



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

S72/22

**IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT IN RELATION TO ORAL EXAMINATIONS IN IRISH AND
MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR LEAVING CERTIFICATE 2023**

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

Purpose of Circular

The purpose of this circular is to:

- Advise that the arrangements for the 2023 Leaving Certificate oral examinations will see these tests being delivered during the first week of the Easter Holidays for a further year pending a full review of the timing of the orals.
- 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.

NB. The 2023 Leaving Certificate Music Practical Performance Tests will be held in school term in advance of the Easter holidays. A separate circular will issue in relation to Music examinations for 2023 giving operational details of the examinations and recruitment details for examiners.

Timing of the 2023 Oral Examinations at Easter for a further year

For the 2023 Leaving Certificate, it is intended to extend the arrangements that applied in 2022 for a further year and to conduct the Oral examinations, by SEC appointed examiners, in the Easter holidays from Saturday 1 April to Thursday 6 April. Following the completion of the 2022 oral examinations and Music Practical Performance Test at Easter the SEC carried out a preliminary review of the process to assess the impact of the timing of the examinations on candidates and on the second-level system noting that Covid created particular challenges in the delivery of these tests at Easter in 2022. A more extensive evaluation involving engagement with all of stakeholders is required to fully assess the impact of holding the oral examinations at Easter. This evaluation, which will be undertaken as part of a more comprehensive review of the overall issue of examiner supply for the state examinations, will

be completed in order to advise the Minister on the timing of the Oral examinations in 2024 and beyond.

Key Points

- The model of delivery for 2023 will be similar to the model for oral examinations that pertained in 2022.
- The examiner training conferences for the 2023 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 relation 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.
- Schools are required to ensure that the Contingency arrangements which may be necessary, including delayed and deferred examinations, are clearly notified to candidates and parents at the earliest opportunity.
- The SEC will seek to prioritise tests in those schools which have teachers acting as external examiners.
- By arranging the 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 dates is included at Appendix 1.

Overview of 2023 Delivery Model

For the 2023 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.

It is intended that oral language examinations be conducted over a six-day period commencing on Saturday 1 April and concluding on Thursday 6 April 2023.

The examinations will be conducted by visiting 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). In collaboration with the SEC and SEC appointed examiners and schools, attention will be required to the scheduling at school level to take account of these considerations.

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 6 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 19 and Thursday 20 April 2023. 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 event that it is not possible to hold the examinations as scheduled either at Easter or using the contingency days, candidate will be assigned to undertake examinations in the window for the conduct of the Late Orals. (See below for further details).

Candidates who miss their oral language examination due to illness will be facilitated in mid-late May with a later examination.

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.

Examiner Recruitment

During the week commencing 5 December the SEC will commence the recruitment of Leaving Certificate oral examiners for 2023. The rate of remuneration, which reflects the change to the timing of these examinations, will be notified by the SEC to applicants as part of the recruitment process and are contained in Appendix 1 of this circular for information. 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. Recruitment and retention of teachers as oral examiners is not only an issue for the SEC, it is an urgent whole of system issue at second level. Our objective is to substantially increase the numbers of teachers involved so that the experience is a positive one which greatly enhances teacher professional competence as well as earning power. We are appealing to school leaders to actively support the SEC's 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. While the benefits go beyond the financial, we are pleased to advise that the additional rate increases secured for 2022 have been assured for the 2023 examinations.

The SEC will be offering automatic appointments to examiners who meet the relevant criteria who were previously appointed in 2022. New applications will also be invited.

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 2023. 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.

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 1 to 6 April
- That it may be necessary to schedule some tests on the contingency days of Wednesday 19 and Thursday 20 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 tests on the 19 and 20 April then the tests will be rescheduled to the window for the late Orals commencing in mid to late May.
- That any reschedule of tests 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 we can increase the examiner number to the required level then this need for contingency arrangements will dissipate.

Financial Support for School Authorities

1. **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 2023.

As was the case in 2022, 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.

2. **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 SEC.
3. **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 SEC.

Further Information

The SEC will issue a more detailed circular in January 2023 with further details of these arrangements including details in relation to the management of the tests 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.

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

Richard Dolan
Director of Operations
State Examinations Commission
December 2022

Appendix 1 – Leaving Certificate Orals 2023 - Rates and Dates

A. Payment Rates

The rates of pay for oral examiners for 2023 are as follows. These rates include the additional €6 per script/test first approved in 2022 and a premium for conducting the tests at Easter. The 2023 rates have been increased by the public sector increases as they apply to examination rates of pay.

- Leaving Certificate Irish Foundation Level **€19.73** per candidate (2019 rate €7.00)
- All other Oral tests **€26.44** per candidate (2019 rate €9.38)
- Revised Arrangement Fee: **€235.28** per appointment (2019 rate n/a)

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

B. Schedule of Dates

Event	Date
Music Practical Performance Tests	20 -24 March and 27-31 March
Schools Close for Easter Holidays	Friday 31 March
Orals commence - Day 1	Saturday 1 April
Active Examining Days	Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday
Orals Finish - Day 6	Thursday 6 April
Good Friday	Friday 7 April
Easter Sunday	Sunday 9 April
Schools Reopen	Monday 17 April
Contingency Days	Wednesday 19 and Thursday 20 April
Additional Contingency Period	W/B 15 May (TBC)