



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

**S86/25**

## **LEAVING CERTIFICATE 2026 - PRELIMINARY INFORMATION ON THE ORAL EXAMINATIONS IN IRISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

**TO THE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES OF POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND OTHER ENTITIES RECOGNISED BY THE SEC TO HOLD EXAMINATIONS**

Related Document: [Leaving Certificate 2026 Schedule of Examinations Dates](#)

### **1. Purpose of Circular**

The purpose of this circular is to:

- Provide some preliminary information on the arrangements for the Oral examinations.
- Outline the additional supports that will be available to schools including additional exam aide days specifically to provide Pastoral support for candidates.
- Commence the recruitment of Oral examiners and seek the assistance of schools with this recruitment.

This circular does not apply to the Leaving Certificate Applied Oral examinations which are the subject of separate communications.

### **2. Timing of the Oral Examinations in 2026**

In December 2024 (Circular S88/24) the State Examinations Commission announced that the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations in Gaelige and Modern Foreign Languages examinations will be delivered during the first week of the Easter holidays for three years 2025, 2026 and 2027.

As already set out in the Leaving Certificate 2026 Schedule of Examination Dates, these examinations will be delivered by SEC appointed examiners in schools in the early part of the

Easter holiday period from **Saturday 28 March to Thursday 2 April 2026 inclusive**. All days Saturday, Sunday, Monday – Thursday may be required (See below for further details).

### **3. Background to the Use of the Easter Holiday period for the Oral Examinations**

The SEC undertook a comprehensive evaluation of the timing of the Oral examinations. The inputs to the review included consideration of the historical position, the impact of the more recent changes to the timing, and the research undertaken for the SEC by the University of Galway. Candidates' best interests were to the fore in this evaluation as was as a desire to ensure that the system provides for fair and equitable delivery of the Oral examinations. The SEC carefully considered how best to progress its advice noting the challenges and issues; the outcomes of the research work, as well as the experience of delivering the Oral examinations during term time and in the Easter holidays. Ultimately, candidates' interests are best served by the least possible interruption to their teaching and learning and by as much assurance as possible that the SEC can deliver examinations and assessment to the published timeframes.

The SEC's Advice to the Minister for Education on the Timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals, dated December 2024, and the related research documents, are available [here](#). The Minister accepted the SEC's advice that the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations should continue to be delivered during the Easter holidays until the 2026/2027 school year and be subject to further review after the conclusion of the 2027 examinations. Maintaining the timing at Easter until the 2027 Leaving Certificate provides certainty to Leaving Certificate candidates about the timing of their examinations and will deliver stability to the school system in relation to their planning for future years.

### **4. Key Features of the 2026 Oral Examinations**

- The model of delivery for 2026 will be the same as for the Oral examinations in 2025.
- The examiner training conferences for the 2026 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 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 and this may involve the utilisation of contingency days during the school term.
- The SEC will seek to prioritise examinations in those schools which have teachers acting as external examiners, should the supply of examiners prove insufficient.
- Schools are required to ensure that any contingency arrangements needed, 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 school staff have a consecutive ten-day break from school after the examinations have been completed.
- In recognition of the workload associated with the Easter model of delivery, **8 Examinations Aide - Administration days** are available to schools with 120 Leaving Certificate candidates or fewer while 10 days are available to those schools with in excess of 120 Leaving Certificate candidates. The provision of these days is intended to act as a support to school leaders in the administration of these tests and their delivery over the Easter holidays.
- An additional **6 Examinations Aide - Pastoral Support** days are also provided so that each school authority can appoint a member of staff for the specific purpose of providing pastoral support to candidates and to ensure their attendance at the time of the delivery of the Oral examinations over the Easter holiday period. It is a requirement that the person appointed to this role is not involved in the operational and administrative duties associated with the Oral examinations and is therefore a different individual to the person undertaking the Examinations Aide - Administration role.
- A schedule of the 2026 Oral Examinations dates is included at Appendix 1.
- The 2026 Written Examinations timetables and the schedules of dates for the Oral and Practical examinations were recently published on the SEC website, these documents are available [here](#).

## 5. Overview of 2026 Delivery Model

For the 2026 Leaving Certificate, Oral examinations will be held in Irish, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Russian, Mandarin Chinese, Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese.

Oral examinations in these subjects will be conducted over a six-day period commencing on Saturday 28 March and concluding on Thursday 2 April 2026.

The examinations will be conducted by SEC appointed examiners, recruited and assigned 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 Oral examinations in multiple Modern Foreign Languages in the same five-day period. School authorities will be required to pay particular attention to the scheduling of candidates in the school to take account of their individual subject considerations. Consideration should be given to candidates who are due to take more than one examination over the 6-day period and school authorities should make every reasonable effort to avoid a candidate having to take two Oral examinations on a single day. In limited circumstances this may be unavoidable, particularly if a candidate is taking a number of language subjects, or is taking a language with a smaller cohort. Generally, every precaution should be taken by the Administration Examinations Aide to ensure that no candidate is taking two Oral examinations on one day. School authorities will be required to engage with the SEC if they encounter scheduling clashes. Further details will be provided in due course.

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 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 Monday 18 May. Evidence of illness/bereavement is required to support this arrangement.

## **6. Examiner Recruitment**

The SEC has commenced the recruitment of Leaving Certificate Oral examiners for 2026. The SEC will be offering automatic appointments to examiners who meet the relevant criteria and who were previously appointed in 2025. New applications will also be invited.

While the benefits of examining go beyond the financial, we are pleased to advise that the additional rate increases secured for 2024 and 2025 have been assured for the 2026 examinations. For 2026, the rates have been increased by the public sector increases as they apply to examination rates of pay.

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 also at **Appendix 1** of this circular. Examiners also receive travel expenses and subsistence allowances.

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 2026. In particular, we expect that releasing examiners for a one-day training conferences will not be any impediment to participation. The SEC is extremely grateful to all stakeholders for their assistance in ensuring that sufficient examiners were recruited to conduct the 2025 examinations and looks forward to the same level of co-operation in the 2026 examiner recruitment process.

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.

## **7. 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 Saturday 28 March to Thursday 2 April.
- That it may be necessary to schedule some examinations on two contingency days after the main examining window details of which will be notified to schools if they become necessary.
- That as a result, some teachers appointed 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 two contingency days then the examinations will be rescheduled to the window for the late Orals commencing in week commencing 18 May.
- That any rescheduling 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.

## **8. Supporting Schools**

- i. **Examinations Aide – Administration** : The SEC provides financial support for schools in the administration of the annual Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate examinations. Under the 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 Examinations Aide days are to be used for both the written examinations and the related assessment components.

In addition, in recognition of the workload associated with the Easter model of delivery, 8 Examinations Aide days are available to schools with 120 Leaving Certificate candidates or fewer while 10 days are available to those schools with in excess of 120 Leaving Certificate candidates. The provision of these days is intended to act as a support to school leaders in the administration of these tests and their delivery over the Easter holidays.

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. **Examinations Aide - Pastoral Support:** A strong theme coming through the research, and in feedback to the SEC otherwise, is the need for pastoral support to be available in the school over the course of the Easter Orals to support candidates coming into school for their examinations and in ensuring the attendance of all candidates for these important examinations. This emanated from the overarching need for candidates to be supported at what is a stressful time for them and specifically the need for schools to take particular measures to ensure that all candidates return to school during Easter for their examinations.

For 2026, **6 Pastoral Support Examinations Aide** days are available to schools. The number of days that schools can claim will be dependent on the number of days on which there are oral examinations in each school. The resource is provided so that each school authority can appoint a member of staff for the specific purpose of providing pastoral support to candidates and to ensure their attendance at the time of the delivery of the Oral examinations over the Easter holiday period. It is a requirement that the person appointed to this role is not involved in the operational and administrative duties associated with the Oral examinations and is therefore a different individual to the person undertaking the Examinations Aide - Administration role. Further details of this resource will be provided in due course.

- 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, schools will be asked to arrange taxi services for examinations events at the Easter Holidays where necessary and to recover the costs from the SEC.

## **9. Further Information**

The SEC will issue a more detailed circular prior to the examinations in 2026 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.

## **10. Timing of the Oral Examinations in 2027**

For planning purposes, you are reminded that the Oral examinations in 2027 will also be delivered during the first week of the school Easter holiday period with these arrangements subject to confirmation in the longer term following a further review to be conducted by the SEC.

## **11. Enquiries**

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.

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

Richard Dolan  
Director of Operations  
State Examinations Commission  
December 2025

## Appendix 1 – Leaving Certificate Orals 2026 - Rates and Dates

### A. Payment Rates

The rates of pay for Oral examiners for 2026 are as follows. These rates include an additional €6 per test first approved in 2022 and a premium of c. €11 for conducting the tests at Easter. For 2026, the rates have been increased by the public sector increases as they apply to examination rates of pay.

- Leaving Certificate Irish Foundation Level      **€21.95** per candidate (2019 rate €7.00)
- All other Oral examinations                      **€29.41** per candidate (2019 rate €9.38)
- Revised Arrangement Fee                          **€261.75** per appointment (2019 rate n/a)

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

### B. 2026 Schedule of Dates

<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Schools Close for Easter Holidays</b>	Friday 27 March
<b>Leaving Certificate Orals commence - Day 1</b>	Saturday 28 March
<b>Active Examining Days</b>	Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
<b>Leaving Certificate Orals Finish - Day 6</b>	Thursday 2 April
<b>Good Friday</b>	Friday 3 April
<b>Easter Sunday</b>	Sunday 5 April
<b>Schools Reopen</b>	Monday 13 April
<b>Leaving Certificate Orals Contingency Days</b>	TBC (if required)
<b>Late Orals (illness/bereavement)</b>	W/B 18 May (TBC)