will be no need to issue sample papers to reflect the changes that have been made. The adjustments have, where possible, increased the choice for students and/or reduced preparation time for additional components, thereby freeing up time for teaching and learning. In addition, the revised arrangements take into consideration advice on the use of practical equipment in schools.

In the case of non-curricular languages, no adjustments will be made.

The changes will be broadly proportionate but may vary, taking account of specific context, across modules, subjects and programmes. However, in all cases they will involve some combination of one or more of the following adjustments in 2021:

- Students will be provided with greater choice in written examinations; this will be supported through the provision of additional questions and/or adjustments to mandatory sections on written examination papers
- The dates on which coursework briefs are issued will be brought forward to allow for additional preparation time for students and teacher

- In some subjects, adjustments to the requirements for practical examinations will be made; these adjustments will reflect the need to manage access to equipment to complete the preparatory aspects.

Detailed information for each subject will be available before the start of the school year 2020/21..

5. Further advice and support for schools and teachers

5.1. Introduction

While it is expected that there will be a full re-opening of schools by September, schools will need to be ready for a situation where there may be a need to provide for students who cannot attend school for health reasons related to Covid-19, or a situation where a school may be faced with closure (in whole or in part) for a period during which the curriculum will need to be delivered remotely.

5.2 Supporting students ‘at very high risk’ to COVID-19

There may be some students for whom return to school at the end of August/ early September may not be appropriate because the relevant public health guidelines indicate they are at “very high risk”. Overall responsibility for ensuring that such students receive appropriate support to engage adequately with learning remains with the school in which they are enrolled. Regular and ongoing communication between school and home will be essential to support the student’s engagement with their learning and their continuous connection with their classmates and school community.

Additional supports will be provided for these students from within the staffing resources of the school. It may also be possible to utilise support from teachers who are assessed as ‘very high risk’ and who are available to work from home. Schools will have discretion to manage and redistribute their support resources in order to best meet the learning needs of their students, including students at ‘very high risk’ to COVID-19.

Under the direction of the school principal, the relevant support teacher should:

- Liaise with the relevant subject teachers, class tutor/year head, and Special Education Team (SET) where relevant, regarding curricular content and classwork
- Access relevant learning resources, including those produced by the subject teachers as well as other externally produced resources such as those on *Scoilnet*
- Provide the student with individualised support for his/her learning; this may include devising of an individual support plan for the student in cooperation with the relevant subject teachers, class tutor/year head and, where relevant, the SET
- Increase the student’s autonomy, motivation, agency and wellbeing
- Improve the student’s capacity to become a self-directed learner

- Support the development of the student’s digital competence where necessary
- Avail of the communication / learning platform used by the student’s school to ensure ongoing contact between the student and his/her school and to facilitate some engagement with his/her subject teachers and classmates.

5.3 Supporting teaching and learning in the home where there is localised full school closure

During the period of school closures, the Department provided schools in the primary and special school sector and at post-primary level with a series of “[Continuity of Schooling Guidance](https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html)” documents to help education professionals and parents to support children learning in a remote environment. Those documents are listed below and are available at: <https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/continuity-of-schooling/continuity-of-schooling.html>

Guidance on Continuity of Schooling for Primary and Post-primary Schools 02 April 2020

Guidance on Continuity of Schooling: Supporting Pupils at Risk of Educational Disadvantage - for Post-Primary Schools 22 April 2020

Guidance on Continuity of Schooling: Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs- for Post-Primary Schools 22 April 2020

The events surrounding COVID-19 and the public health restrictions which resulted in the emergency closure of schools to learners have highlighted the absolute necessity for schools to be agile in how they can provide for continuity of teaching and learning in the future. The continuity of teaching and learning during the emergency period was achieved with significant additional effort from all school staff working remotely to ensure pupils were supported during this time. Most schools put in place arrangements to communicate with students and parents, demonstrating innovation and resilience by providing flexible local responses.

As a contingency for any such reoccurrence of closures, whether localised or on a bigger scale, to ensure compliance with any public health restrictions, it is vital that schools are prepared. The Department is updating its *Continuity of Schooling Guidance* documents to support schools in responding in an agile way in the event of localised school closure. Specifically, schools will be provided with guidance and support to put in place arrangements to facilitate communication with and between staff, between staff and learners and to facilitate development of online approaches to remote and blended learning in the event that such is required.

In circumstances where there is clear public health advice from HSE Public Health that a school should close, schools will be supported to:

- Make best use of guidance materials which were already provided to all schools during the period of school closures and will be further updated to reflect learning during the emergency period
- Advise parents/guardians to where students are at in their learning
- Develop subject specific lesson activities to be carried out at home
- Have a system in place for subject teachers to engage with students regularly during the week and to provide them with feedback on their work
- Contact parents/guardians at regular intervals to offer feedback on their son's/daughter's engagement and progress in learning
- Have a system in place to engage with students regularly
- Make best use of digital technologies to allow continued engagement with students and their learning.

In the case where a school may have to close for a period in line with public health advice, school leaders and teachers will need to work collaboratively to put in place systems and approaches to:

- Advise parents/guardians of where students are at in terms of their learning
- Develop subject specific lesson activities to be carried out at home
- Have a system in place for subject teachers to engage with students regularly during the week, for example, during timetabled class periods and to provide them with feedback on their work
- Consider how best digital technology can be used to continue to engage with their students and to support their learning.

5.4 Continuing professional development (CPD) and the Teacher Education Support Services

During the period of school closure, the Teacher Education Support Services continued to support schools, adapting their work programmes and introducing new supports required for teaching in a distance learning environment. The principles underpinning effective CPD provision will continue to inform the design and delivery of all elements of the support services' professional learning events over the new school year. Professional learning events will reflect the pedagogical environments in which teachers will be working from September, the restrictions that may need to be applied, for health reasons,

regarding attendance at CPD events, and the need to minimise, insofar as possible, any disruption to class contact time over the coming school year.

5.4.1 Principles underpinning how TES Support Services will continue to support schools

- The need to protect student-teacher contact time and to minimise disruption to school time
- The need to reflect public health guidelines and advice in any consideration of face-to-face CPD provision
- The need to provide clear and consistent messages to the school system across DE funded and other support services and agencies in order to avoid confusion and duplication of effort and to ensure that supports are provided in an efficient and effective way
- Continued engagement with schools, principals, teachers and the education partners to ensure that the Support Services are able to respond quickly to any emerging demands for support throughout 2020/21
- CPD to support SEN teaching and learning will continue to be designed and delivered in collaboration with the NCSE support service.

5.4.2 CPD for digital approaches to curriculum delivery

PDST, JCT, NCSE, NCGE, Centre for School Leadership (CSL) and National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT) continued to provide a range of supports to schools and school leaders during the school closure period. In preparation for the reopening of schools in September, the PDST digital technologies team has developed an interactive resource for teachers to support teaching, learning and assessment. The NCGE has planned a series of webinars and resource materials to support guidance counsellors. Resource bundles to support school leaders during closures, are available at: <https://www.pdst.ie/post-primary/leadership/leadingcontinuity>
<https://www.pdst.ie/postpost-primary/leadership>

5.4.3 Prioritising other CPD provision for 2020/21

Planned support programmes will be restructured on the basis of DE decisions which alter the existing timeframe for planned curricular and other reforms. While a significant portion of CPD provision is connected to curricular and other reforms, there continues to be a requirement for CPD on a range of issues on a recurring basis annually in schools. Having reviewed this category of CPD provision, it is proposed that schools will continue to require support in relation to a number of priority areas

including:

- Health and Wellbeing including Child Protection
- Leadership
- DEIS/Disadvantage
- Digital Technologies
 - Teacher technical competence
 - Using Digital Technologies in enhancing teaching, learning and assessment
 - Leading teaching and learning in schools (for Principals and school leaders).

The Support Services will continue to liaise with other lead agencies and partners in these priority areas to ensure that support is made available in a targeted, efficient and responsive way. Support will be offered remotely through webinars or through visits, in line with health advice.

5.5 The Inspectorate

The Inspectorate will also support schools and the education system as the return to school takes place. The specific activities included in the Inspectorate's work will be kept under review and will evolve in line with public health advice and the prevailing health circumstances.

The main focus of the Inspectorate's work in the first term of the 2020/2021 school year will be on its advisory work in schools. Through this work, inspectors will support school leaders, teachers, boards of management and school communities to provide effectively for the learning and progression of all children and young people – with a strong focus on the needs of vulnerable learners.

The Inspectorate will also engage in research work through which it will seek to identify and disseminate examples of effective practice where schools have been successful in addressing the needs of students whose schooling has been disrupted and the curricular and other challenges posed by the return to schooling. The research will seek to collect and use the perspectives of teachers, school leaders, parents and students to inform good practice throughout the school system.

The Inspectorate's advisory and research work will be conducted through school visits or remotely in line with public health advice.

Schools will also be offered the opportunity to participate in advisory sessions with inspectors. While the specific focus of each session will be determined by the school

principal and senior management in line with the particular context of each school, possible themes for discussion could include areas such as ensuring that the wellbeing of the school community is supported; identifying the strengths in teaching and learning; or assessing and providing for the current needs of learners.

The Inspectorate will also advise and support schools and centres for education as appropriate in the implementation of public health advice relating to the health, safety and welfare of the school/centre community in the context of guidance from the Department of Health, the Department of Education and other relevant authorities on creating a safe learning and working environment for all.

6. Curricular reforms

6.1 Introduction

Taking account of the loss of in-class time at the end of the 2019/2020 school year, the potential challenges facing schools at the outset of the new school year, and the workload of principals at this time, it is acknowledged that this is not a suitable time for significant curriculum change, particularly at the start of the new school year. In order to support schools in the practicalities of re-engaging with students, a number of key decisions have been taken to pause elements of curriculum change that were due to commence in September 2020.

The curriculum CPD programme provided by the Department's support services has been adapted to provide continued subject, thematic and whole-school CPD through online provision in the earlier part of the school year 2020/21. Details are provided through the websites of the main providers including pdst.ie and jct.ie.

6.2 Junior Cycle

6.2.1 Wellbeing

The new Wellbeing area of learning at Junior Cycle was introduced from September 2017, beginning with a minimum of 300 hours of timetabled engagement over three years in 2017 and scheduled to build up to 400 hours for students entering first year in September 2020. In view of the various challenges facing schools when they resume in September, schools be given the option of an extra year to introduce the 400 hours of timetabled engagement.

6.2.2 History

In October 2019, the Minister for Education announced that History should have special core status within the Framework for Junior Cycle. Prior to this only English, Irish and Mathematics were required subjects for all students, with all other subjects being optional. This decision was advised to schools in February 2020 by circular letter. A programme of CPD was provided by JCT to accommodate teachers teaching the new Junior Cycle History specification for the first time. It is expected that all schools will provide History to all first-year students from September 2020.

The Department has requested the NCCA to develop a short course in History which will be broadly aligned with Level 2 of the National Framework of Qualifications. The short

course will be designed for the small number of students with general learning difficulties/needs in the low mild to high moderate range of ability and will be available for the 2021/2022 school year. Students in the low moderate and severe and profound range of general learning disability will not be required to study History.

6.3 Senior Cycle

6.3.1 Art

The new Leaving Certificate Art specification was due to be implemented for in-coming fifth-year students from September 2020. As the implementation of the revised specification has not yet commenced, its introduction is deferred until September 2021.

6.3.2 Computer Science

Computer Science is due to be rolled out nationally in September 2020. Schools that have elected to introduce the subject from September 2020 can proceed with implementation. Subject choices will have been made by students commencing fifth year this September and to remove a subject option at this point in the year could be a cause of stress for students. A school also has the option to defer implementation. If it chooses to defer, it may offer the subject in September 2021 and avail of the relevant CPD at that stage.

6.3.3 Physical Education (examinable subject)

Leaving Certificate Physical education is due to be rolled out nationally in September 2020. Schools that have elected to introduce the subject from September 2020 can proceed with implementation. Subject choices will have been made by students commencing fifth year this September and to remove a subject option at this point in the year could be a cause of stress for students. A school also has the option to defer implementation. If it chooses to defer, it may offer the subject in September 2021 and avail of the relevant CPD at that stage.

6.3.4 The Physical Education Framework (non-examinable)

The Physical Education Framework replaces guidelines in relation to Physical Education currently set out in the *Rules and Programmes for Secondary Schools*. As previously advised, the Framework is available now to all schools for their consideration in planning Senior Cycle Physical Education; there is no change in this regard.

6.3.5 Leaving Certificate Foreign Languages

New subject specifications for Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian, and Portuguese are due to be implemented in some schools in September 2020. Schools have the discretion to proceed with implementation from this date. If a school that had decided to implement one or more of these specifications in September 2020 now chooses not to do so, it may offer them in September 2021 and avail of the relevant CPD at that stage. It should also be noted that the CPD for these languages will be delivered by Post-Primary Languages Ireland (PPLI).

6.3.6 LCA Module Descriptors

The introduction of the new module descriptors for English & Communications, Mathematical Applications, Introduction to ICT and ICT Specialism is deferred to September 2021. The existing module descriptors in these areas will continue to be available in schools.

END