



## Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit

State Examinations Commission

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S12/24

### Leaving Certificate (Established) Examinations 2024; Oral Examinations in Irish and the Modern Foreign Languages

#### **TO THE BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT/AUTHORITIES OF SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS AND CHIEF EXECUTIVES OF ETB'S AND MANAGEMENT OF OTHER CENTRES OF EDUCATION PROVIDING LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS IN 2024**

For the 2024 Leaving Certificate (Established), Oral examinations will be held in Irish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese.

Circular **S84/23**, which is available ([HERE](#)) announced the timing of the delivery of the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations for the 2024 Leaving Certificate.

The purpose of the circular is to provide school authorities with further details of the arrangements for the conduct of the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations and to provide instructions as to what schools are required to do now. You are asked to note the contents of this circular and to bring it to the attention of relevant personnel in your school.

As previously announced, these examinations will be held for a further year during the first week of the Easter holiday period pending a full review of the timing of the Orals. For 2024, the relevant dates are **Saturday 23 March to Thursday 28 March 2024** inclusive.

The background to the arrangements this year is as follows;

- Prior to the pandemic, the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations in any given year were held either **before** or **after** the school Easter holidays, depending on how early or late Easter fell in that year.
- For the first time in 2022, the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations took place outside of school time over the first week of the school Easter holidays. This change in timing was made in response to the need to take steps to limit teacher absences from schools, given challenges associated with sourcing substitute teachers. It was intended to minimise further disruption to teaching and learning in schools and in particular for those candidates preparing for their examinations.
- Following a preliminary review, the SEC extended the arrangements that applied in 2022 for the Oral examinations in Irish and the Modern Foreign Languages for a further year to the 2023 Leaving Certificate.

- In 2023, it was possible to deliver these examinations for all candidates within the Easter holiday period due to the positive response to the SEC's recruitment efforts. Nonetheless, the SEC is aware of the mixed views of stakeholders about the timing of these examinations at Easter in 2023 and also in school time prior to the pandemic.
- The SEC is conducting a much more extensive evaluation of the timing of these examinations, involving all of the stakeholders, in order to fully assess the issues associated with the timing of the Oral examinations. As an input to the evaluation, the SEC has engaged the University of Galway to undertake research to explore parent, student, teacher, examiner, and school leadership opinions about the timing of these examinations.
- Following the completion of the wider evaluation process the SEC will provide advice to the Minister on the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations in the future.
- At this time, this work is ongoing. In order to provide certainty to the system, including for candidates preparing for the 2024 Leaving Certificate, the SEC believes it is preferable to extend the Easter holiday timing for a further year.

The SEC is extremely grateful for the cooperation it receives from thousands of teachers each year to undertake the critical work of examining. School leaders are of course aware of the challenges in recent years in the recruitment and retention of teachers as Oral examiners and of the impact on the system when there are not enough examiners.

Our objective is to substantially increase the numbers of teachers involved in examinations work so that the experience is a positive one which greatly enhances teacher professional competence as well as earning power. We are again calling on school leaders to actively support our recruitment efforts this year in promoting the value of examining roles for the State Examinations to your staff which include developing the quality of their teaching as well as their assessment competence. The SEC will be seeking the active assistance and support of the second-level school system in ensuring that we will have sufficient examiners available to conduct these examinations in 2024. In particular, we expect that releasing examiners for a one-day training conferences will not be any impediment to participation.

### **Pastoral Support for Candidates**

An additional five Examination Aide days will be available for the 2024 examinations so that school authorities can appoint a member of staff to provide pastoral support to candidates to ensure their attendance at the time of the delivery of the Oral examinations over the Easter holiday period.

## **1. GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE CONDUCT OF THE ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

This section contains important information for you on the operation of the examinations;

- The examinations will be conducted by visiting examiners, recruited, trained and appointed to schools by the SEC.
- Examiners will be assigned a school or a list of schools in which they will deliver the Oral examinations over the designated examination period.
- From Wednesday 28 February, designated examiners will contact the schools to which they are assigned to advise them of the days they intend to visit the school to deliver the examinations, and the number of candidates they will examine each day.
- Most examiners have been assigned a full 5-day itinerary (in the period from Saturday 23 March to Thursday 28 March inclusive) to cover all of the schools to which they have been assigned. This

greatly limits their flexibility. Your co-operation in relation to accommodating examiners on the particular days they intend to visit the school is appreciated.

- Examiners have been instructed not to examine more than a set number of candidates on each day. The examinations will be delivered in the normal hours of a full school day, in as far as is possible.
- Given that all of the examinations are being delivered in the same assessment window, it is highly likely that it will be necessary to accommodate a number of examiners on the same day in your school.
- Schools are asked to be cognisant of the impact of the scheduling on candidates, in particular those entered for Oral examinations in multiple languages. Please see Section 4 below.
- There should be a designated Examination Aide assigned to deal with the Oral examinations to act as the coordinator and central point of contact for these examinations. (See Section 2 below re supports for schools.)
- Examiners should be provided with an out-of-hours contact number for the Examinations Aide for the Oral examinations in case they need to get in touch for any emergency issues arising over the duration of the examinations. Examiners will also be instructed to provide their contact details to the school.

### **Use of Contingency Days**

Decisions on the use of the two assigned contingency days - Wednesday 17 and Thursday 18 April - will be made by the SEC and will be approved only in exceptional circumstances.

- Holding examinations on these days will require the examiner to be released from their own school to deliver the examinations on these contingency days; therefore, use of these days will be considered only in the most exceptional circumstances.
- Examiners do not have discretion to arrange the examinations on these days.
- Individual schools must liaise with the SEC in relation to arranging examinations on these days.
- Examinations will only be arranged on these days in exceptional circumstances where the issue is beyond the control of the candidate and the school.
- Decisions on the use of these contingency days will be made by the SEC where exceptional and extraordinary circumstances have occurred, necessitating the scheduling of examinations on a contingency day(s).
- The SEC will need to be satisfied that it is not practicable to hold the examinations without availing of a contingency day(s).

### **Specific information in relation to Leaving Certificate Irish Common Oral Examination 2024**

*Please bring the following to the attention of candidates.*

#### **Section 4: The Picture Sequence**

In accordance with the document, *Assessment Arrangements for Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate Examinations 2024*, the candidate will have prepared 10 Picture Sequences from the 20 Picture Sequences 2024. The candidate must give a list of the titles of the 10 Picture Sequences that he/she has prepared to the examiner at the beginning of his/her Oral examination. At the beginning of Section 4: The Picture Sequence, the candidate will be asked to choose at random one Picture Sequence from the 20 Picture Sequences. If the title of that Picture Sequence is on the candidate's list, he/she will keep that Picture Sequence. If the Picture Sequence chosen is not on the candidate's list, the candidate will be allowed to

choose another Picture Sequence until such time as the Picture Sequence chosen is on the candidate's list.

## **2. SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS**

The SEC provides financial support for schools in the administration of the annual Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations. Under the current scheme, school authorities have discretion to engage an Examinations Aide for a period of 15 days each year to assist the Principal during the state examinations or to fully substitute for the Principal if they are unavailable for any reason. Additional days are also available to schools based on the number of examination candidates and the duration of the timetable in that school. The Examination Aide days are to be used for both the written examinations and the related assessment components.

As was the case in 2023, in recognition of the changed workload associated with this Easter model of this delivery, an additional 8 Examination Aide days will be available to schools with 120 Leaving Certificate candidates or fewer while 10 days will be available to those schools with in excess of 120 Leaving Certificate candidates.

The provision of these additional Examination Aide days is intended to act as a support to school leaders at examination time in order to alleviate some of the administrative burden associated with examinations. **Principals are not required to be in attendance in school on these days in the Easter holidays and are empowered to assign a member of teaching staff to discharge the Examination Aide days in respect of these examinations.**

In addition to the examinations aide resource provided for the administration of the Orals the SEC is introducing a further resource for school authorities for the 2024 Oral examinations, where an additional five Examination Aide days will be available so that school authorities can appoint a member of staff to provide pastoral support to candidates and to ensure their attendance at the time of the delivery of the Oral examinations over the Easter holiday period.

The Pastoral Support resource is in addition to the examinations aide resource provided for the administration of the Orals. In line with the general arrangements for the Examinations Aide model, discretion as to who to appoint rests with the school principal. In considering appointments school principals should note;

- The pastoral support role is separate to the examination aide resource role.
- The person undertaking the pastoral support role will be deputising for the principal.
- The person is best placed to help and support students, including managing attendance, at the time of the Orals over the Easter holidays.
- In this context, it will be expected that this person will monitor candidate attendance over the period of the orals examinations.
- The person will follow up in instances where candidates have not attended for the oral examinations.

It will be expected that the person selected for this role will make themselves known to the candidates in your school prior to the examinations so that the candidates can contact them when necessary.

Reasonable additional costs specifically incurred in relation to light, heat, cleaning, caretaking within schools, associated with the Oral examinations taking place in the Easter holidays will be reimbursed by SEC.

To facilitate attendance by candidates reliant on the school transport scheme, schools can arrange taxi services for the Oral examinations during the Easter Holidays where necessary and to recover the costs from SEC. Schools are asked to facilitate the attendance of candidates using taxi services in the following limited circumstances. The candidate must:

- be eligible for school transport under the terms of the Department’s School Transport Scheme and
- be availing of school transport in the current school year for whom transport services will not be available over the Easter holiday period
- have to attend for an examination event over this period.

The SEC will reimburse schools for reasonable costs of such services on the production of valid receipts.

Full details of the supports available to schools this year to support the running of all aspects of the examinations including details of how to claim will issue to schools in due course.

### **3. ORDER OF MERIT LIST FOR THE ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

In line with the SEC’s longstanding practice in the Oral examinations, an Order of Merit list is required to be prepared showing the school’s estimate of the oral proficiency of each candidate. This will be required only in the exceptional circumstances where a recording of a candidate’s Oral examination cannot be accessed. To facilitate the preparation of an Order of Merit list, copies of form ML10/BT10 are available [here](#). School authorities should ensure that the forms ML10/BT10 are completed at the time of the Oral examinations and retained in the schools. Where this form is required by the SEC we will contact you to ask for it to be submitted. **The forms should not be routinely sent to the SEC nor should they be given to the examiners.**

Please use a separate form for each language.

Please place the names of the pupils in each Leaving Certificate class on the enclosed forms in order of merit according to the school’s estimate of proficiency. When completing the ML10/BT10 forms please use the following symbols:

A.L. = Higher Level	G.L. = Ordinary Level
B.L. = Foundation Level	M = Mixed class

All that is required is an Order of Merit; do not award any marks.

### **4. ORDER OF ENTRY OF CANDIDATES (ORAL EXAMINATIONS).**

On arrival at the school on the first day of their assignment, examiners should be given a list showing the order in which candidates will present for the examinations. Examiners will have informed the school in advance of the number of candidates that they will examine each day. Any timetable made out by the

school, therefore, can only be approximate. While every effort will be made to hold the examinations as close to the designated time as possible, it is really important that candidates be made aware that they will not necessarily be examined at that specific time.

Consideration should be given, where practicable, to candidates who are due to take more than one examination. In scheduling the examinations, the Examinations Aide should seek to avoid circumstances in which a candidate is taking two examinations on one day, while noting that this may not always be possible. Under no circumstances, should a candidate be scheduled to take more than two examinations on one day.

## **5. RECORDING OF THE ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

Digital Voice Recorders (DVRs) will be used to record the Oral examinations in all languages. Examiners will be provided with the equipment that they need to record each examination for later use such as monitoring, for quality assurance purposes and appeals. Schools and candidates are prohibited from making their own recordings (See also note 10 below).

## **6. ATTENDANCE AT THE ORAL EXAMINATIONS**

On their arrival at the school on the first day of their assignment the examiner should be asked to provide identification. Any advising examiners from the SEC who visit the school should also be asked for identification.

SEC advising examiners may visit the school over the course of the assignment to advise and support the work of the examiner. This will require their attendance in the room during the examinations.

The Manager/Principal (or his/her appointed representative) may, in exceptional circumstances on instruction from the SEC, be present during the examinations.

It is also expected that the Examination Aide will maintain a presence in the vicinity, as appropriate, during these examinations.

## **7. ILLNESS, BEREAVEMENT TRANSFERS AND EXTERNAL CANDIDATES**

### **7.1 Absence of a Candidate through illness/bereavement**

It is intended to initiate late examinations from Monday 13 May to Friday 17 May 2024, for situations where a candidate is absent through illness or bereavement at the time the examinations are held. Medical certificates or similar documents should not be given to the examiner.

An application for such arrangements must be made by the school authorities and must be supported by medical evidence or evidence of bereavement to reach the SEC on or before 12 April 2024, using the Late Application form which will be available on our website [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie) under the Examination Information section, prior to **22 March 2024**.

It will not be possible to make alternative arrangements for any candidate other than those mentioned above. Medical certification or evidence of bereavement is required in all circumstances.

## **7.2 Transfer of Candidates**

The Orals Section of the SEC should be notified immediately of any candidate transferring from, or to, your school and the name and candidate number and details of the other school should be given.

## **7.3 External Candidates**

All candidates who do not attend your school but who may wish to attend for the purpose of the examinations are required by the SEC to have received prior permission. On the understanding that such permission is received, the SEC will make appropriate arrangements with the candidates concerned.

## **8. MULTIPLE SUBJECT EXAMINERS IN THE SAME SCHOOL**

Where two (or more) examiners for the same language have been appointed to one school, candidates must present for examination to the examiner to whom they have been assigned.

## **9. GROUP MEETING WITH CANDIDATES**

In light of the revised arrangements for the delivery of these examinations outside of school time during the Easter holidays, it is not practicable to hold the usual group meeting with candidates in advance of the examinations commencing. Information in relation to the 2024 Oral examinations is available on the SEC website at [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie). You are advised to ensure that this information is brought to the attention of all candidates in advance of the examinations.

## **10. MOBILE PHONES/RECORDING/ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

Candidates should be instructed by the school authority that **mobile phones and/or other recording/electronic devices, other than recording by the examiner, are prohibited in the examination room** and that such devices are to be left outside.

## **11. REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS**

On arrival examiners should be provided with details of any candidate with a visual, speech or hearing impairment. They should also be advised of any specific circumstances where candidates have been granted reasonable accommodations to access these examinations under the scheme of Reasonable Accommodations including those that may require the support of an additional person during the examinations. Schools are advised that they may put practical measures in place such as timetabling the candidate(s) last in the order of entry.

## **12. CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE ORAL EXAMINATIONS RESULTS**

The examinations will be conducted entirely by the examiners who, subject to monitoring by the SEC, will decide the marks to be assigned to the candidates. The marks assigned are strictly confidential and may be communicated only to the SEC. Schools are advised that examiners and advising examiners are

expressly prohibited from divulging any information with regard to candidates' performance in the Oral examinations. Therefore, examiners should not be asked about the performance of candidates.

### **13. ENQUIRIES**

Issues of concern in relation to these examinations should be made by School Management or his or her appointed representative directly to the Orals or Practicals Section of the SEC as soon as they come to light.

Queries related to the Oral examinations should be directed by email to [orals@examinations.ie](mailto:orals@examinations.ie) or by telephone to 090 6442741.

It is noted that the period during which examinations are being held can give rise to unexpected issues or concerns. Over the course of the window for the conduct of these examinations, staff of the SEC will be on hand to address these issues as and when they arise.

**Richard Dolan**  
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**State Examinations Commission**  
**February 2024**