



Circular Letter 0025/2023

**To: The Managerial Authorities of Recognised Primary,
Secondary, Community and Comprehensive Schools and
The Chief Executives of Education and Training Boards**

Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave for Registered Teachers employed in Recognised Primary and Post Primary Schools

The Minister for Education, pursuant to the power contained in Section 24 of the Education Act (as amended), directs employers to implement the procedures as stated, for eligible registered teachers employed in approved teaching posts funded by monies provided by the Oireachtas.

All employers and teachers must adhere to the agreed terms and conditions as stated with immediate effect.

This Circular supersedes all previous Circulars in relation to Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave for teachers employed in recognised primary and post primary schools.

Please ensure that the contents of this Circular are brought to the attention of all members of the Board of Management/Education and Training Boards and all teachers in your employment, including those on leave of absence.

All queries should initially be brought to the attention of the employer who may wish to consult with their representative organisation. Any further queries may be directed to the Department at the following email address: teachersna@education.gov.ie

This Circular can be accessed on the Department's website at gov.ie.

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10th May 2023

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Definitions and Abbreviations

For the purposes of this Circular, the following terms shall have the meanings assigned to them here unless the context indicates otherwise:

‘Back to Back’ Contract – means a contract which follows immediately from the previous contract with no break in service e.g. one contract ends on 31st August and a new contract will begin from 1st September of the same year.

Employer – means an Education and Training Board (ETB) for vocational schools/community colleges, community national schools, and a Board of Management/Manager in the case of primary (excluding community national schools), voluntary secondary, community, and comprehensive schools. The ETB or Board of Management/Manager may delegate as appropriate responsibility for matters set out in this Circular.

ETB – means an Education and Training Board established under and governed according to the Education and Training Boards Act 2013.

On Line Claims System (OLCS) – means the system for recording absences and claiming substitution currently operating in primary, voluntary secondary, community and comprehensive schools.

Paymaster – means the organisation in charge of paying salaries. This is the Department of Education in the case of primary (including community national schools), voluntary secondary, community and comprehensive teachers, and the ETBs or Education Shared Business Services (ESBS) in the case of ETB/vocational/community college teachers.

Recognised School – means a school which is recognised by the Minister for Education in accordance with Section 10 of the Education Act 1998.

School Year – as defined by the Minister for Education from time to time currently beginning on 1st September and ending on 31st August.

Teacher – means a person registered with the [Teaching Council](#).

The Department – means The [Department of Education](#).

1. Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave

- 1.1 Special leave with pay may be granted to a teacher who is called out on a search and rescue operation and is a member of a specific voluntary search and rescue organisation.

2. Eligibility

- 2.1 Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave with pay may be approved by an employer, subject to the teacher meeting the following criteria:-
- a) must have been called out on a search and rescue operation
 - b) must provide their employer with satisfactory documentary evidence of their call-out, as soon as possible after the rescue operation, but no later than one week after their return to work.
 - c) must be a member of a specific voluntary search and rescue organisation (please refer to [paragraph 2.3](#) of this Circular).
 - d) must provide their employer with satisfactory documentary evidence of their current membership of the voluntary search and rescue organisation
- 2.2 Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave is not available where a teacher wishes to attend a training course with a voluntary search and rescue organisation.
- 2.3 To be eligible to avail of Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave, the teacher must be a current member of one of the following voluntary search and rescue organisations:
- Irish Coast Guard
 - Royal National Lifeboat Institution
 - Community Inshore Rescue Service
 - Irish Water Safety
 - Mountain Rescue Ireland
 - Irish Cave Rescue Organisation

3. Entitlement to Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave

- 3.1 A teacher is entitled to avail of a maximum of 5 days Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave in any school year, subject to the criteria at [paragraph 2](#) of this Circular. An absence on Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave for part of a school day, constitutes an absence for a full school day.

4. Application Procedures

- 4.1 A teacher who avails of Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave is required to complete the Application Form at [Appendix A](#) of this Circular. The Application Form should be completed and submitted to the employer as soon as possible, but no later than one week after the teacher's return to work.
- 4.2 Where a teacher is employed by an ETB, there may be an online facility to make application for Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave, rather than completion of the Application Form at Appendix A.

5. Recording of Leave

- 5.1 Following the employer's approval of Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave, the absence must be recorded by the employer in a timely manner on the OLCS/relevant ETB system.

5.2 For schools using the Department's OLCS, Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave is recorded under 'Personal Leave' and then leave sub-category 'Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave'.

6. Status during Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave

6.1 A teacher on Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave, is deemed for all purposes to be in employment at that time, including for remuneration and superannuation. Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave is fully reckonable for seniority and progression on the incremental salary scale.

7. Replacement Teacher

7.1 The employer may appoint a substitute teacher, paid by the Paymaster, while a teacher is absent on Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave, and this must be recorded by the employer on the OLCS/relevant ETB system.

8. Employment while on Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave

8.1 A teacher on Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave may not engage in any type of teaching or other paid employment.

9. Leave Entitlements for Fixed Term/Fixed Purpose Appointments

9.1 A teacher who is on a fixed term/fixed purpose contract of employment shall, during the term of the contract, have full Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave entitlements. The granting or taking of this leave should not affect a fixed term/fixed purpose appointment or the renewing of such an appointment.

9.2 A teacher's entitlement to Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave shall cease on the expiry of a contract and that contract not having been renewed unless that contract is followed directly by a 'back to back' contract in an approved teaching post funded by monies provided by the Oireachtas.

10. Employee Assistance Service

10.1 The [Employee Assistance Service](#), which is currently provided by Spectrum.Life, is available as a supportive resource for teachers. The freephone confidential helpline is 1800 411 057 and is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

11. Data Protection

11.1 All documentation relating to the teacher's absence on Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave must be retained by the employer with the relevant personnel records in a safe and secure manner and in line with the employer's data protection policy and data protection regulations. These records may be selected for inspection by nominated Department officials.

12. Compliance

12.1 Failure to abide with the regulations and procedures set out in this Circular may be dealt with under the agreed disciplinary procedures and may lead to cessation of salary for a teacher or withdrawal of substitute cover for a school.

Appendix A - Application for Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave

The Application Form should be fully completed and submitted to the employer as soon as possible after the rescue operation, but no later than one week after their return to work.

PART 1A – TEACHER APPLICATION

Teacher's Name: _____ Contact No: _____

Home Address: _____

E-mail Address: _____

PPSN: _____

School Name: _____ Roll No: _____

PART 1B – LEAVE DETAILS

Voluntary Search and Rescue Organisation (please tick relevant box)

Irish Coast Guard

Royal National Lifeboat Institution

Community Inshore Rescue Service

Irish Water Safety

Mountain Rescue Ireland

Irish Cave Rescue Organisation

Start date: _____ End date: _____ Duration (Days): _____

No. of days Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave taken to date in this school year: _____

Declaration

I wish to apply for Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave in accordance with Circular 0025/2023. I confirm that the information provided in the application is true and accurate.

I have not exceeded my entitlement to Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave as detailed in Circular 0025/2023.

Signature of Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Data Protection Privacy Statement

The main purpose for which the Department requires you to provide this personal data to your employer is to enable your Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave application to be processed. Your employer will retain your application form and accompanying documents in accordance with their Data Protection policy. Further information in relation to this policy is available on request from your employer.

The Privacy Notice outlining further information in relation to this Application Form can be found on gov.ie. Full details of the Department's Data Protection policy setting out how we will use your personal data as well as information regarding your rights as a data subject are available on gov.ie. Details of this policy are also available in hard copy from Teacher/SNA Terms & Conditions Section, Department of Education, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath, N37 X659, upon request.

PART 2– EMPLOYER DECISION

I certify that I have approved/refused (delete as appropriate) the Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave in accordance with Circular 0025/2023. The following documents have been retained on file for audit purposes:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1) Application for Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave under Circular 0025/2023 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2) Documentary evidence of teacher's call-out | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3) Documentary evidence of voluntary search and rescue organisation membership (as specified in Circular) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4) Copy of Decision Notice issued to teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Approved Voluntary Search and Rescue Leave has been recorded on the OLCS/relevant ETB system | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Signature: _____ Date: _____
(Employer)

Application Form/Supporting Documentation should NOT be submitted to the Department of Education. They should be retained in the school/ETB with any other relevant documentation for record and audit purposes with the relevant personnel records.