



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission
Corr na Madadh, Baile Átha Luain, Co. na hIarmhí
Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath.N37TP65

S84/23

**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT IN RELATION TO ORAL EXAMINATIONS IN IRISH AND
MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR LEAVING CERTIFICATE 2024**

**TO THE BOARDS OF MANAGEMENT/AUTHORITIES OF POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND OTHER
ENTITIES RECOGNISED BY THE SEC TO HOLD THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE ESTABLISHED
EXAMINATIONS**

1. Purpose of Circular

The purpose of this circular is to:

- Advise that, under a further extension of the arrangements originally introduced in 2022, the 2024 Leaving Certificate Oral examinations will be delivered during the first week of the Easter Holidays pending the completion of the review of the timing of the Orals examinations by the State Examinations Commission (SEC).
- Provide some preliminary information on the arrangements for the Oral examinations
- Provide information in relation to the recruitment of Oral examiners and seek the assistance of schools with examiner recruitment
- Outline the contingency arrangements that will apply in the event that the number of examiners is insufficient to conduct the examinations as scheduled.
- Outline the additional supports that will be available to schools.

The 2024 Leaving Certificate Music Practical Performance Tests will again be held in school term after the Easter holidays. A separate circular will issue in relation to Music examinations for 2024 giving operational details of the examinations and recruitment details for examiners.

2. Timing of the 2024 Oral Examinations at Easter for a further year

For the 2024 Leaving Certificate, the arrangements that applied in 2023 to the delivery of the Oral examinations in Irish and the Modern Foreign Languages are being extended for a further year. The 2024 Oral examinations will be undertaken by SEC appointed examiners in schools in the early part of the Easter holiday period from **Saturday 23 March to Thursday 28 March 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.

3. Key Points

- The model of delivery for 2024 will be the same as the model for the Oral examinations in 2023.
- The examiner training conferences for the 2024 Oral examinations will continue to be held in school time and attendance at these conferences is mandatory, noting that paid substitution is available for this and other examination related absences.
- Scheduling the examinations over the first week of the Easter holidays will limit teacher absences from school (given the current challenges associated with sourcing substitute teachers). Furthermore, it assists in minimising disruption to teaching and learning in schools and in particular for those candidates preparing for their examinations.
- Conducting the Oral examinations at Easter is contingent on the SEC receiving sufficient applications from teachers for roles on the examining teams. If sufficient applications are not received the SEC will develop contingency arrangements where necessary.
- The SEC will seek to prioritise examinations in those schools which have teachers acting as external examiners.
- Schools are required to ensure that any contingency arrangements which may be necessary, which may include delayed examinations, are clearly notified to candidates

and parents at the earliest opportunity. Should this be required, the SEC will engage with schools in this regard.

- By arranging these examinations in the first week of the Easter holidays, it will provide that examiners, candidates, and schools staff have a consecutive ten-day break from school after the examinations have been completed.
- A schedule of the relevant 2024 dates is included at Appendix 1.
- The SEC intends to publish the 2024 detailed Written Examinations timetables and the schedules of dates for the Oral and Practical examinations before the Christmas holidays.

4. Overview of 2024 Delivery Model

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. This circular does not apply to the Oral examinations in the Leaving Certificate Applied.

Oral examinations in these subjects will be conducted over a six-day period commencing on Saturday 23 March and concluding on Thursday 28 March 2024.

The examinations will be conducted by SEC appointed examiners, recruited and appointed to schools by the SEC.

Under the traditional arrangements (pre-2022), a candidate would not have their Irish Oral and their Oral examinations in the Modern Foreign Languages in the same week (although they could have multiple modern foreign language Oral examinations in the same five-day period).

School authorities (i.e. the school principal or their authorised representative for this work) will be required to pay particular attention to the scheduling of candidates in the school to take account of their individual subject considerations. School authorities are asked to be cognisant of the demands on candidates and to avoid scheduling multiple tests on one day to the greatest degree possible.

All of the days Saturday to Thursday inclusive will be available for scheduling these examinations. Working with the SEC, and the examiners assigned to the school, and depending on the availability of examiners, schools may have some flexibility if there is a particular day over the six days on which examinations cannot be held due to local needs. However, in choosing not to use the full six days, schools will be asked to be cognisant of the impact of the scheduling on candidates and particularly the impact on those entered for multiple language subjects. The more examiners that we have the more likely it will be that flexibility for schools will be possible within this six-day window.

In the event that it is not possible to facilitate all of the examinations in the 6-day period, two contingency days have been identified. The contingency days are Wednesday 17 and Thursday 18 April 2024. Decisions on the use of the contingency days will be made by the

SEC in conjunction with the SEC appointed examiners. The SEC will need to be satisfied that it is not practicable to hold the examinations without availing of one or both of those contingency days. It will not be up to individual schools to seek to arrange examinations on these days in the first instance.

In the interest of equity and fairness, it will not be possible to make bespoke arrangements for individual candidates, groups of candidates or schools. This includes, but is not limited to, sporting events, competitions, school trips, holidays or type of school.

In line with traditional arrangements, candidates who miss their Oral language examination due to illness or close family bereavement will be facilitated with a later examination in the week commencing 13 May. Evidence of illness/bereavement is required to support this arrangement.

5. Examiner Recruitment

In the coming week the SEC will commence the recruitment of Leaving Certificate Oral examiners for 2024. The rate of remuneration for SEC Oral examiners, which includes a premium for examining over the Easter holiday period, will be notified by the SEC to applicants as part of the recruitment process. These rates are contained in Appendix 1 of this circular for information. Examiners also receive travel expenses and subsistence allowances. While the benefits of examining go beyond the financial, we are pleased to advise that the additional rate increases secured for 2023 have been assured for the 2024 examinations.

The SEC will be offering automatic appointments to examiners who meet the relevant criteria and who were previously appointed in 2023. New applications will also be invited.

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.

Examiners are primarily recruited from a pool of experienced serving and retired teachers. The most essential requirement for examiners is subject competence and any personnel appointed to mark the State Examinations must be appropriately qualified. Examiners will be selected on the basis of their academic qualifications, their teaching experience and their

examination experience. New applicants for these positions will be required to complete an interview to demonstrate their language competence.

6. Contingency Measures

In the event that we do not reach the required number of examiners it may be necessary to put in place contingency arrangements. In this regard, I can advise as follows;

- That it may not be possible to provide for the delivery of all subjects in all schools in the period 23 to 28 March.
- That it may be necessary to schedule some examinations on the contingency days of Wednesday 17 and Thursday 18 April.
- That as a result, some teachers signed up for examining work will need to be out of school for these two days.
- That if it is not possible to provide for all examinations on the 17 and 18 April then the examinations will be rescheduled to the window for the late Orals commencing in mid to late May.
- That any reschedule of examinations to the late Orals window will require teachers undertaking roles as Oral examiners, to be out of school for possibly 5 days in May to cover these duties.

Should this become necessary the SEC will endeavour to notify affected schools at the earliest opportunity noting that such arrangements might become necessary at short notice. No doubt there will be disappointment for schools and candidates should it be necessary to delay their examinations as set out above. However, if examiner numbers are at the required level then the need for contingency arrangements will dissipate.

7. Financial Support for School Authorities

- i. **Examinations Aide Days:** 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. Details are provided below of additional days to be used for the Oral language examinations in 2024.

As was the case in 2023, in recognition of the changed workload associated with this Easter model of 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.

- ii. **Pastoral Support for Candidates.** Under the same Examinations Aide model, the SEC is introducing a further resource for school authorities. For the 2024 examinations, 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. Further details of this resource will be provided in due course but it is intended that this person would not be involved in the operational and administrative duties associated with the Oral examinations
- iii. **Caretaking/light/heat/etc.:** Reasonable additional costs specifically incurred in relation to light, heat, cleaning and caretaking, within schools, associated with the Oral examinations taking place in the Easter holidays will be reimbursed by the SEC.
- iv. **Transport:** To facilitate attendance by candidates reliant on the school transport scheme, school will be asked to arrange taxi services for examinations events at the Easter Holidays where necessary and to recover the costs from the SEC.

8. Further Information

The SEC will issue a more detailed circular prior to the examinations in 2024 with further details of these arrangements including details in relation to the management of the examinations during the 6-day period over the Easter holidays and the financial support arrangements available to schools.

In the meantime, I would appreciate your assistance in bringing the details of these arrangements to the attention of school staff, students and parents/guardians.

9. Enquiries

Queries related to the Oral examinations should be directed by email to orals@examinations.ie or by telephone to 090 6442741.

Thank you for your support and assistance with these important examinations.

Richard Dolan
Director of Operations
State Examinations Commission
December 2023

Appendix 1 – Leaving Certificate Orals 2024 - Rates and Dates

A. Payment Rates

The rates of pay for Oral examiners for 2024 are as follows. These rates include an additional €6 per script/test first approved in 2022 and a premium of c. €11 for conducting the tests at Easter. For 2024, the rates have been increased by the public sector increases as they apply to examination rates of pay.

- Leaving Certificate Irish Foundation Level **€20.43** per candidate (2019 rate €7.00)
- All other Oral examinations **€27.37** per candidate (2019 rate €9.38)
- Revised Arrangement Fee **€243.59** per appointment (2019 rate n/a)

Examiners also receive travel expenses and subsistence allowances in addition to the above.

B. 2024 Schedule of Dates

Event	Date
Schools Close for Easter Holidays	Friday 22 March
Leaving Certificate Orals commence - Day 1	Saturday 23 March
Active Examining Days	Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
Leaving Certificate Orals Finish - Day 6	Thursday 28 March
Good Friday	Friday 29 March
Easter Sunday	Sunday 31 March
Schools Reopen	Monday 8 April
Leaving Certificate Orals Contingency Days	Wednesday 17 and Thursday 18 April
Late Orals (illness/bereavement)	W/B 13 May (TBC)
Leaving Certificate Music Practical	8 April to 19 April
Junior Cycle Music Practical Performance Test	Commencing Monday 22 April