



Student Perspective

Taken from article written by Leaving Certificate Student Meadhbh Brown of St. Leo's College, Carlow for Extra.ie

Plenty of Irish people are missing going for pints with their friends and normal working conditions at the moment, but spare a thought for the sixth year students of 2020 who are studying for the Leaving Certificate.

With all oral and practical examinations cancelled and with uncertainty surrounding the written exams due to take place in June, sixth year students all over Ireland have experienced more disruption than most in recent weeks, and a dark pall of instability hangs over their immediate futures.

Speaking to [Extra.ie](https://www.extra.ie), Leaving Cert student **Meadhbh Browne** described the bizarre nature of the situation she and her classmates have found themselves in, and the difficulty of staying focused amid all the upheaval.



Meadhbh, who is a student at St Leo’s College in Carlow, said the massive change from strictly regimented timetables to total uncertainty about when or if schools will re-open is disconcerting, stating: ‘The situation is OK so far but the uncertainty about the length of time that we will be off for is daunting.

‘For the past six years in school we have always been told when exactly exams and deadlines are and we always follow strict timetables, so this new situation is a total contrast.



‘Personally, I feel as though the Leaving Cert this year will be more of a test of each student’s perseverance and self-motivation, rather than their ability to study’.

On March 19, the Department of Education and Skills announced that all Leaving Certificate and Junior Certificate oral and practical exams [would be cancelled](#), and all students would receive full marks. This decision caused some consternation, as it was argued that students who had studied hard for the exams would be left in the lurch, and some students would gain an unfair advantage.

Initially, Meadhbh was disappointed by the decision, as she explained: ‘When I first heard the news I was devastated. I was immediately reflecting on the hours upon hours of work that I had put in to the oral exam and I felt extremely frustrated.

‘I was so annoyed that people could have done no work at all, yet I poured hours of endless work into this section, just for us all to be awarded the same marks. However, I came around to the understanding that not all of this study would go to waste, and I realised that it was the “least unfair” option. No student is being penalised for the current situation and the top students will still excel in the written exams.’



Meadhbh went on to speak about the difficulty of structuring her time while the schools remain closed, as she and her classmates attempt to balance carrying on with revision and completing the syllabus in various subjects.

Meadhbh said: ‘Being someone who likes a definite time frame, it is hard to balance revision work while also trying to finish the course.’

‘It is difficult not knowing when exactly the Leaving Cert will be, and whether it will go ahead at all. For now, I have plenty of work to keep me motivated with trying to finish the course, but it will definitely be hard to keep going once all we have facing us is endless hours of revision work.’



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When asked if she is concerned that the written exams in June may also be cancelled, Meadhbh said: 'It is not a concern exactly, but all the speculation is hard to filter. It is difficult when family members and friends are presuming that the Leaving Cert will not go ahead, or will be postponed, when really no changes have been made at all.

'I know it is hard for the Department of Education to make a decision now, when the situation can change in a matter of days, but it would be reassuring to receive more updates from them.'

The 18-year-old was full of praise for the support provided to Leaving Cert students by her school, St Leo's, saying: 'All my teachers are sending us plenty of notes and resources, and continue to prescribe homework and revision questions. All the teachers have helped each other out with using the on line methods of teaching, and all are accessible when we have any questions at all.'



Amid all the madness and the uncertainty, Meadhbh and her friends are able to see some silver linings, as she explained: ‘In one way we are lucky. We are the one Leaving Cert year that have the chance to study, but also have plenty of time to exercise and relax.

‘Daily walks definitely help me to study, and I don’t mind studying as much when I have more of a chance to relax in the evening. I feel like this is a chance for all of our mental health to improve, as Leaving Cert students are usually always exhausted and sleep deprived.’

One major downside, however, is being separated from her classmates, an unfortunate necessity that can leave some students feeling isolated and overwhelmed: ‘It is difficult not seeing our friends each day. Lunchtime is always a chance to vent about Leaving Cert stress, and without this it’s easy to feel as though you are the only one finding this year difficult.’ At the time of writing, the Department of Education is planning to go ahead with all written state exams in June, but the global health situation may require that position to change.

Meadhbh Brown

*Leaving Certificate Student
St. Leo’s College, Carlow*