

3rd and 6th year Pre Examinations

Dear Parents and Guardians,

It appears that as of today (12th February) we have no definitive response from the Minister regarding a return to school. An Taoiseach has said that numbers in hospitals are too high and they will have to lower before schools reopen. SEC plans depended on a Feb 1st reopening. Those plans have been shelved and the partners are still dealing with the fundamentals of a new format assessment.

Leaks to newspapers indicate that exam years may return to school over a 3 week period in advance of the Easter Holidays. This means that that our best *guess* for LCs and 3rd years returning is sometime between the 1st and the 8th March.

If traditional 3rd year and 6th year Pre Exams were to be set after a week of class time, we could have exams right up to 19th March with just 8/9 weeks of school to go.

At our latest Year Head review meeting held yesterday, a number of significant issues were highlighted regarding a decision on the 2021 Colaiste Muire Pre Examinations. There were many options to be considered:

- Deciding not to proceed with Mocks this year. The class of 2021 has lost significant tuition time both in fifth year and sixth year. We may decide to prioritise classroom teaching over Mock exams to maximise learning experience and outcomes for this year group, particularly considering the short timeframe between mid-term and Easter. **We felt that some form of written examination with a grade report back to parents will motivate students to study and settle them prior to June exams.**
- Providing remotely delivered Mock examinations. While schools remain closed to mainstream students, a schedule of self-administered trial papers could be communicated to students and parents/guardians. Agreement could be achieved, perhaps on a subject by-subject basis, on whether answering such papers would be by way of closed or open book. **We felt that such exams, even if supervised remotely would not be a worthwhile investment of time. Grade inflation would be a consideration.**
- Utilising commercial providers for examinations shortly after students return – the traditional, format. **The biggest obstacle is the likelihood that the State Examinations Commission will adjusting their exam papers in terms of choice range – so what type of paper do we provide to students?**

We believe that Pre papers are being shared widely on Social Media at this stage. There are also issues with clashes with submission deadlines in e.g. DCG, LCVP, Geography, practice orals etc. Students may find it psychologically challenging to have to sit exams immediately on their return to school and before they have had a chance to re-connect with classroom learning and socialisation.

- Supporting a range of different approaches as decided-upon by each subject department. **We agreed that a common approach would be preferable.**

- Supporting in-class Mock assessments, adapted for double classes where possible, for elements of a new adjusted exam paper following school reopening. **We felt this was the best option, with reporting on VShare to parents. This could be done late March and allow students and colleagues to attend to their own SEC submission deadlines. Not all examinable syllabus has to be tested – but it will motivate students to revise and allow them to practice timing.**

- **We felt that a decision on Pre Exams should be taken at middle management level. We are a school that normally completes its examinations around now. Late Pre Exams are not part of our structure. Given the plethora of options, we felt that an informed decision now, rather than losing more time in consultations later, was preferable.**

The national trend of growing anxiety levels among students is certainly evident in our school. Students need some certainty before the Mid Term Break.

Therefore, following review, we have decided for the reasons above, not to proceed with the usual Pre Examination format for 3rd and 6th years for 2021. We will proceed with teacher assessments, in the form of substantial class based examinations, preferably in doubles as the timetable allows, possibly late March. There will be reporting of grades for examined sections to parents. This depends on the SEC clarifying exam paper adjustments within a reasonable time.

Regards,

FOB