



April 2020

Dear Sixth Year Student,

I hope you are continuing to stay well during the Covid 19 crises. We are living in uncertain times and consequently we face numerous challenges in our lives. For you the greatest challenges are to stay healthy and to stay focused on preparing for the forthcoming Leaving Certificate examination. This year the challenges associated with the Leaving Certificate are greater than usual as you are forced to study at home without the usual classroom and school- based interactions with your teachers and your peers. This is a significant burden at a crucial time in your lives and it is not what any of us want for you. School management, teachers and your families would dearly love to open the schools and prepare for the commencement of the Leaving Certificate in June as students have done every year since the examination was first introduced in 1925. Unfortunately, this is not possible due to the current public health emergency in Ireland and throughout the world. The sacrifices you are being asked to make now and in the coming months are necessary to protect public health and to save the lives of elderly and vulnerable persons.

On Friday, 10<sup>th</sup> April the Minister for Education and Skills Joe McHugh TD announced that schools would remain closed until further notice. He also announced a series of changes to the 2020 State Examinations as part of measures to respond to Covid-19, including postponement of the Leaving Certificate examinations. The announcement came in response to students and their families seeking clarity in relation to the exams. I am very aware that Leaving Certificate students are experiencing high levels of anxiety and stress due to the shift in the goal post from the beginning of June to late July and this is very understandable. In his press statement the minister said “asking Leaving Certificate students and their families to refocus their attention from June to August is not something we do lightly. I know it will not be easy. However, I believe it is the fairest way of assessing students and giving them certification of achievement in school and a pathway to higher and further education and training, apprenticeship or work.”

The rescheduling of the Leaving Certificate is presented as the least worst option as it allows the examinations to take place in a format which is familiar to students and it maintains the inherent fairness of the marking system which is a recognised hallmark of the Irish Education system. Leaving Cert students throughout the state will sit examinations in the format that they expect and that they have prepared for during the past two years. A two-week period of engagement in school prior to the commencement of the state examinations is envisaged. This will allow you to complete any outstanding work and focus on examination preparation.

The following are the main changes affecting Leaving Certificate students:

- Practical examinations scheduled for 27<sup>th</sup> April to 8<sup>th</sup> May in Engineering, Art Life Sketching and Construction Studies will take place in the late July/August period.
- The new Leaving Certificate exam timetable will be confirmed in early June. The final arrangements for the exams, the exam centres, social distancing and other measures will all be determined by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) on foot of public health advice in June.
- The deadline for the submission of practical projects and course work in Art, Agricultural Science, History, Geography, Music Composition, Construction Studies, Engineering and Home Economics (Textiles) will be immediately prior to the commencement of the written examinations in the late July/August period.
- LCVP Link Modules written examination will be rescheduled for late July/early August.
- Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA)
  - LCA Personal Reflection Task, scheduled for completion by 1 May, will now be completed by the commencement of the written examinations in the late July/August period.
  - LCA Oral Examinations and LCA practical performance tests in Hotel Catering & Tourism and ICT will be rescheduled to late July/August.
- Further information for students about the decisions taken to date with regard to the State Examinations can be found at the [State Examinations Commissions frequently asked questions document](#).

There will be no change to the provision of assistance to SEN students. Reasonable accommodations granted to students will be provided in the usual way. The admissions process for higher education, managed by the Central Applications Office (CAO), will operate as closely as possible to the usual timeframe for offers and the entry date for first year students will be delayed.

During the coming weeks it is crucial that all students at Our Lady's engage fully with remote learning. Work with your teachers to complete course work and revision. Exam preparation is key to success and this is something you must engage with in a constructive manner. Prepare a realistic study plan and do your utmost to adhere to it. Seek guidance from your teachers in relation to prioritising revision topics and course work. Take regular breaks and exercise. Remember to stay connected with your family and friends. Try to avoid the constant barrage of negativity in the media and on social media. This can be energy sapping and very wasteful of your time.

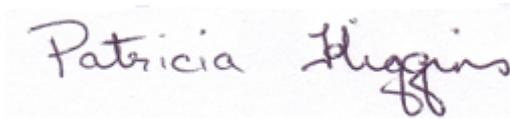
In the coming weeks/months teachers and school management at Our Lady's will continue to work with you and support you as you prepare for the Leaving Certificate examination. As you apply yourself to your studies and exam preparation, I want you to know that the effort you put in now will yield good dividends in the summer. Over the years when I addressed you at assemblies, on school induction days, at Awards Ceremonies I always had one message, and my message to you today remains the same – Do Your Best. Your best is all that is required and it is always good enough.

On Sunday last RTÉ broadcasted a mass celebrated by Most Reverend Kevin Doran (Bishop of Elphin) from the Devine Word Chapel in Maynooth. James Finnegan (a pupil of CBS, Roscommon town) provided the welcome address at the mass and he quoted Emily Dickens who wrote:

Hope' is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul  
And sings the tune without the words  
And never stops—at all—

Throughout our lives we need hope to assist us to surmount obstacles. In the current crises it is reasonable and practical for us to have hope as we see that our sacrifices are making a significant impact in the fight against Covid 19. The curve has been flattened and many lives have been saved. We hope for better days when schools will reopen and when we will welcome students to classrooms and corridors at Our Lady's. We hope for normal interactions and social contact with our peers. Bishop Doran concluded that "hope is an attitude or a virtue that allows us to keep going even when everything is not just fine" because hope is not just about the here and now but about better times in the future. He referred to the St. Paul's reading which offers hope in the risen Christ to all of us. Whatever your challenges in the coming months may you have an abundance of hope and may you have the ability to stay focused and committed to your studies.

I wish you well for your final term at Our Lady's and I look forward to supporting you during the Leaving Certificate examinations in July. Beannacht Dé ort.



Principal