



OLLSCOIL NA
GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY
OF GALWAY

Timing of Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

Opinions and Perspectives of Parents, Students, Teachers, Examiners and Schools

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Table of Acronyms

DEIS.....Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

ISSU..... Irish Second-Level Students' Union

NPC National Parents Council

SEC.....State Examinations Commission

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

The central objective of the study was to explore parent, student, teacher, examiner, school management and other opinions about the most suitable timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations from 2024 onwards. The report is divided into two sections as there were two phases of the research. The first phase conducted in October/November 2023 comprised an online survey asking respondents to choose an appropriate timing for the oral examinations in the future and to reflect experiences of recent years. The second phase of the research involved a multisite case study, completed in April/May 2024, where school communities were asked to reflect on their experience of the oral examinations in Easter 2024. As the two sets of data reflected different experiences and the research was conducted using differing instrumentation the results will be presented within this report in separate sections.

1.2. Background to the Survey

As noted above the survey was conducted to gain an insight into the opinions of stakeholders in relation to the most suitable date for the Leaving Certificate orals going forward and the experiences of parents, students, teachers and management in relation to recent examinations up to Easter 2023.

The key areas we will report on in Section One are:

1. The most favourable timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations.
2. The reasons given by the various stakeholders for their choice.
3. The perceived challenges and opportunities related to the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during Easter time on students, teachers, schools and others.
4. The perceived challenges and opportunities relating to the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during school time on students, teachers, schools and others.

This report provides a summary and synthesis of the survey responses of the participating students, parents, teachers, examiners and school management as well as any other interested parties.

Irish and English language versions of the survey were housed on a commercial survey website compliant with GDPR requirements. The online survey was initiated on 20th October 2023 and closed at one am on the 13th November 2023. Demographic questions were included across each section of the survey. A cross-sectional research design (i.e. the survey was administered at one point in time) was employed where respondents were asked to choose a most appropriate timing for the exams in the future and also those who had been involved with Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations were asked to retrospectively reflect on their experiences of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during the Easter Holidays and during school time, whichever was applicable. Along with a range of closed-ended questions, the survey included open-ended items that offered all the respondent sample the opportunity to describe in their own words their opinions, experiences and perspectives on the oral examinations. Respondents were recruited via a number of pathways including: the NPC database of parent affiliates; the ISSU database of young people, social media channels targeting parents of Senior Cycle students, teachers, and primarily language teachers as well as examiners and others. Other channels also used included the University of Galway news webpage and Twitter account; direct email to all second level schools in the country, and through personal and organisational contacts of the research team.

Students under 18, were accessed solely through their parents; that is, parents provided informed consent for their young person to participate in the online survey, after which, the child provided their own informed assent, and then initiated the relevant section of the survey.

The quantitative data from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics combined with parametric and non-parametric inferential statistics. Data from the open-ended questions of the

survey were analysed using content analysis approaches. The final sample ($N^1 = 11,220$) was comprised of parents (10%), parents with a student Under 18 (12%), students under 18 (6%), Students over 18 who have completed the Leaving Certificate (29%), Students over 18 who are yet to complete the Leaving Certificate (13%), teachers and teaching examiners (22%), examiners who are not currently teaching (1%), principals and deputy principals (3%) and others (4%).

1.3 Main findings of the Survey

Majority preference for Leaving Certificate Oral exams to take place prior to Easter and during term time

The majority of respondents (53%) reported that they would prefer to have the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations prior to Easter and during term time. All of the categories of respondents were in agreement with this as the most appropriate time for the oral examinations with the exception of the Principal and Deputy Principal cohorts who expressed a preference for oral examinations during the Easter break.

The reasons behind this choice for all cohorts other than the Principal and Deputy Principal cohorts stemmed from the collective need for a break for all involved - students, teachers, parents and management alike. It was seen as vital for the wellbeing and mental health of students, particularly in the face of the considerable stress experienced throughout the final year of school. The second most prevalent theme emerging from this section pointed to the need for a sufficient gap between the oral examinations and the written paper. Many respondents emphasised that scheduling oral assessment prior to the Easter holidays is crucial, as it provides a necessary separation of school terms and allows students time to rest and refocus before the upcoming stage leading into the written examination period. Additionally, the role of school support emerged as a third factor. It was believed the teachers, guidance counsellors and exam aides would be readily available to students during term time to support and guide them through their orals. Moreover, the availability of physical resources such as transportation, study classes and peer support might be lacking during the Easter period.

Preferences for Leaving Certificate Oral exams to take place outside of term time and during the Easter holidays

23% of respondents reported that they would prefer to have the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations outside term time during the Easter holidays.

The prevailing theme evident across the entire cohort pertained, once again, to the need to allocate time for focused study. It was proposed that the Easter holidays would afford an opportune period for concentrated and purposeful preparation for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. Respondents further cited advantages such as a more peaceful school environment, which would alleviate pressure and stress on students, while concurrently minimising disruptions to teaching and learning.

Notably, Principals and Deputy Principals emerged as the sole cohort favouring this particular timing. Their rationale centred on the significant benefit of limiting disruption to teaching and learning during the holiday period. They contended that, by aligning the oral examinations with the Easter holidays, the need for substitution for teachers acting as State Examination Commission (SEC) examiners would be obviated, and students would not miss out on crucial instructional time in their absence.

¹ N refers to the total number of respondents or responses to a particular question on the survey.

Preferences for after Easter

Just less than 23% of respondents reported that their choice would be to have the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during term time but after the Easter holidays.

Reasons associated with this choice were similar to those relating to the preferences expressed for the pre-Easter option and included: student wellbeing and the need for a break to rest, relax and focus on study for the orals. It was noted by many also that the students had more time to prepare and study including the two weeks of the Easter break. A number of respondents across the cohorts mention that support would be available to them in schools from teachers, management and their peers. Finally, many noted that having the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations after Easter would ensure that it would not clash with other elements of the examination system such as projects, practical's and written examinations.

Other

Less than 1% of respondents chose the other category with relation to the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. 176 respondents chose 'Other' as a response option stating various alternative preferences, the most common of which included: holding these oral examinations before or after Easter depending on how it fell; before Christmas; at the end of fifth year in Senior Cycle; or at other varying points during Senior Cycle.

Perceptions of those who engaged with Leaving Certificate orals during Easter in 2022 and 2023

Parents and students who were involved with the Leaving Certificate oral examinations during Easter in 2022 or 2023 reported overall satisfaction levels that were evenly distributed between the "very satisfied" and "satisfied" options, and the "unsatisfied" or "very unsatisfied" options.

When parents were asked to assess various statements regarding the impact of the Leaving Certificate orals during Easter, the primary concerns centred around the increased difficulty of attendance and the unavailability of teachers to support students during this period. Students agreed that the timing of the examinations made it more challenging to attend, acknowledging both the logistical difficulties and the absence of teacher support during that crucial time. However, there was also a large proportion of students who noted that the quieter school environment was of benefit to them.

When teachers were questioned about the challenges and opportunities presented by the timing of the Easter exams in 2022 and 2023, the predominant themes that emerged included the necessity for teachers to be available during holidays to support students, heightened teacher stress levels, an increased workload, constraints on teachers' ability to conduct examinations, less support from management, and challenges in relation to student absenteeism during this period.

Examiners and non-teaching examiners, pointed out that the most prevalent challenge was teachers being unable to conduct examinations. Additionally, they identified increased workload, heightened stress levels, and reduced management support as other notable challenges.

When Principals/Deputy Principals were asked about the opportunities and challenges relating to the orals during the Easter period in 2022 and in 2023 the most common themes highlighted were less distribution to classes and less substitution related issues.

Other who responded to the survey highlighted issues similar to those encountered previously including examinations impinging a much-needed break for all, the lack of support available in schools during this time and also less disruption to teaching and learning during the Easter break period.

Perceptions of those who engaged with Leaving Certificate orals in term time prior to 2020

When the Parent cohort were asked to reflect on the period before 2020, when oral examinations were conducted during term time, many highlighted the primary benefit of access to teacher and peer

support. Additionally, they noted the positive impact of the regular school environment on their students during that time.

Students displayed a high level of satisfaction with this timing and also noted that the availability of teacher and student support impacted positively on their experience at this time.

Teachers and examiners observed that conducting oral examinations during term time resulted in lower stress levels and increased support from management. Nevertheless, a significant number highlighted the primary challenge as their inability to work as examiners during this period, with many also expressing concerns about the absence of teachers due to the exams.

Non-teaching examiners, when posed with the same question, pointed out the presence of more supportive management and an overall reduction in stress during term time, while also noting the challenges associated with teachers missing classes.

When Principals and Deputy Principals were asked similar questions, they noted challenges with substitution and teachers missing classes as well as the disruption of classes as the most common issues.

Other Suggestions/Comments

The majority of respondents to this question reiterated their choice for the timing of the orals and repeated their reasons for this choice. There were a number of other unrelated themes that emerged also which included general comments about the running of the oral examinations, renumeration of personnel connected to the oral examinations and more general topics such as the Irish language curriculum and the examinations process.

1.4 Key learnings from the 2022/2023 period

There are a number of key learnings which emerged from the responses in relation to the examination period in 2022 and 2023.

One of the key benefits of having the oral examinations during Easter time highlighted by all cohorts related to the quieter less stressful environment which were available to student in 2022 and 2023.

An area of challenge highlighted by many respondents related to the time frame which students had to do their oral examinations during Easter. Many noted that the oral examinations were too close together with students having to complete two or three oral exams over a period of a number of days. In contrast to this, some spoke of their experience prior to 2020 noting the longer time frame, where the examinations are held over a two-week period to be more beneficial to them. In light of this it would be of benefit to schools and students that guidance would be produced in relation to the spacing of examinations over the period of assessment.

1.5 Background to the Multi-Site Case Study

As noted above, this research study is a continuation of the initial report on the Timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations, completed in November 2023. This phase of the research, commenced in April 2024, employed a multisite case study approach. The primary objective was to attain a deeper understanding and additional clarity regarding the experiences of parents, students, teachers, and school management following the completion of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during Easter 2024. Additionally, the study aimed to assess opinions on the most appropriate timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations from 2025 onwards. The key areas we will report on are:

1. The experiences of the various stakeholders across the sites in relation to the Oral Examinations which took place in 2024.
2. The perceived challenges and opportunities which the Easter timing afforded to these stakeholders.
3. The most favourable time for Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations going forward.
4. The perceived challenges and opportunities in relation to this chosen time.

This report provides a summary and synthesis of the survey responses of the participating students, parents, teachers and school management. In some cases teachers also held the role of examiner and their opinions were also noted.

Due to time constraints in relation to the gathering of data, a convenience sampling approach was used to engage schools in this research phase during April and May 2024. Eight schools in total took part working with three researchers from the team. Schools were contacted through direct email, phone calls and messaging. Focus groups and individual interviews were used to gather the data, primarily in person with the exception of two interviews which were conducted online via Zoom. In a small number of cases messages and emails were sent detailing stakeholders opinions when they did not have the time to engage directly with the research. Interviews lasted in the region of ten minutes where focus groups lasted between 10 and 22 minutes. All participants were given an information sheet and a consent form prior to engaging in the research. All students who took part were over 18.

The final sample included 8 schools and participants which consisted of students (42), teachers (32), school management team (10) and parents (10). As parents were not on site at the data gathering stage it was more challenging to connect with them, emails and messages were sent to encourage participation but there was limited engagement.

1.6 Main findings of the Multi-Site Case Study

Majority preference for Leaving Certificate Oral exams to take place prior to Easter and during term time

Similar to the findings reported in Section 1, a slight majority of participants expressed a preference for oral examinations to be conducted during term time although the preferences in this phase of this study for this option were less conclusive. As was the case with the first phase of the study, the only group to unanimously oppose this term-time preference were the Principals and Deputy Principals, who favoured keeping the exams during Easter time. The main reason cited by students, parents, and teachers who reported term time as their preference going forward related to student wellbeing, with many emphasising the need for students to have a break to rest and recuperate. Numerous students noted that holding oral exams during Easter disrupted their part-time jobs and other commitments such as sporting activities and holidays. Many also highlighted the exhaustion following the exams and the necessity for downtime before the final busy term. Parents shared these concerns, emphasising the need for a complete break due to the stressful academic load on their children. Teachers concurred, stressing the importance of rest and recuperation for both students and themselves. Another key challenge for these cohorts related to the scheduling of the examinations. Many teachers noted that they only received notice of the specific dates a week or so prior to Easter, this left students waiting and wondering about whether they had to reschedule commitments such as work or holidays. Linked to this also was the pressure on teachers and/or exam aides to ensure that students didn't have examinations on consecutive days. This scheduling was challenging and was heavily dependent on open communication between subject departments in schools. The majority of students themselves noted the scheduling as a challenge. Having too many examinations within a short few days was exhausting for many, and yet many maintained that they wanted them finished early in Easter so that they could have a full break. Teachers were uncertain as to who's role it was to schedule these exams, and many were unaware that a second exam aide could have been employed to help with the scheduling and the daily support of students.

Examiners were more divided about the timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals going forward. A recurrent theme here also was linked to the need for a break between school term and oral examinations with many noting that they were exhausted leaving school on the Friday to head into a week of oral examinations that resulted in a 12-day working week for many teachers which was unsustainable for many. Many teachers and examiners were not happy with the oral examinations occurring on a weekend, and specifically on a Sunday.

In line with Section 1, school management were, for the most part, opposed to the idea of the examinations returning to term time. This relates mainly to the lack of substitution cover for teachers who may be examining and to more general disruption to classes and school life.

Preferences for Leaving Certificate Oral exams to take place outside of term time and during the Easter holidays

Although a slight majority indicated a preference for holding the Leaving Certificate orals before Easter, the opinions were more nuanced compared to the views expressed in the first phase of the study (see Section 1). A significant minority of students, parents, teachers, and examiners also recognised the benefits of conducting the assessments during Easter. High-achieving students, in particular, appreciated the opportunity for focused study with fewer distractions, and they found the quiet, calm school environment advantageous. This timing allowed them to attend the exams without missing other classes. Most students were satisfied with the support provided by their schools during this period and did not feel it was necessary for their language teachers to be present. Access to school transport was not an issue for many. While not ideal, parents working from home were more flexible for this one-off occasion if the need arose.

Parents echoed many of the opinions of the students noting the quiet environment and limited distractions as an advantage to their students. Few were perturbed in relation to transport apart from in a small number of cases where the examinations schedule changed at the last minute.

A small number of teachers noted that there were advantages to the Easter timing which included less disruption to classes and the fact that they were finished before the last term allowing for concentrated time for the written papers. A key issue was highlighted by students, teachers and examiners related to the examiners' 'student briefing' prior to the commencement of the oral examinations. Many noted that this had been a very important part of the examination process in the past as it put students at ease and its absence created a gap in student support.

Several examiners also discussed the benefits to them of the Easter timing. Many noted that they would not be afforded the opportunity for the Professional Development that this type of examination work provides if it were being held during term time due to the challenges with substitution in a number of schools. Many noted that the Easter time also suited some examiners due to patterns of term-time childcare and other school commitments absent during the Easter break.

Management were very strongly in favour of the oral examinations remaining during Easter time. This related to the lack of availability of substitutes to cover for those teachers who would be examining if it were to be held during term time. They also noted the calm environment and the lack of disruption meant that the examinations were, for the most part, less stressful and less dramatic for most. With regard to the issue of students not attending for examination, it seemed that this issue was a challenge in all schools not solely in schools with DEIS status. However, in the majority of the schools within this study, steps were taken to ensure that all students, particularly the more vulnerable, were contacted and collected, where need be, to ensure attendance. The majority of those students who did not attend had been absent from school for lengthy periods during the previous term and it was unlikely they would have attended if the examinations were held during term time.

Very few preferences for after Easter

Very few of the participants across all of the cohorts were in favour of having the oral examinations after the Easter holidays. The exception for this was when Easter fell very early. Most noted that having the oral examinations during Easter meant that students had a natural break and were ready to focus on the written papers in the last term. Also, many noted the heavy workload of the last term which includes practical and other examination deadlines.

Other

A small number of respondents noted that oral examinations should be held at alternative times during Senior cycle. The end of fifth year, Christmas or February of Leaving Certificate Year were mentioned as alternatives by a few.

Notable comments

A number of other issues were noted by participants across the cohorts. This included the lack of awareness with regard to the extra examination aide granted by the State Exams Commission (SEC) for 2024. Many of the teachers, examiners and management were unaware that such a role existed. There was also uncertainty about the duties of the primary examination aide in relation to the scheduling of the examinations within the schools. The lack of notice to schools in relation to the days of examination was also a challenge which impacted students who were travelling home or on holidays.

1.7 Policy implications of both the Survey and Case Study Data

The responses from the survey data in phase one indicate a clear preference for future Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations to take place prior to Easter and during term time or during Easter. The analysis identified some divergence between school leaders, teachers and parents and students in relation to the strength of this preference but all concurred that it was in the best interests of students for these examinations not to take place after the Easter break.

Responses from the case study research indicated similar opinions but with less conviction regarding a clear preference for future Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. Although a small majority of respondents across the cohort of students, parents, teachers and examiners opted for prior to Easter timing, this was less clear than had been in the first phase of the study. Very few students reported a poor experience with the oral examinations during Easter time in 2024, and many could see the benefits that the Easter timing affords. Teachers were more vocal in their choice for a return to term time examinations due to student support and many were unaware of the new supports and arrangements that were available for 2024. The analysis clearly identified dichotomies of opinion among school leaders, with many noting the importance of the Easter break for student wellbeing while at the same time agreeing that the new arrangement was more beneficial to all.

The main challenges with returning to Leaving Certificate Orals during school time relates to the difficulties which arise in relation to substitution and supervision and the disruption of student learning due to teachers being released from school to examine elsewhere. All cohorts in the case study noted this and acknowledge the challenge this would create.

In light of the persistent shortage of teachers, specifically in the field of languages, and drawing upon the suggestion presented by Harford and Fleming (2023) advocating for the continuation of examinations outside regular school hours, it is imperative to formulate a comprehensive strategy for all school based assessments, particularly in the light of proposed changes to assessment envisaged by Senior Cycle reform. This strategy might encompass a detailed plan for assisting school administrators in mitigating potential disruptions to the teaching and learning process during assessment activity.

Section One – Report on the Online Survey in Relation to the Timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations November 2023

2. Introduction

This section of the report provides a summary of the survey conducted for teachers, students, school leaders, examiners and other stakeholders of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. The survey was initiated by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in cooperation with the School of Education, University of Galway to determine the most appropriate timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals from 2024 onwards.

Prior to 2020, Leaving Certificate Oral examinations were examined during school time. These examinations were held either prior to or after Easter depending on the date of the Easter break, during term time. However, when the Covid 19 pandemic occurred in March 2020, the Oral Examinations were cancelled. Accredited grades were used to determine results. For the 2021 Examination period, oral examinations were facilitated by schools and examined by teachers within the schools. The teachers did not grade the students but recorded the audio which was sent to the State Examination Commission for grading (DE, 2020).

In December 2021, an advisory group released guidelines for arrangements for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations for 2022 (DE, 2021). In 2022 Examinations were conducted during the Easter Break due to the challenges associated with sourcing substitute teachers and to minimise disruption to teaching and learning for those preparing for their examinations. These contingency arrangements were in place also for the Oral Examinations in 2023 pending this survey and a second review on contract recruitment (DE, 2023). In 2023, the music practicals returned to in-school or term time for examination.

This survey was intended to gauge the opinions of parents, students, teachers, examiners, school management and other interested bodies in relation to the most suitable date for Leaving Certificate Oral Examination. The languages which have an Oral Examination component and the number of students who did these exams in the past are available for reference in Appendix 1.

This survey, made available through Irish and English, aimed to investigate stakeholder opinions regarding the most appropriate timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations, from 2024 onwards. This survey also collected responses in relation to the impact of conducting the oral examinations during term time and during Easter time, in the past. Along with a range of closed-ended items, the survey included open-ended items offering respondent sample opportunity to describe, in their own words, their experiences and perspectives. The value of the significant qualitative component of the survey is clearly demonstrated in the rich and diverse findings presented in this report. The use of very similar questions with the various stakeholders facilitates comparisons between the different cohorts in relation to their experiences.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This section provides an outline of the data collection methods used in this research, together with an overview of the characteristics of the final sample of respondents. It also details the descriptive, inferential and qualitative analysis strategies that were employed to explore the data.

3.2 Development of the Online Survey

A survey was employed as the primary method of data collection as it allows for detailed description and measurement of phenomena across potentially large numbers of individuals within a specific context efficiently (Cohen et al., 2018). An online format was chosen for the survey with the hope that it would enable the collection of comprehensive data from as broad and diverse a sample as possible (ibid.). It was also acknowledged that an online format would provide participant anonymity, offering potential benefits for response rate and data validity. To address some of the limitations of the online survey method (e.g., lack of researcher control), clear instructions were provided to respondents on how to complete the survey (Nardi, 2018).

A cross-sectional research design was utilised, meaning that the survey was administered at a single point in time. However, respondents were asked to retrospectively reflect on their experiences of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations as they or their children had experienced them in the past. The data collection instrument took the form of an omnibus survey with individualized sections for each of the eight stakeholder groups. A branching format was applied, directing targeted content to respondents based on the stakeholder group with which they identified.

In the research, no pre-existing measures were utilised because the rationale was that novel questions were necessary to meaningfully capture the views and experiences of the target population. A range of demographic items were included in each of the branching groups to facilitate the description of the final sample and to allow for the investigation of potential differences across sub-samples. These demographic items included questions on gender, county of residence, DEIS or non-DEIS status of schools in relation to the parents, and a more detailed choice of school context for teachers and school management. No potentially identifying information (e.g., names, IP addresses, specific geographical location) was collected from the participants.

A mix of open and closed-ended questions examining different aspects of parents', teachers, management, and young people's experiences of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations were developed, with a predominance of closed-ended items (e.g., dichotomous questions, multiple-choice questions, and Likert-type rating scale questions). A number of open-ended questions were utilized for the purpose of clarifying and probing participant views. Classic limiting factors for surveys, including biased questions and leading questions (Nardi, 2018), were avoided to the greatest extent possible. A pilot study was conducted prior to the distribution of the survey, with comments on structure, content, and wording being addressed in the final iteration of the survey. Irish and English language versions of the survey, which took approximately 5 minutes to complete, were housed on a commercial survey website compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

There were few anticipated risks associated with participation in the research for the adults and young people who responded to the survey. The respondents who were under 18 were accessed solely through their parents; that is, parents provided informed consent for their young person to participate in the online survey, after which, the child provided their own informed assent, and then initiated their section of the survey. Ethical approval was received from the University of Galway, Research Ethics Committee on 11 October 2023 and this was complied with throughout the project.

3.4 Sampling Strategy and Procedure

Respondents were recruited via a number of pathways including: the NPC second level database of parent affiliates; the database of the ISSU, direct emailing of all schools on the Department of Education database of schools to access teachers, parents and students as well as social media channels targeting parents, teachers and students; the University of Galway School of Education news webpage and Twitter account, and personal and organisational contacts of the research team. Recruitment through NPC and researcher contact channels was achieved through an email invitation to parents and their young people which included information about the survey and the link to the online survey. Social media recruitment was organised through an advertisement produced on Canva which provided a succinct description of the research combined with a link to the online survey. For all participants, apart from those under 18, the informed consent process was completed online (i.e., on the landing page of the survey). For those respondents who were under 18, parents provided consent prior to their own assent as is detailed in Section 3.3. The online survey was initiated on 20th October 2023 and remained active until one am on the 13th of November 2023 to ensure as large and diverse a sample of parents, students, teachers, examiners and other interested parties.

3.5 Aggregate Profile of Respondents

Whilst, in total 14,322 people engaged with the survey, there were 11,220 valid responses to the key question regarding preferences of the timing of oral examinations. Therefore, the profile of respondents' demographics will be reported on this basis to ensure an accurate account of the sample and providing context of the findings.

As the survey was accessible in both Irish and English, with the majority (91.60%) opting for the English version. A smaller percentage, just under 9% (8.40%) chose to complete the survey in Irish, as depicted in in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The total number of respondents by language

	Count	Percent
English	10277	91.60%
Gaeilge	948	8.40%
Total	11220	100%

3.5.1 Categories of survey respondents

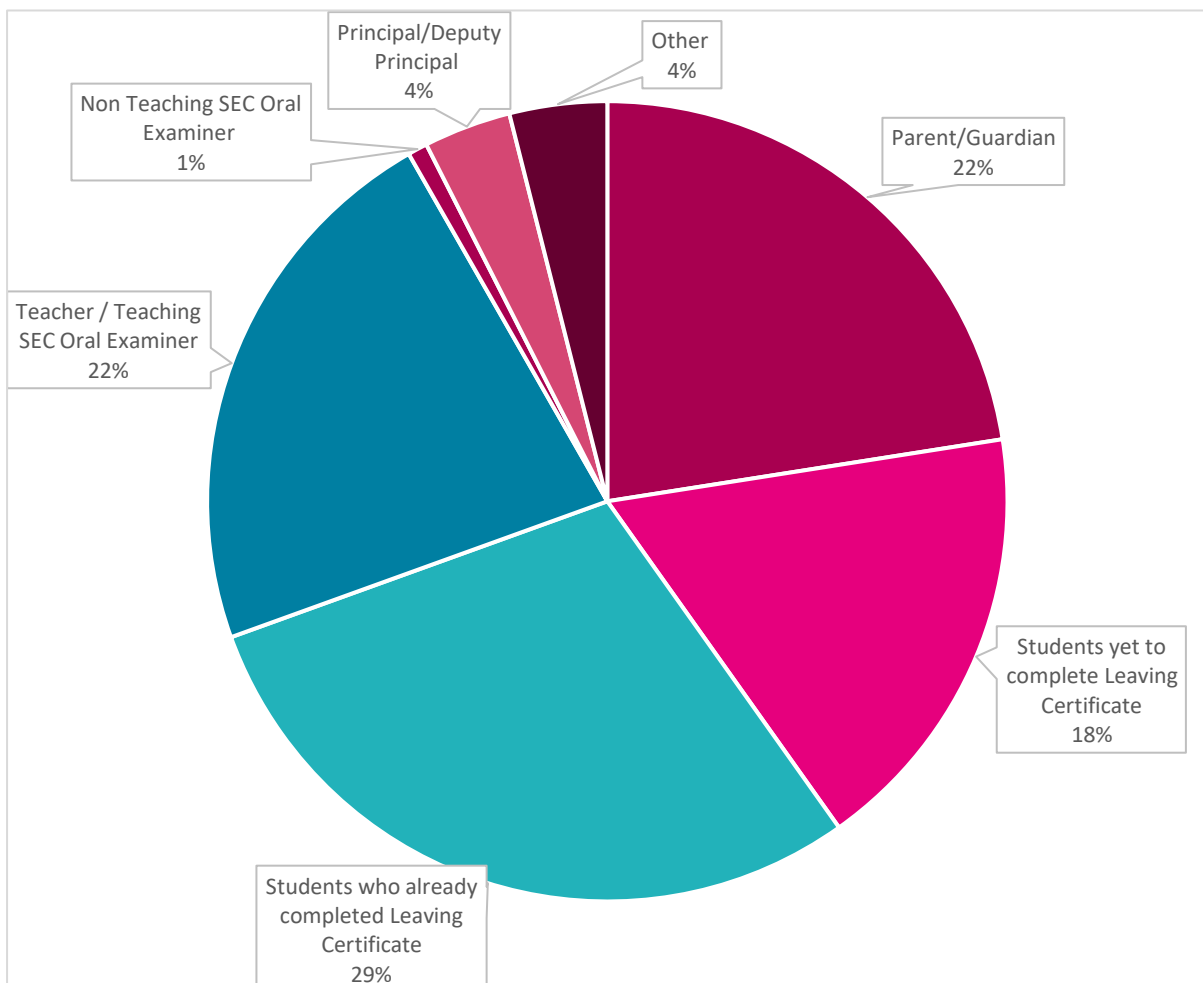
The majority of respondents were students, totalling 5,271 respondents, comprising almost 47% of the overall total (almost 18% yet to complete the leaving certificate, and 29% who had). The next largest category were parents, consisting of 2,526 respondents, representing 22.5% of the total. Teacher/Teaching SEC Oral Examiners were the third largest group, comprised of 2,585 respondents combined, representing 23%. A small number of responses came from Principals and Deputy Principals: 396 respondents, accounting for 3.5%, and smaller percentages of responses from non-teaching examiners and others.

Table 2 offers a detailed summary of the respective categories, and this is graphically represented in Figure 1.

Table 2: Categories of All Survey Respondents

	Count	Percentage
Parent/Guardian	1093	9.74%
Parent /Guardian with Student (Under 18)	1433	12.77%
Total Parent/Guardian Responses	2526	22.51%
Student (Under 18) yet to complete Leaving Certificate	502	4.47%
Student (Over 18) yet to complete Leaving Certificate	1481	13.20%
Total Student responses yet to complete the Leaving Cert	1983	17.67%
Student (Under 18) who already completed Leaving Certificate	6	0.05%
Student (Over 18) who already completed Leaving Certificate	3282	29.25%
Total Student responses who completed the LC	3288	29.30%
Teacher / Teaching SEC Oral Examiner	2496	22.25%
Teacher who is also an Oral Examiner with the SEC	905	8.07%
Non-Teaching SEC Oral Examiner	89	0.79%
Principal/Deputy Principal	396	3.53%
Other	442	3.94%
TOTAL	11220	100.00%

Figure 1: Categories of all survey respondents



3.5.2 Year of completion of Leaving Certificate

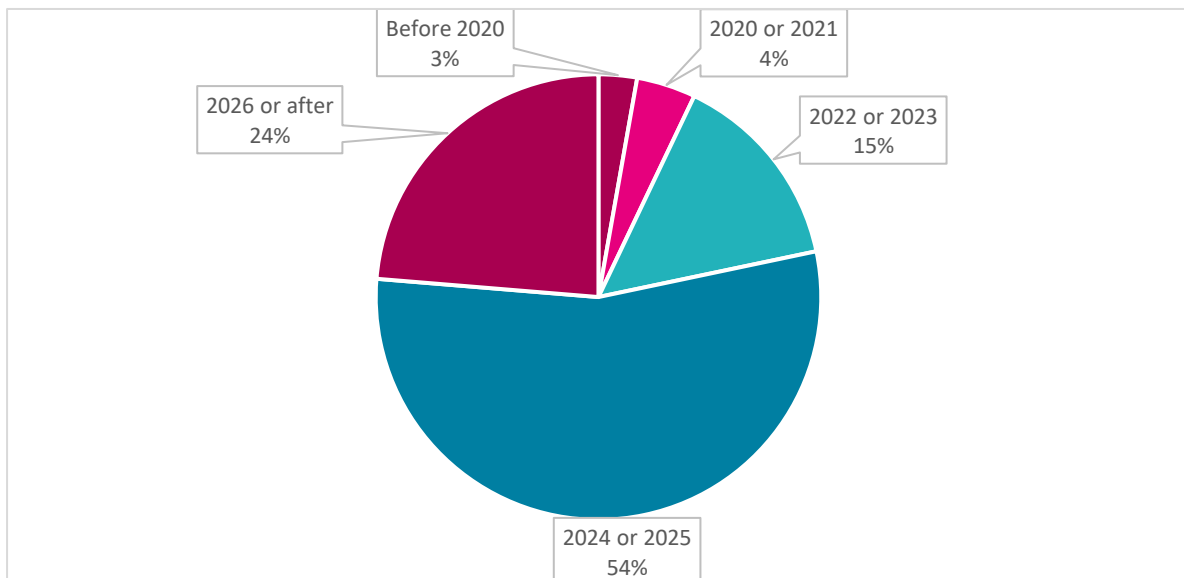
Parents, guardians and students were both asked to indicate the year of completion of Leaving Certificate. The following is a breakdown of how they responded.

Parent and Guardian Respondents

Table 3: Parent and Guardian Respondents: Year of completion of Leaving Cert of their children

What year did/will your children complete the Leaving Certificate? (Select any that apply)	Count	Percent
Before 2020	80	2.79%
2020 or 2021	123	4.29%
2022 or 2023	419	14.62%
2024 or 2025	1565	54.61%
2026 or after	679	23.69%
Total	2866	100.00%

Figure 2: Parent Responses: Year of Completion of Leaving Certificate for their children

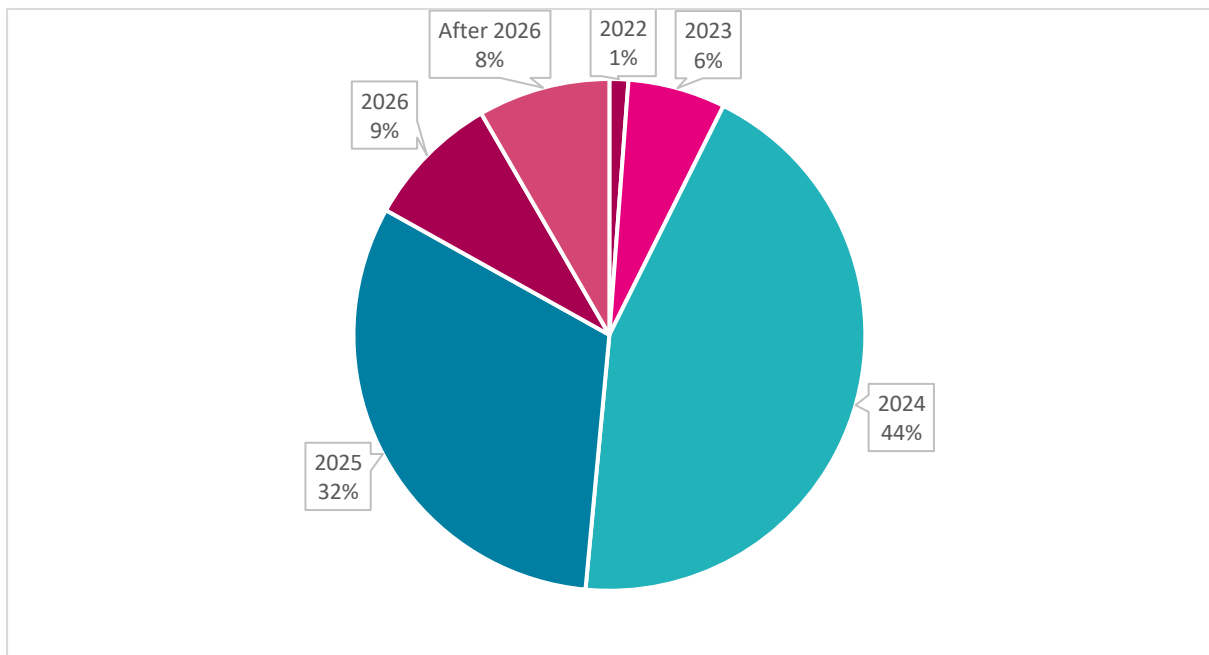


Students Respondents Under 18

Table 4: Student Respondents Under 18: Year of completion of Leaving Certificate

What year will you/did you complete your Leaving Certificate	Count	Percent
2022	6	1.19%
2023	31	6.16%
2024	222	44.14%
2025	159	31.61%
2026	43	8.55%
After 2026	42	8.35%
Total	503	100.00%

Figure 3: Student Respondents Under 18: Year of completion of Leaving Certificate

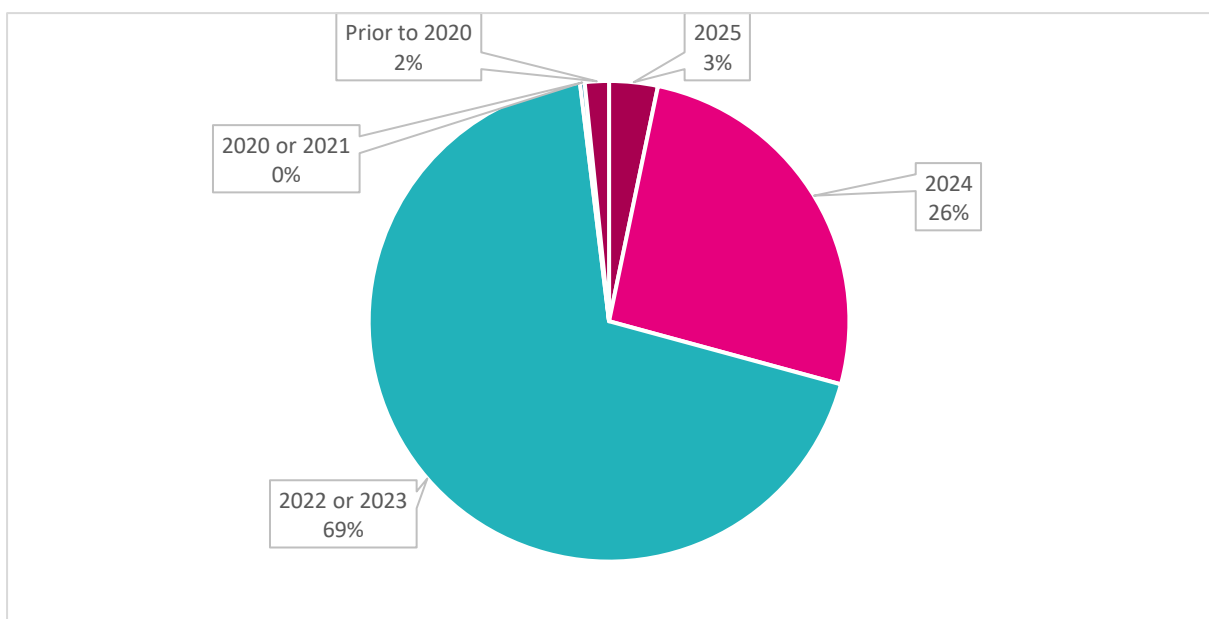


Student Respondents Over 18

Table 5: Student Respondents Over 18: Year of completion of Leaving Certificate

What year will you/did you complete your Leaving Certificate?	Count	Percent
2025	147	3.27%
2024	1168	25.96%
2022 or 2023	3097	68.84%
2020 or 2021	14	0.31%
Prior to 2020	73	1.62%
Total	4499	100.00%

Figure 4: Students Respondents Over 18: Year of completion of Leaving Certificate



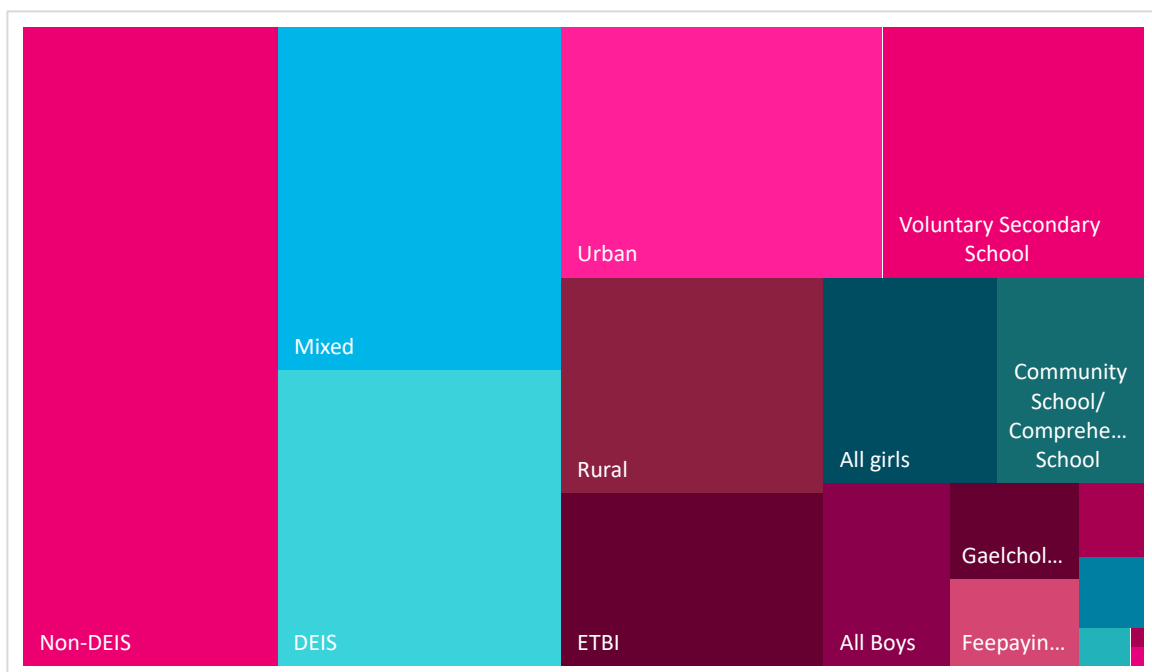
3.5.3 School types represented

The survey respondents were asked to identify their respective school types, through a multiple-response question. The distribution of responses, along with the corresponding counts (N), is as follows (See Table 6). The majority were non-DEIS, mixed, urban and voluntary secondary schools, which broadly reflects the Irish schooling context in general.

Table 6: Description of school context (multiple responses)

Description of school context	N
Non-DEIS	1868
Mixed	1113
DEIS	960
Urban	924
Voluntary Secondary School	753
Rural	647
ETBI	519
All girls	409
Community School/Comprehensive School	346
All Boys	267
Gaelcholáiste/Sruth/Aonad Láinghaeilge	141
Fee-paying/Private School	128
Scoil Ghaeltachta	55
Boarding School	53
Other	22
Alternative Education Setting - Youthreach, Home schooling, Ret	3
Tuition College	3

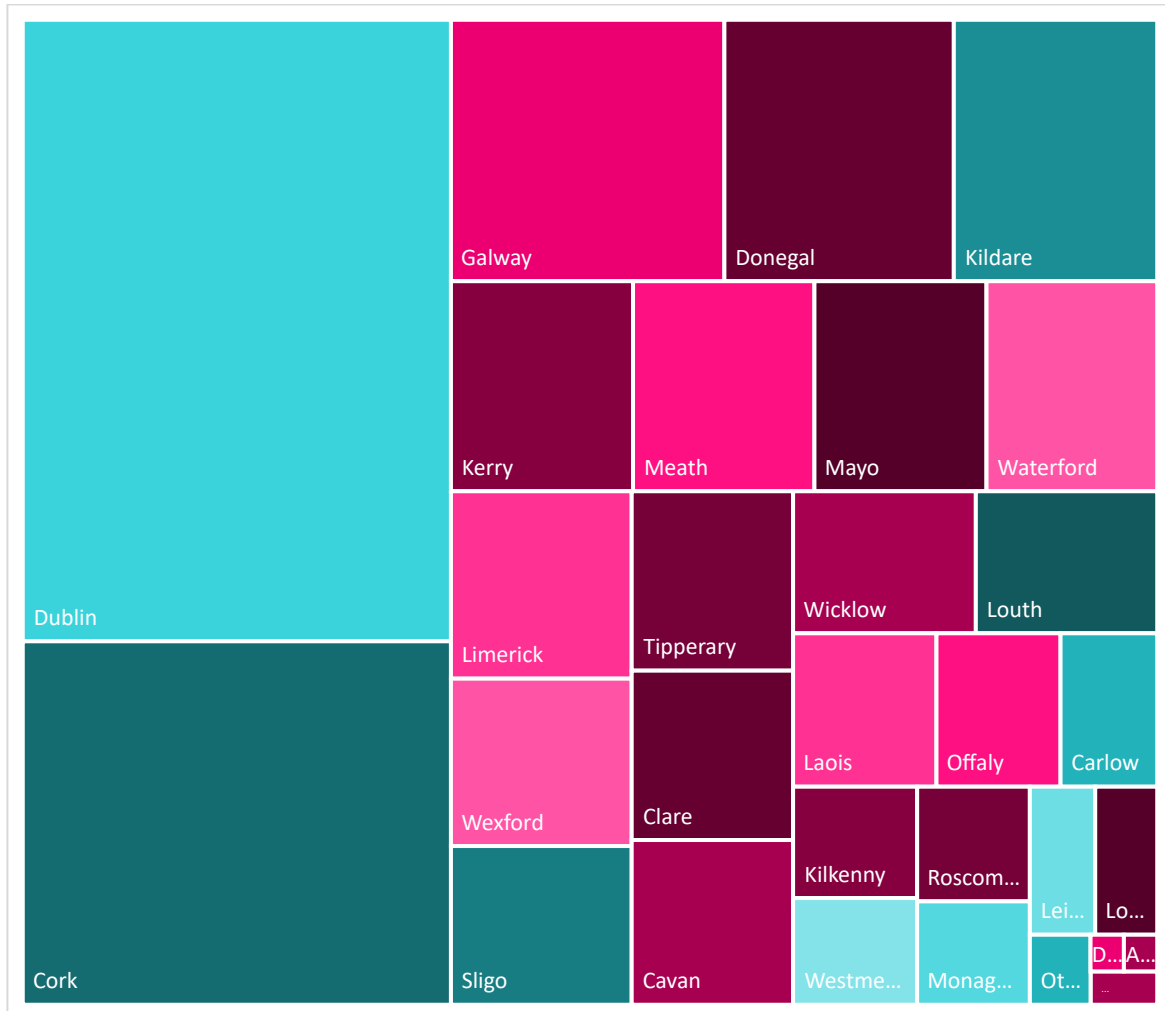
Figure 5: Description of school context (multiple responses)



3.5.4 Location of respondents

In considering the answer to the question, “Where do you live” responses from 9,960 respondents were received, of the total 11,220 valid responses sought. Figure 6 Figure 1below illustrates this graphically, and this aligns in the main to the major demographic spread across Ireland.

Figure 6: Respondents by county



Antrim	11
Armagh	7
Carlow	132
Cavan	237
Clare	243
Cork	1386
Derry	6
Donegal	535
Down	11
Dublin	2371
Fermanagh	5
Galway	638
Kerry	342
Kildare	474
Kilkenny	123
Laois	195
Leitrim	86
Limerick	302

Longford	82
Louth	230
Mayo	323
Meath	339
Monaghan	104
Offaly	169
Roscommon	116
Sligo	257
Tipperary	257
Tyrone	2
Waterford	320
Westmeath	118
Wexford	270
Wicklow	231
Other	38
Total	9960

3.5.5 Gender of respondents

In response to a question of gender (n=10,471), responses indicated that respondents overall were 23% male and 76% female, with less than 1% identifying as non-binary/other. A closer analysis of gender by respondent is illustrated in Figure 7 and Table 7 where notable gender differences in response rates of students and parents are observable.

Figure 7: Gender by category of respondents

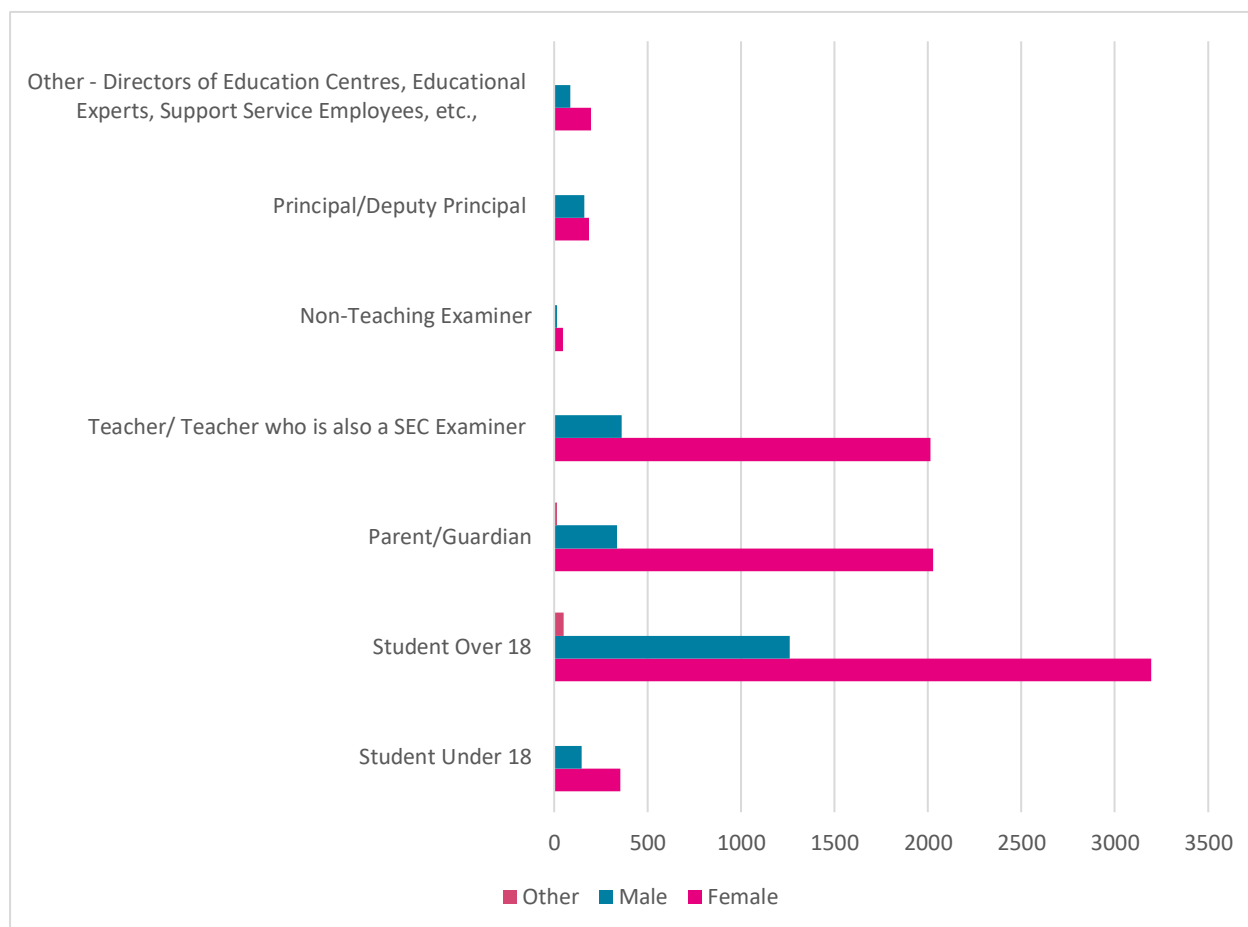


Table 7: Reported gender demographics of respondents by category (n= 10,471)

Gender	Female	Male	Other
Student Under 18	353	147	5
Student Over 18	3194	1261	49
Parent/Guardian	2027	336	14
Teacher/ Teacher who is also a SEC Examiner	2013	363	5
Non-Teaching Examiner	47	16	0
Principal/Deputy Principal	187	160	2
Other - Directors of Education Centres, Educational Experts, Support Service Employees, etc.,	198	88	6
Totals	8019	2371	81

3.5.6 Languages

Irish, French, German, Spanish, and Italian are among the most widely studied languages, that include an oral examination component within the Leaving Certificate examination in Ireland. As a result, the survey aimed to gather representative responses from individuals involved in studying, teaching and examining these specific subjects. Respondents were asked to indicate which languages were being studied as an examinable component of the Leaving Certificate examinations. The most frequently mentioned language within responses from parents and students was Irish, with 6,067 responses relating to students taking or having taken it for the Leaving Certificate exam. Followed closely were French, Spanish, and German. Additional, respondents mentioned other languages. These details are

presented in Figure 8 and Table 8 below. A corresponding table reporting the numbers of students who took each of these languages in the previous years is available in Appendix 1.

Figure 8: Frequency of responses from parents with children under 18, and students over 18 regarding languages undertaken in the Leaving Certificate (multiple responses).

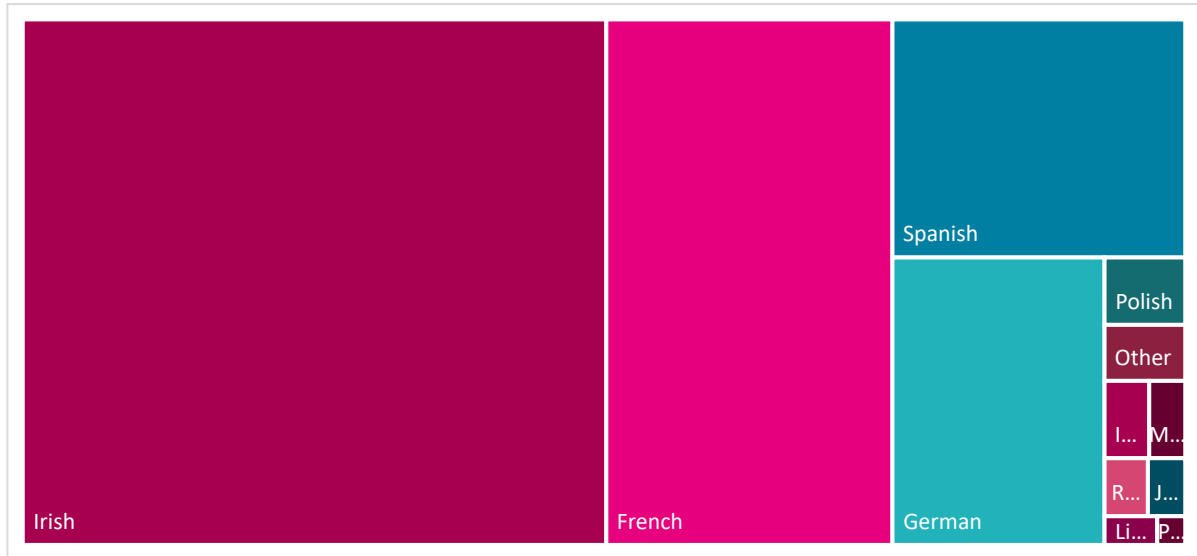


Table 8: Frequency of responses from parents with children under 18, and students over 18 regarding languages undertaken in the Leaving Certificate (multiple responses)

Languages	Count	Percent
Irish	6067	50.18%
French	2981	24.66%
German	1201	9.93%
Spanish	1380	11.41%
Italian	69	0.57%
Russian	50	0.41%
Mandarin Chinese	55	0.45%
Lithuanian	30	0.25%
Polish	108	0.89%
Japanese	43	0.36%
Portuguese	16	0.13%
Other	90	0.74%

In terms of teachers and/or examiners, a similar representation of languages was evident from responses to the question of what languages you teach or do you or have you examined for the SEC. Again, the highest represented response was Irish, followed by French, German, and Spanish.

See Figure 9 and Table 9 below for a detailed breakdown of multiple responses received to this question.

Figure 9: What language do you teach, or what language do you/have you examined for the SEC?

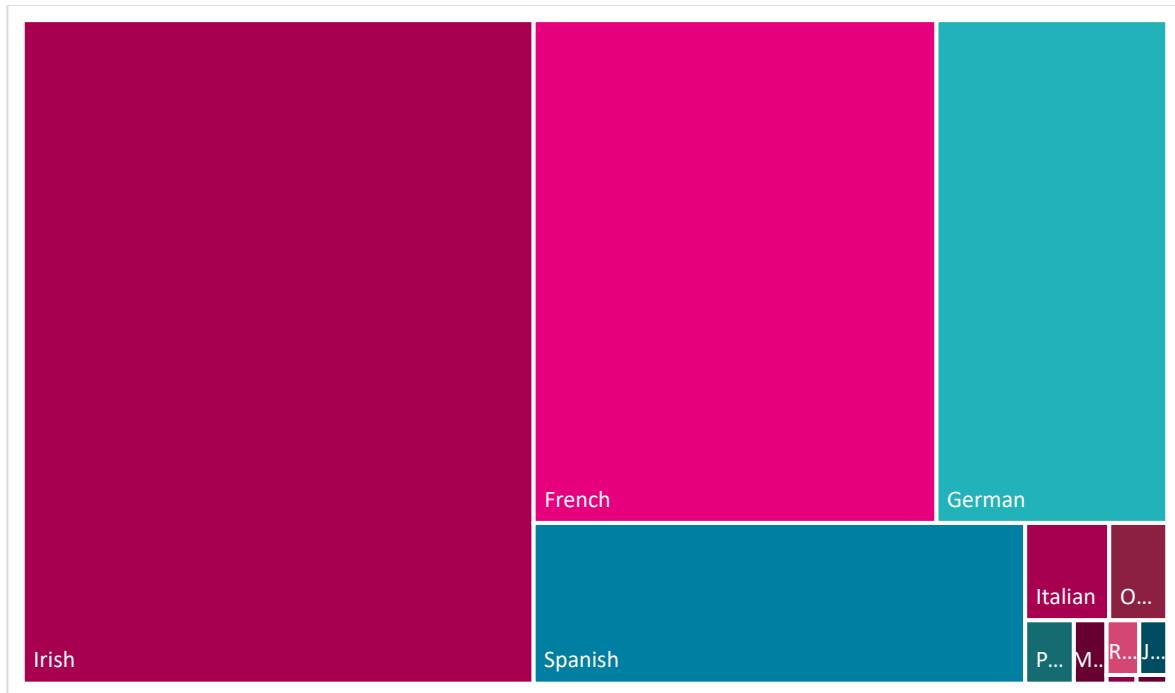


Table 9: What language do you teach, or what language do you/have you examined for the SEC?

What languages do you/have you taught or examined for the SEC?	Count	Percentage
Irish	1318	44.98%
French	787	26.86%
German	451	15.39%
Spanish	307	10.48%
Italian	32	1.09%
Russian	7	0.24%
Mandarin Chinese	8	0.27%
Lithuanian	1	0.03%
Polish	12	0.41%
Japanese	6	0.20%
Portuguese	1	0.03%
Other	22	0.75%

4. Survey Findings

4.1 Timing of Leaving Certificate Orals

The first and primary aim of this survey was to determine the most suitable time for the Leaving Certificate Orals from 2024 onwards. 11,220 responded to this question which was asked to all cohorts at the beginning of the survey, (apart from students under 18 who were asked as part of their own branching question). This is illustrated in Figure 10 below. The main summary is as follows:

- 53% of those who responded indicated the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations should occur during term time before the Easter holidays.
- 23% chose during school time after Easter holidays,
- 23% outside school time during the Easter holidays
- 1% chose “other”.

Figure 10: When do you think Leaving Certificate Examinations should take place in the future?

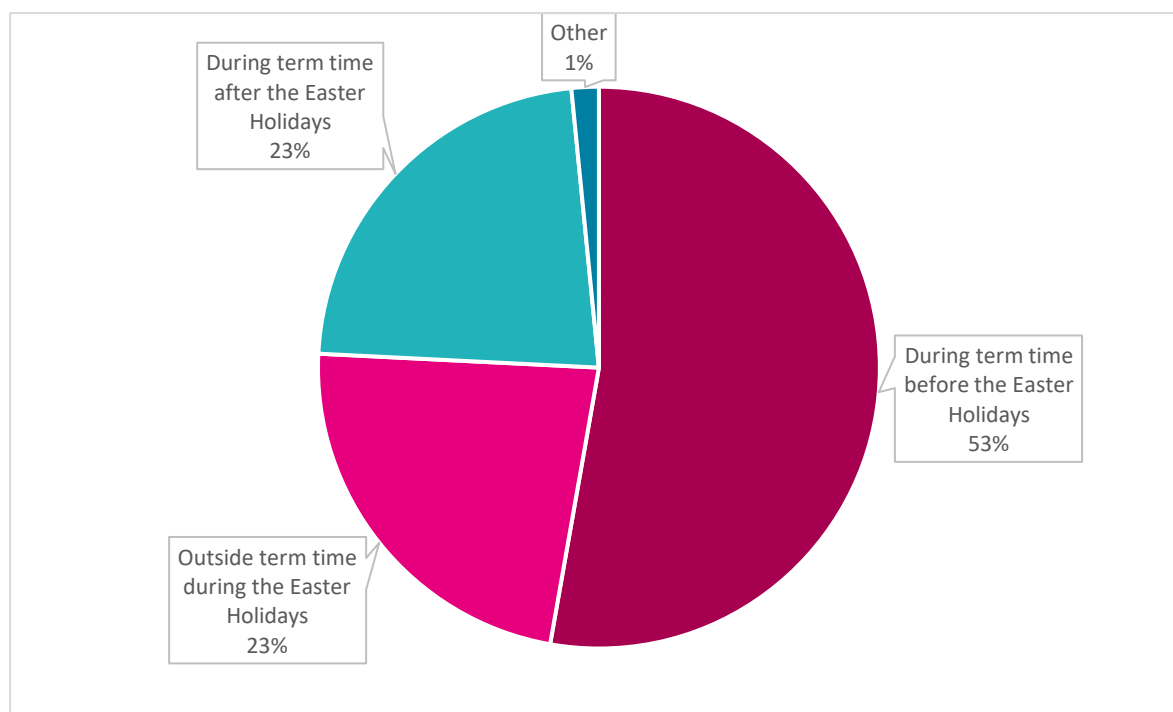


Table 10: Preferences on the future timing of the leaving certificate oral examinations across all cohorts

	Count	Percent
During term time before the Easter Holidays	5922	52.78%
Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	2582	23.01%
During term time after the Easter Holidays	2540	22.64%
Other	176	1.57%
Total	11220	100.00%

Within the “other” selection, suggestions were made for alternative timings for oral exams. The most common theme that emerged under this category was a return to the old system where the date of the Leaving Certificate Oral examinations would occur before or after Easter dependant on when Easter fell each year. However, in contrast to this a small number of respondents suggested that the orals be at a set time each year. Other options which were suggested was to have a hybrid model with one set of exams (such as Irish) occurring one week before the Easter holidays with the other languages either during or after Easter. Some other respondents suggested during the first term in Leaving Certificate year with others suggesting the end of 5th year. A small number of respondents

suggested to have them closer to the written papers in June where others suggested earlier in the second term after Christmas.

In the following section we will report by cohort on the findings of this question, and Figure 11 (below) illustrates this collectively. The level agreement across all categories is evident, with the preference for these examinations to be held in the first option illustrated below (i.e. during term time and before the Easter holidays). The second main preference that emerges across all of the categories of respondent is for the third option in Figure 11 below (i.e. during term time and after the Easter holidays).

A notable exception is observed for the second preference by students over 18 who have completed the Leaving Certificate for these exams, and for teachers, for these examinations to occur during the Easter holidays, rather than after Easter. This may be explained in part by these students and teachers having experience in undertaking this examination at this time period in 2022 or 2023. However, both categories of respondent still report a consistent and aligned first preference for these examinations to be timed to take place before Easter, comparable with other respondents.

The remaining exception to note is that of principals/deputy principals who indicate their first preference is for Easter timed exams. We will explore this particular finding in more detail as we consider the individual categories of respondents in turn. Table 11(below) gives a full detailed breakdown of the responses by respondent type.

Figure:11 Preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral exam, by respondent type (n=11,220)

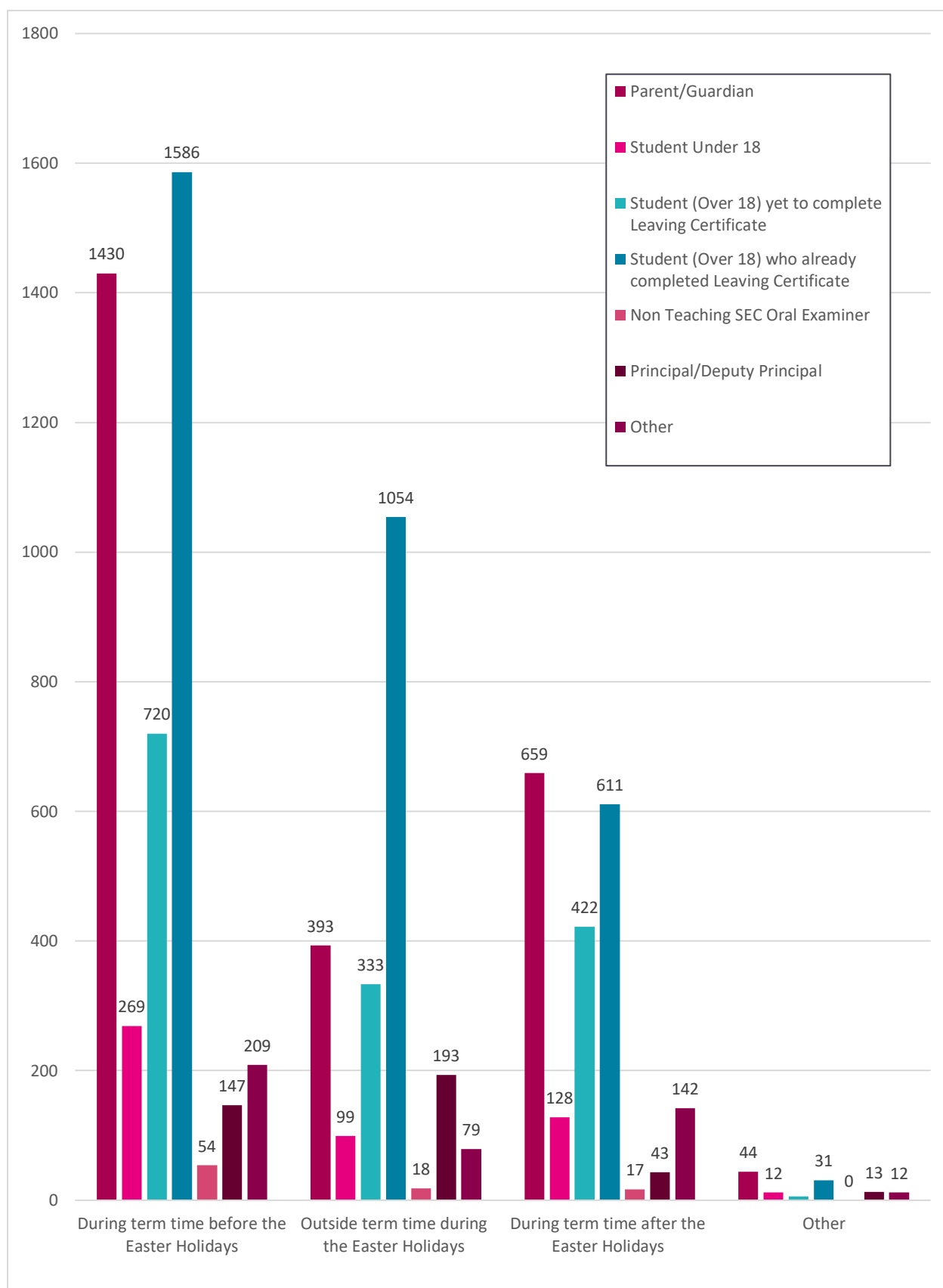


Table 11: Preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral exam, by respondent type

		[Q3] When do you think the Leaving Certificate oral examinations should take place in the future? (Select one response only)
--	--	---

		During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Count Total
[Q5] Which best describes you?	Parent/Guardian	1430	393	659	44	2526
	Student Under 18	269	99	128	12	508
	Student (Over 18) yet to complete Leaving Certificate	720	333	422	6	1481
	Student (Over 18) who already completed Leaving Certificate	1586	1054	611	31	3282
	Teacher / Teaching SEC Oral Examiner	1507	413	518	58	2496
	Non-Teaching SEC Oral Examiner	54	18	17	0	89
	Principal/Deputy Principal	147	193	43	13	396
	Other	209	79	142	12	442
	Count Total	5922	2582	2540	176	11220
Cumulative percent	52.78%	23.01%	22.64%	1.57%	100.00%	

4.1.1 Parents

When the results from both the English and Irish language parts of the survey were combined almost 57% of parents indicated that the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations should be held before Easter during school time. 26% chose after Easter during school time, 15% outside school time during the Easter holidays and just under 2% chose other.

Figure 12: Parent preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

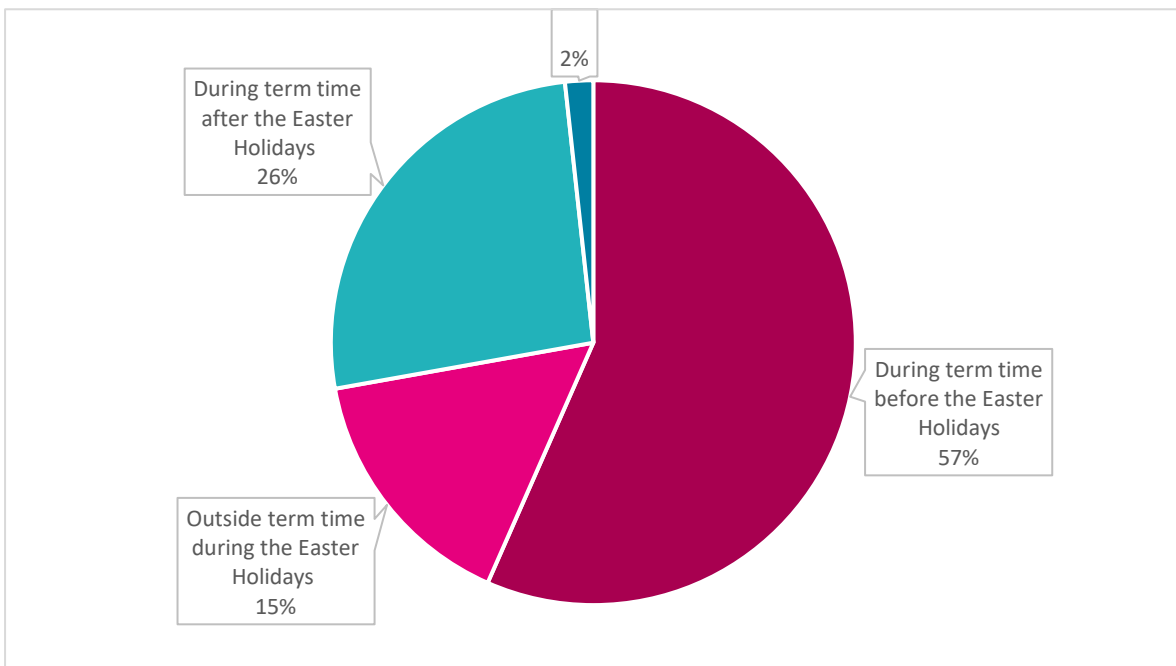


Table 12: Parent preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

Parent/Guardian	During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Total
Count	1430	393	659	44	2526
Percentage	56.61%	15.56%	26.09%	1.74%	100.00%

4.1.2 Students under 18

From this cohort 53% indicated that they would prefer the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations to take place before Easter during school time. 25% chose after Easter during school time, 19.5% chose outside school time during the Easter holidays and 2% chose other.

Figure 13: Students under 18 preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

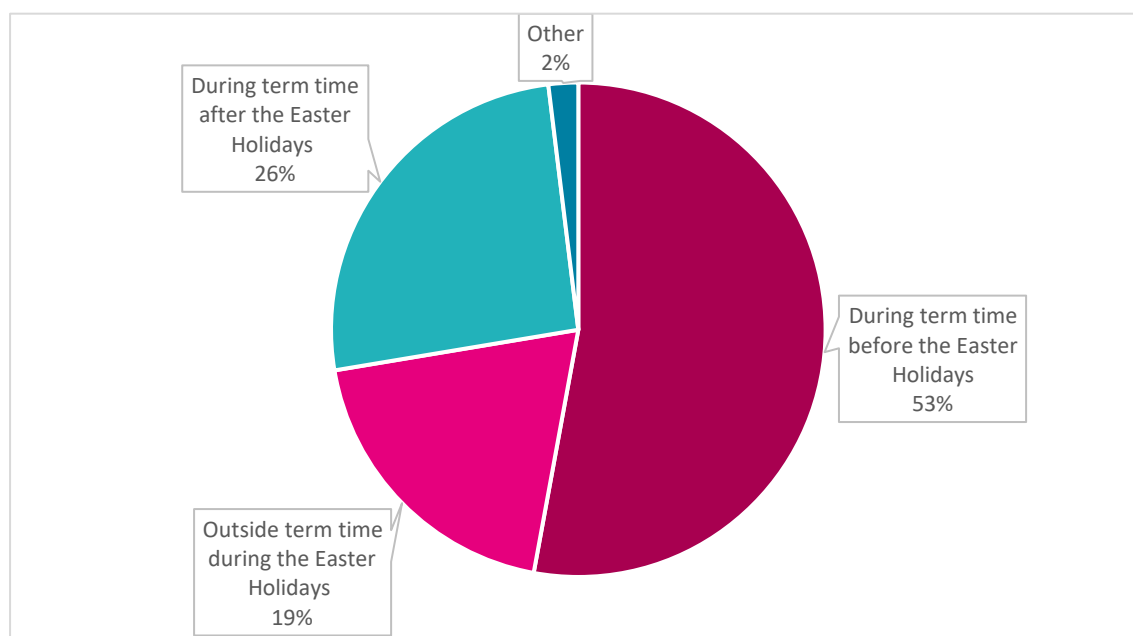


Table 13: Students under 18 preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

Student Under 18	During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Total n
Count	269	99	128	12	508
Percentage	52.95%	19.49%	25.20%	2.36%	100.00%

4.1.3 Students Over 18

48% indicated that they would prefer the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations to take place before Easter during school time. 22% chose after Easter during school time, 29% chose outside school time during the Easter holidays and 0.78% chose other.

Figure 14: All Students Over 18 preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

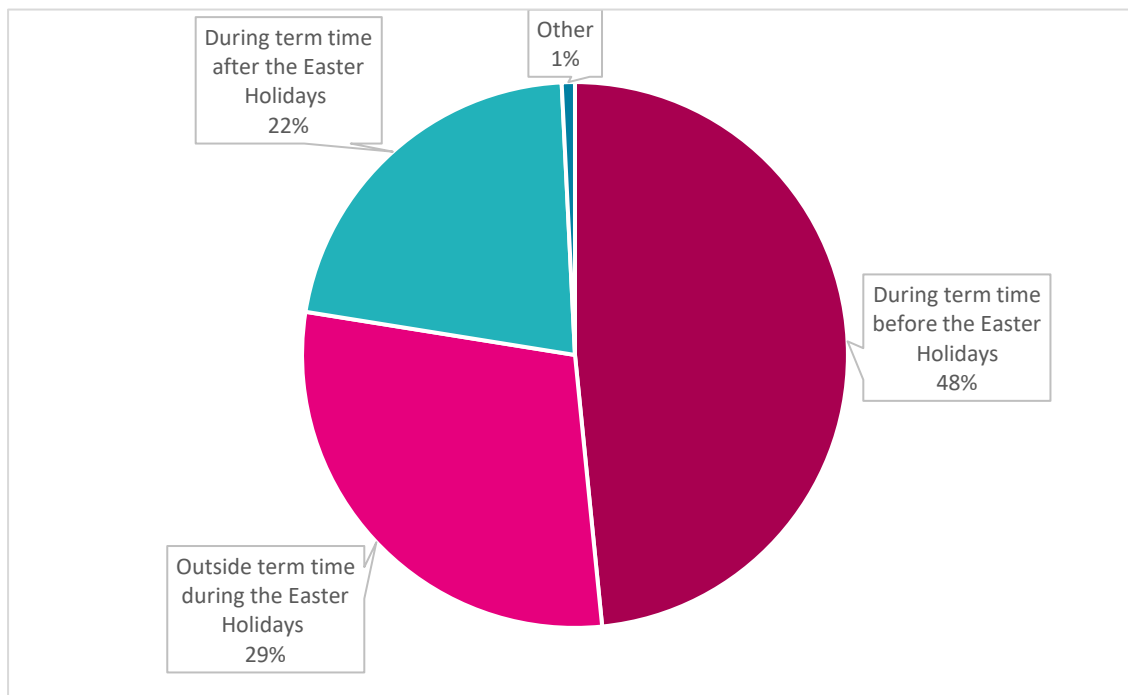


Table 14: Students Over 18 preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

	During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Total
Student (Over 18) yet to complete Leaving Certificate					
Count	720	333	422	6	1481
Percentage	48.62%	22.48%	28.49%	0.41%	100.00%
Student (Over 18) who already completed Leaving Certificate					
Count	1586	1054	611	31	3282
Percentage	48.32%	32.11%	18.62%	0.94%	100.00%
All students over 18					
Count	2306	1387	1033	37	4763
Percentage	48.41%	29.12%	21.69%	0.78%	100.00%

4.1.4 Teachers and Teaching Examiners

60% of teachers/teaching examiners indicated they would prefer to have the orals before Easter during school time, almost 17% indicated after Easter during school time, 21% chose outside school time during the Easter holidays and 2% chose other.

Figure 15: Teachers and Teaching Examiners preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

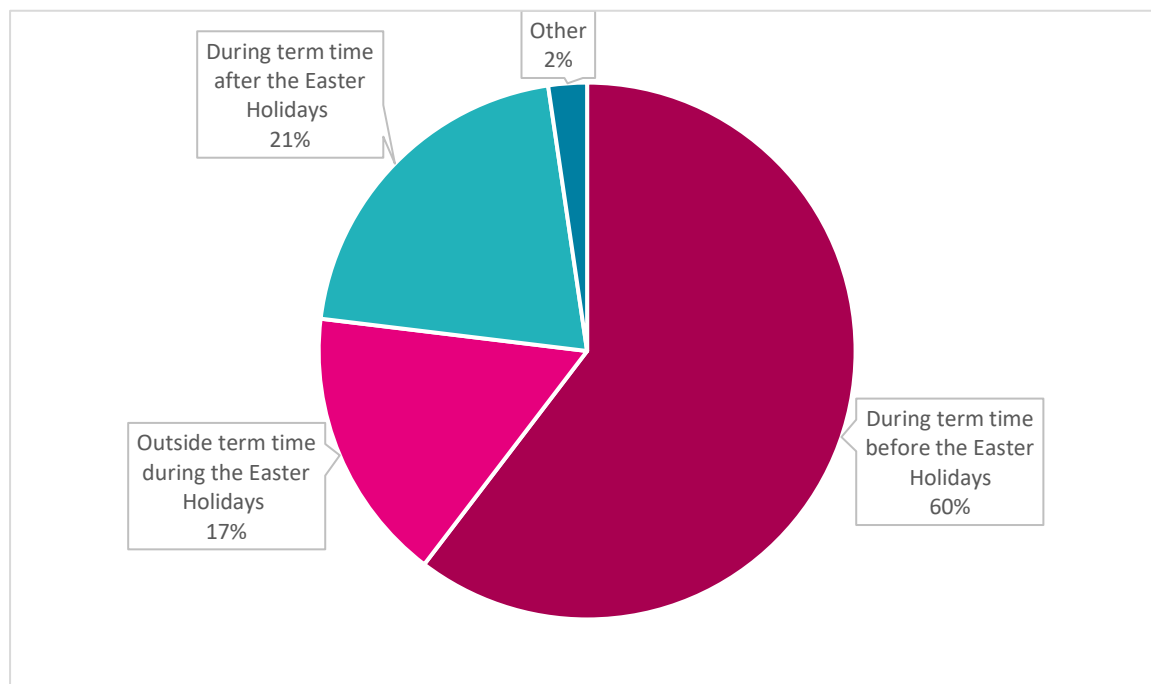


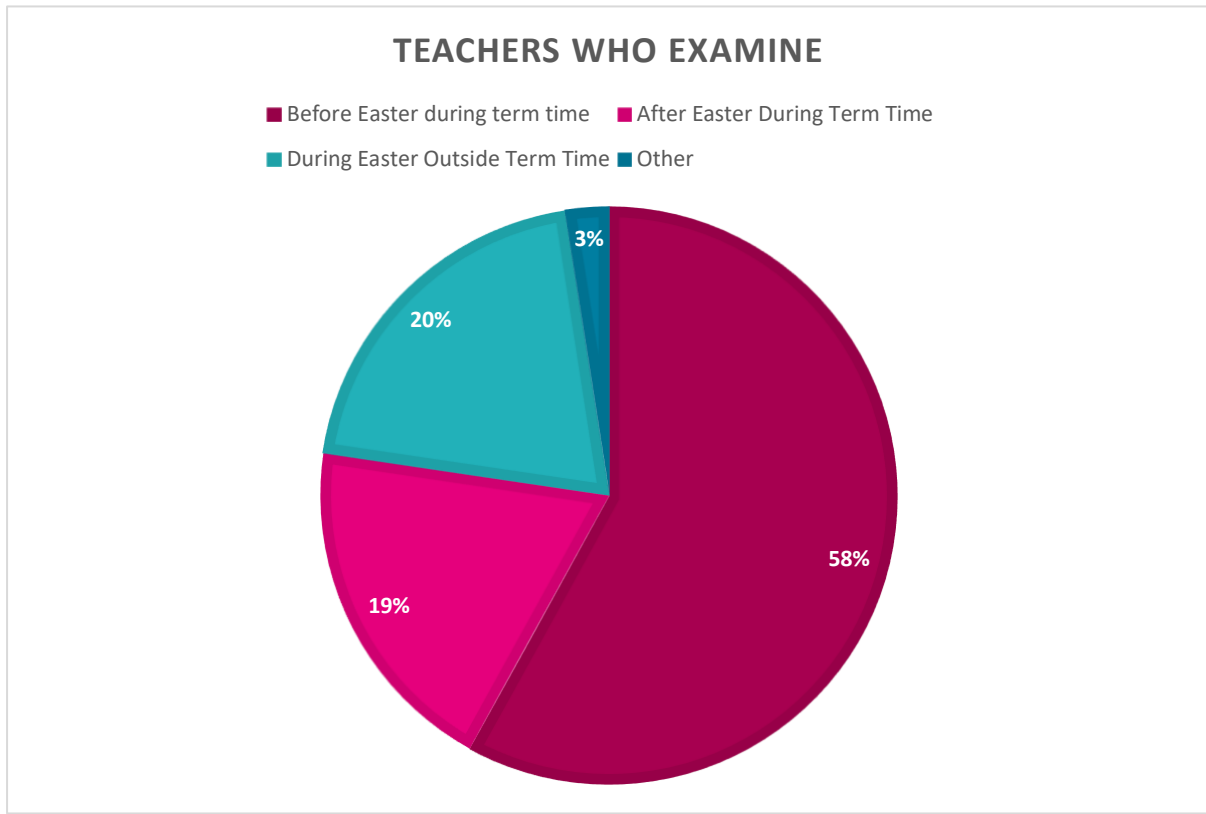
Table 15: Teachers and Teaching Examiners preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

Teacher / Teaching SEC Oral Examiner	During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Total
Count	1507	413	518	58	2496
Percentage	60.38%	16.55%	20.75%	2.32%	100.00%

This data has been further broken down into those teachers who reported that they have examined oral examinations and those that haven't.

4.1.4.1 Teachers who have acted as Examiners

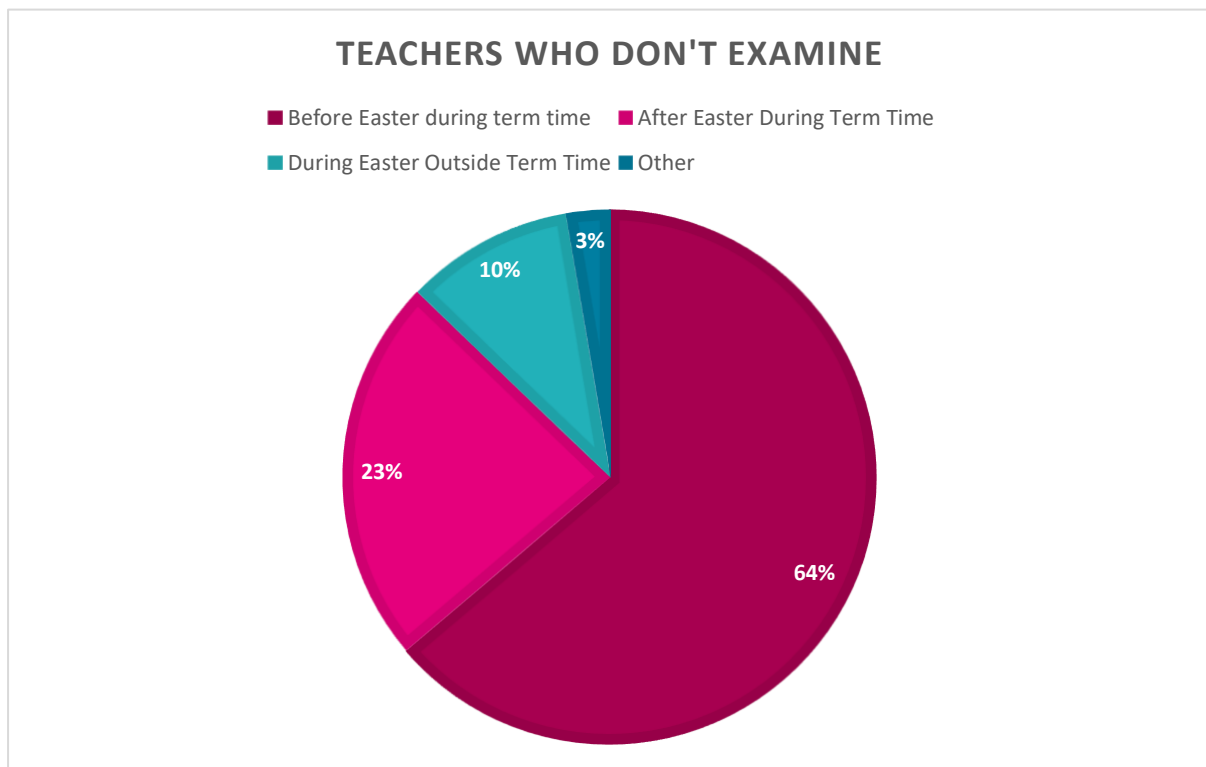
Figure 15a: Teaching Examiners preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations



58% of teaching examiners indicated they would prefer to have the orals before Easter during school time, almost 19% indicated after Easter during school time, 20% chose outside school time during the Easter holidays and 3% chose other.

4.1.4.2 Teachers who have not acted as Examiners

Figure 15b: Teachers who have not examined preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations



64% of teacher who have not examined Leaving Certificate orals indicated they would prefer to have the orals before Easter during school time, almost 23% indicated after Easter during school time, 10% chose outside school time during the Easter holidays and 3% chose other.

4.1.5 Non-Teaching SEC Examiners

In this smaller cohort the results were of a similar trend as others. Almost 61% indicated they wanted the Oral Examinations before Easter during school time, 19% chose after Easter during school time, 20 % outside school time during the Easter holidays and 0% chose other.

Figure 16 Non-Teaching Examiners preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

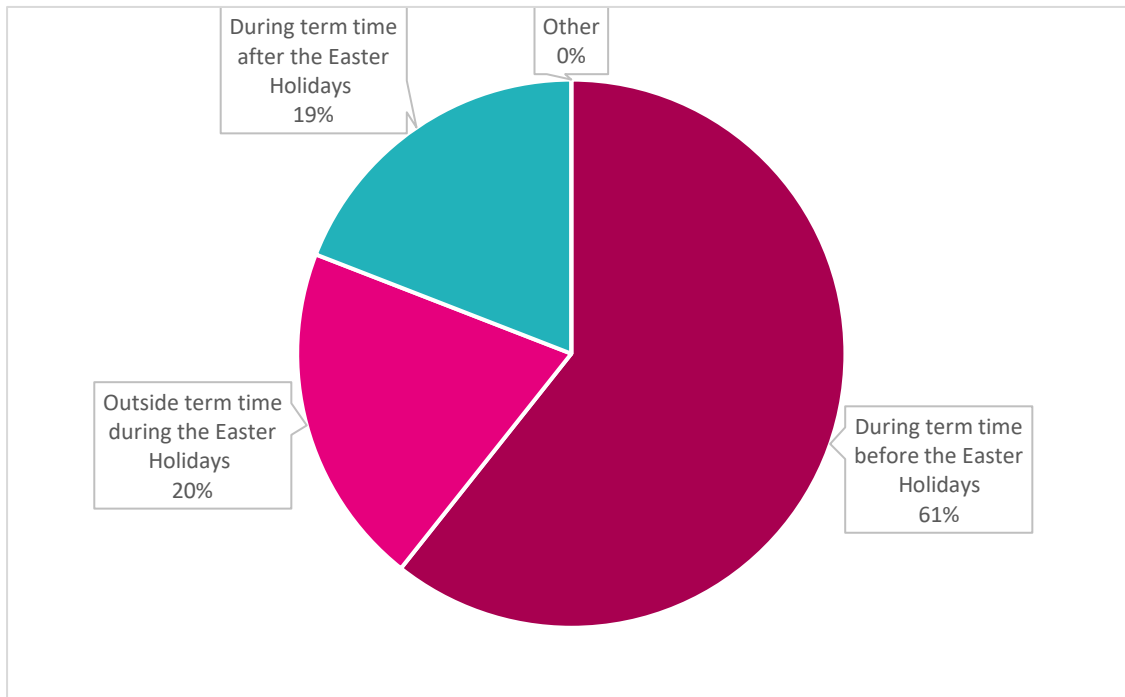


Table 16: Non-Teaching Examiners preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

Non-Teaching SEC Oral Examiner	During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Total
Count	54	18	17	0	89
Percentage	60.67%	20.22%	19.10%	0.00%	100.00%

4.1.6 Deputy Principals/Principals

This cohort was the only group to deviate from the trend. Here, 37% indicated they would prefer the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations before Easter during school time, with almost 11% choosing after Easter during school time, however a majority, almost 49% chose outside school time during the Easter holidays and 3% chose the other option.

Figure 17: Deputy Principals/Principals preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

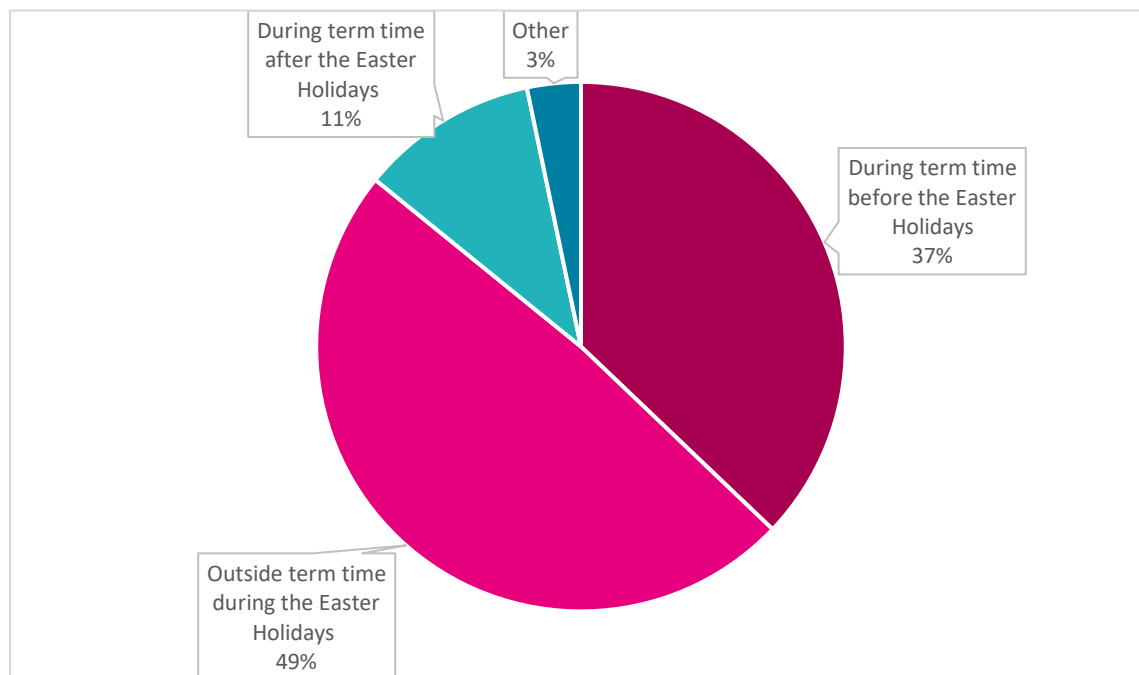


Table 17: Deputy Principals/Principals preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

Principal/Deputy Principal	During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Total
Count	147	193	43	13	396
Percentage	37.12%	48.74%	10.86%	3.28%	100.00%

4.1.7 Other - Directors of Education Centres, Educational Experts, Support Service Employees, etc

There were 442 respondents to this section of the survey. Almost 92% answered the English language version and 8% the Irish language version. This cohort were then asked to describe their role or interest in this subject, a number of students completed this section as well as teachers and former teachers were also to the fore. Other reasons given by respondents included other members of the school community including guidance counsellors, parents, exam secretaries, ASD co-coordinators, and assistant principals etc. Also included here are educational advisors and those working in other areas of the education sector as well as youth workers and those with a general interest in the Irish language or in education in general.

From this group 47% indicated they wanted the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations to be held before Easter during school time, 32% after Easter during school time, almost 18% outside school time during the Easter holidays and just under 3% chose other.

Figure 18: Other categories of respondents' preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

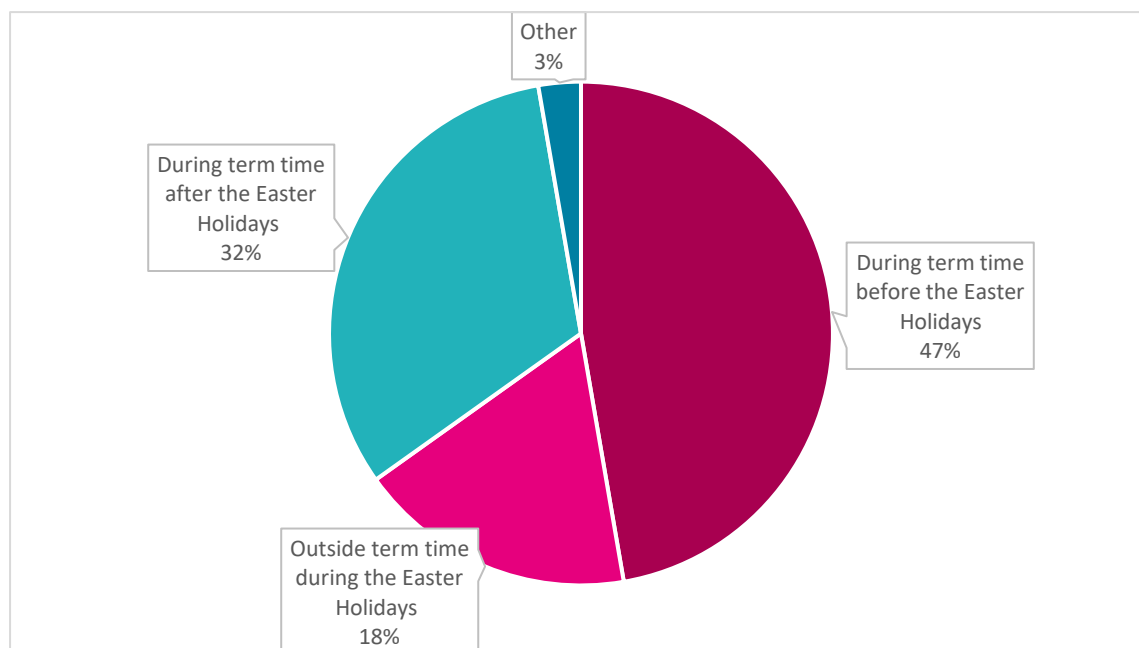


Table 18: Other categories of respondents' preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

Other	During term time before the Easter Holidays	Outside term time during the Easter Holidays	During term time after the Easter Holidays	Other	Total
Count	209	79	142	12	442
Percentage	47.29%	17.87%	32.13%	2.71%	100.00%

4.2 Qualitative rationale in relation to the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations

All respondents were asked to give a rationale as to their choice with regard to the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. Recurrent themes were seen throughout the respondent groups. The following section details the qualitative findings from a thematic analysis of these. **Appendix 4 provides a summary of this qualitative data by cohort.**

4.2.1 Prior to Easter during School time – Rationale

Over 3,500 people who had chosen “Prior to Easter during school time” responded to this question across all of the cohorts. Wellbeing and student mental health was the most prominent theme that emerged from the analysis. The two-week holiday at Easter time was seen by a vast majority as a much-needed break in a very busy and stressful year. Many noted that this break was used to rest, recuperate and pivot towards the written examinations in June. The Easter break would allow the students to separate the learning from term two and focus on the next stage of their examinations. Student support also emerged as a key theme across the responses. It was noted by many that during term time students would have their teachers, pastoral care team and their peers available to help them should they need it. In contrast to this, the difficulties with support during the Easter holiday examinations period of 2022 and 2023 was highlighted by many. Parents, teachers and management all noting that difficulties with absenteeism arose for students due to transport issues, lack of parental

support or other external commitments such as jobs and holiday commitments. This seemed to be further emphasised by those who attend a post primary school with DEIS status.

The following sections detail the findings thematically by respondent type:

Parents

There were over 1300 replies to this question varying from a single word response to a more detailed response of a couple of hundred words. General themes emerged from the analysis of these responses. The most prominent theme that stood out throughout from parents was the students' need for a break, many referred to stress levels, wellbeing and the general mental health of students in their Leaving Certificate year and thus maintaining that the two week holiday at Easter was crucial in ensuring that students, parents and teachers get a break to rest, recuperate and prepare for the next term.

Students need the Easter break to recover from the stress of term. Putting oral exams on back-to-back days and expecting examiners to work and students to come in on Saturdays or Sundays is not justified.

Parent

The next prominent theme was the need for students to get the Oral Examination "over with" and the need "to spread the load" so that students could focus on the upcoming written exams. Many parents maintained that leaving the Oral Examinations until Easter or afterward resulted in students not being able to study and focus on the next stage of examination.

It would give students the opportunity to concentrate on revision for written exams during Easter break

Parent

A number of parents alluded to the fact that holding the Oral Examinations during term time meant that the student was better supported. It was noted that having the normal school day with school transport, peer support and teacher support ensured that students were less stressed and that it was more equitable to all.

Chun a chinntiú go mbeidh daltaí ar fáil chun freastail uirthi is go mbeidh múinteoirí ar fáil chun cuidiú leo ag an tréimhse dheirneach. Bíonn roinnt mhaith neirbhís ar daltaí ag an t-am seo agus laghdaíonn se an imní má tá an múinteoir abhair timpeall.

Tuismitheoir

Some parents mentioned that they struggled to get their student to school during the Easter holidays due to working commitments but also due to school refusal issues. Where a student may have struggled in the normal term time to attend school that in some cases attending Oral Examinations during Easter was more stressful.

Our students in DEIS school struggle to attend during school time due to family circumstances, transport, work etc. They will struggle to attend for exams and most likely will not attend or will cause huge stress for the teacher/ school management. Orals in term time allow staff to link in, collect where necessary and support to attend with buses running etc

Parent

Parents also spoke about other commitments that would create difficulties for families and students if the Oral Examinations were to be held during Easter. Parents mentioned prebooked holidays which had to be cancelled, boarders and international students having to arrange flights around the examination dates, parents and students wishing to partake in religious festivities and other commitments such as students with jobs, revision courses and university entrance tests.

We have family abroad and we'd like to have the option to travel during the holidays. I am a parent of a secondary school student but I work in a primary school so holidays should be a time to rest and reset.

Parent

Students

2259 respondents answered this question. Overwhelmingly students said that they would prefer to have the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations prior to Easter time as this would provide a well needed break, rest and time to take care of their mental health during a stressful year.

Students deserve a proper balance of study and rest over Easter holidays, and I feel that my fellow 2023 graduates and I didn't have a proper Easter break because of our orals. I feel that if oral exams are held before the Easter break this will allow students time to recover and rest after the orals during the Easter holidays.

Student

A large number of respondents also indicated that the Easter break was a crucial period for students to refocus and to pivot towards study for the written papers. Many students indicated that it was essential to have a clear gap and enough time between the oral examinations and the written paper to prepare and revise and that Easter was the ideal time to start this.

As I believe that it is essential that 6th year students get some time to either catch up on study or take some time off during the Easter break without it being hugely interrupted by the Oral Examinations as this could be crucial for the mental health of students and in their preparation for the Leaving Cert.

Student

A number of respondents felt that teacher and peer support was vital during the oral examinations and that students benefitted from having the orals during term time so that they could focus on practice and learning in school.

I attend a DEIS school and I feel it is vital for myself to be around my teachers during this time and to have a support system for when I am doing my first oral examination.

Student

A small number of students also referred to the logistical difficulties created when the orals were examined during the Easter break. Travelling to school was mentioned by a small number as was the fact that parents had to take time off to support them.

It's much easier to get everyone in the school if they don't have to sacrifice holiday time to be there, and for those students who rely on public transport to get to school it is very unfair to force them to try and be in when they may struggle with transport.

Student

Students also mentioned such themes as religious festivities, travel arrangements and other commitments such as jobs which would be impacted if the Oral Examinations were to be held during the Easter holidays.

Having to wait at home for the Orals to finish up is such a nuisance when we could be spending time as a family, travelling or seeing friends who live outside of

the county/country. School exams should be held during school time, not during time with family

Student

Bíonn daoine gnóthach i rith brise na caisce mar shampla and blian seo chaite agus a raibh me i mbun mo ardteist bhí craobh rince an domhain le rince gaelach ar siúl i rith brise na caisce agus bhí go leor brú agus strus orm i rith an treimhse seo ag traenail agus ag deanamh iarracht an dhá eachtra a dhéanamh.

Dalta

Teachers /Teaching Examiners

1155 responded to this question. Similar to other cohorts, teachers also had student wellbeing to the fore, the need for a break for students to rest and renew themselves was to the fore in a majority of responses.

In the interest of student wellbeing students need a break from the pressure of school and exams at Easter before the final run up to the Leaving Certificate.

Teacher /Teaching Examiner

Again, the clear break between the oral examinations and the written papers was mentioned by a larger number of teachers. If the oral examinations were to happen before Easter, then there wouldn't be a clash between orals, practicals and project work so students could focus on each individually.

Practical subjects with practical exams, Engineering, Con St, Visual Art & LCVP exams are all on after Easter.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

In a number of cases teacher referred to the inequity presented to students when the orals were completed during Easter time. In some cases, it was felt that it was more difficult for students to get to schools, that some students felt isolated during this time and that student attendance suffered.

In the interest of equal access for all students to orals. Families that don't or unable to prioritise education may not be aware they are taking place during Easter holidays; some students prioritise part time jobs instead of attending oral.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

During Easter Holidays means those who are from disadvantaged areas, have a part time job, no parental support or means of getting to School are unfairly disadvantaged as they are not in school during Easter Holidays.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

In a few responses teachers mentioned the support which is afforded to students during term time from their peers and their teachers alike. Teachers mentioned that they want to be available for their students as they prepare for the orals but that this is not always possible during the Easter break due to other commitments.

Students can get the oral done during school time with the support of all their friends and teachers. There is far more empathy, collegiality and help available to them during term time.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

I want to be there each day for my students. I can't during the holidays as I have 3 small children.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

In a very small number of cases teachers referred to the impact that the lack of support had on students when the orals occurred during school time, including students taking the wrong level exam as the teacher was not available to advise them.

Má bhíonn ceist ag an scrúdaitheoir faoi leibhéal - gnáth nó bonn níl an múinteoir ar fáil. Rinne 2 de mo scoláirí an scrúdú béil mícheart I mbliana. Ní tharlódh a leithéid dá mbeadh mé thart.

Múinteoir/Scrúdaitheoir atá ag múineadh

In a number of cases teachers referred to the need for a break for teachers also. Some maintained that term time is stressful and that teachers themselves need to refresh and prepare for the last term.

Teachers also need that break to recuperate after a busy term and before the beginning of another.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

A small number of respondents also referred to the challenges associated with taking on the role of examiner during the Easter Break. Caring commitments, stress, work overload were mentioned as factors as to why teachers would not take on the role as examiner during the Easter Break.

I think that a lot of teachers with children are put off the idea of being an oral examiner due to them missing out on their easter holidays with their children. Personally, I have my children in childcare only during term time which makes it difficult for me to be able to work during the Easter. I think there would be a higher number of teachers available if it was during term time.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

It has proven difficult to get examiners. Potentially an examiner may have to work 11 days in a row, the last 6 of which are very intensive.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Non-Teaching Examiners

49 non-teaching examiners engaged with this question. Once again student well-being was to the fore amongst the responses given to this question in this section. Similar to the other cohorts they felt that students needed time off before refocusing and studying for the written papers.

Staff, students and parents need a break

Non-Teaching Oral Examiner

*Bíonn sos ag teastáil ó dhaltaí agus o Mhuinteoirí i rith na cásca
Scrúdaitheoir le Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit nach bhfuil ag múineadh*

Scrúdaitheoir leis an CSS nach bhfuil ag múineadh

A small number of respondents also referred to the added workload placed on teachers when the oral examinations occurred during Easter. They felt that teachers are working hard and need the time of during Easter.

It isn't fair that teachers have to devote time to the exams during the holidays. This wouldn't happen in other jobs or sectors. Teachers are already preparing and working hard to meet expectations of the job while at work never mind during the holidays.

Non-Teaching Oral Examiner

Principal/Deputy Principal

138 people responded to this question in the Principal/Deputy Principal category. Again, student wellbeing was the main theme which emerged during analysis. Many referred to pressure, workload and fatigue which students feel during Leaving Certificate year and the need for a complete break.

Students need time to switch off and not be under constant pressure. Doing exams over holidays does not account for the burn out or fatigue that students are under competing projects/ courses etc

Principal/Deputy Principal

It allows students, staff and management to take a break from the intense workload and therefore protect their well-being. Students are preparing intensely for the weeks leading up to these exams, they can happen the week before without detrimental impact on academic outcomes, but by eating into their holidays, students do not get the same opportunity to take a mental break from revision as many will have multiple exams at Easter followed by revision classes online or in person. It is unfair on the student.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Many respondents also referred to the added pressure and expectations placed on staff and management of schools when orals were held during the Easter break. School management, although not mandated to being in school during this time, felt that they had an obligation to be there with no extra financial reward.

Níl sé cothrom ar bhainistíocht na scoile go bhfuil orthu laethanta saoire na Cásca ag cinntiú go bhfuil scrúduithe stáit á riaradh i gceart.

Príomhoide/Príomhoide Tánaisteach

The expectation of school leaders, namely the principal to be in school in unreasonable. Very few principals will not attend even when it says we don't have to. All parties were getting additional financial incentives to be there except the principal. We hear endless talk of burn out of principals, lack of applications for the job etc and yet wonder why when things like this are introduced.

Principal/Deputy Principal

It is also unfair on senior leaders who although do not have to be in school during these exams and therefore do not get paid to be there during their holidays, the vast majority feel compelled to be there as they care about the students and the success of the exams taking place in the schools they are leading. This system is also detrimental to their well-being.

Principal/Deputy Principal

One respondent referred to the added commitment that having the orals during Easter placed on boarding schools in relation to their students.

Our school is a boarding school and students and staff need their time at home. It causes increased stress for staff and students to lose a week of the vacation.

There are significant extra costs involved when Leaving Cert students, all of whom are borders have to be accommodated until their orals are complete

Principal/Deputy Principal

Some respondents mentioned the difficulties which arose in relation to absenteeism when the oral examinations were examined during the Easter holidays. The importance of a normal school routine, bus transport, and the impact of holiday commitments was highlighted by a few.

In a DEIS school, students need the routine of the school day to perform at their best. The most vulnerable see this exam as an option and some do not show up or have to be contacted on the day before showing up. This is far less of an issue for practical day exams carried out during term time when students perform much better.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Deacrachtaí le scoláirí ag dul ar laethanta saoire, poist pháirtaimseartha srl.

Príomhoide/Príomhoide Tánaisteach

One Principal also highlighted the issue with student engagement prior to the Easter holidays, where students took days off during term time before the holidays to prepare for their upcoming oral.

Many students took a number of days off school during the week before Easter which impacted on missed content in other subjects.

Principal/Deputy Principal

In a number of cases Principal/Deputy Principals referred to the impact that having orals during the Easter had on students in relation to the support which could be provided to them. Some felt that oral exams during Easter were too close together and teachers, pastoral care and other support networks were not available to support the students which meant that they were more isolated and under pressure.

Also, if taking place during the Easter break, key school personnel to support students during this stressful time may not be available to students due to other commitments outside of their normal teaching.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Other

176 people engaged with this question. The vast majority of respondents indicated that the Easter Break was essential to student to have a break, relax and to reduce the stress on students.

Because students need a break and having these exams before the holidays takes away a lot of pressure.

Other

It was mentioned by a number of respondents that by Easter time students have had enough time to prepare and that then they have the chance to pivot towards the upcoming written exams.

Tugann sé tréimhse maith do scoláirí an teanga a shealbhú agus a shaibhriú mar is cúí roimh dóibh tabhairt faoin scrúdú. Má tá an scrúdú le bheith ann le linn saoire na Cásca, cuireann sé isteach ar pé sos beag a bhféadfadh scoláirí a bheith acu gus an deis atá acu díriú ar an staidéar ginearálta - bheadh a gcuid ama go hiomlán tógtha leis na scrúduithe cainte dá mbeadh siad le linn na saoire.

Eile

A small number of respondents also spoke of the impact that the oral examinations has on more vulnerable students. It was noted that the support provided during term time by teachers and peers ensured that those students at risk were more likely to attend the oral examinations.

Because for students who are experiencing anxiety, they need the support of the school structure & support services to help them regulate and do the exams calmly. Also students whose parents do not speak English or do not understand the Irish system are at a disadvantage because they are not always aware of the nature of the exams (ie state exams , run by SEC not by schools) and can actually miss them if they are over the holidays and they are not in school to be reminded of them . Ditto for kids at risk of early school leaving. When exams are during term time teachers are available to help these kids and the HSCL can go to their houses and make sure they are attending for the exam.

Other

In a few cases staff well-being was also mentioned. Teachers, students and examiners were under further pressure when the oral examinations were held during the Easter break, particularly as many noted that the examinations were held too close together for many.

For staff well-being. Staff need the break and some staff feel they need to be in school to support students. Students from disadvantaged schools have more support from teachers during term time.

Other

Anuas air sin, tá sos tuillte ag múinteoirí agus príomhoidí gan bheith ag plé le scrúduithe le linn bhriseadh na Cásca, go háirithe iad siúd a bheadh mar scrúdaitheoirí. Má tá an scrúdú ar siúl níos giorra don samhradh, tá baol ann go mbeadh an brú iomarcach le gach rud ag tarlú níos cóngaraí dá chéile.

Eile

4.2.2 Outside Term Time During the Easter Holidays – Rationale

Approximately 2200 respondents who had chosen “Outside Term Time During the Easter Holidays” responded to this question and gave their reasons as to why they chose that option.

In general, the most common theme that emerged from this data again related to study time. Respondents felt that the Easter break would provide a focused time for students to prepare and concentrate solely on the Oral Examinations without the distractions of school, homework and other Leaving Certificate projects.

A large number of respondents also referred to the benefit of the quieter school environment in relation to this question. Many maintained that the atmosphere would be less pressurised and less distracting for students.

In a large number of cases across all cohorts the impact that having the oral examinations during term time on teaching and learning was a key factor in their choice of timing. Teachers missing class time due to examining commitments, or to support student as well as students missing class time to prepare for their oral examination were mentioned by a few from each respondent group.

Some teachers specifically placed on emphasis on the opportunity that they have had to work as examiners in 2022 and/or 2023 and the benefits that arose from this as they were not leaving their own students to do so. Principals and Deputy Principals highlighted the ease of management of the orals although a number did also note the extra burden such duties have placed on them without extra remuneration or time in lieu.

The themes which emerged are described according to respondent type below.

Parents

409 parents engaged with this question. Three main themes emerged from this section. The most common theme related to the fact that having the oral examinations during Easter would mean that students would have more time to study, firstly due to the fact that it was later in the term and also

because the students would not have other subjects, homework, practical work and other such deadlines at the same time as would be the case if the orals were held during term time.

Focus solely on Orals without the term distraction of other subjects.

Parent

Má tá sé i rith an téarma scoile bheadh na daltaí ag smaoinreamh ar ábhair eile agus ní bheadh a mheabhair s'acu ar an scrúdú amháin.

Tuismitheoir

Equally as prominent a theme related to the school environment. Parents felt that having the oral examinations during Easter would and has meant that it was easier to focus, that the school is quieter, less stressful and with less distractions.

Less anxiety for the student as they can go in and only meet one or two others, very overwhelming during a school day, other distractions, people wishing them luck or asking how they got on.

Parent

The next most prominent theme related to the disruption that occurs when oral examinations are held during term time. Many respondents spoke about the impact on learning and class time in the lead up to the oral examinations and the fact that teachers may be absent as they are examining orals in other schools.

Term time is for teaching and exams should be scheduled out of term.

Parent

To maximise in-school time. If done during school time the examining teachers will be unavailable as they will be examining in other schools and the students will miss out on school while trying to prepare for the exams.

Parent

Students

1330 students responded to this question. A large majority of students referred to the focus which can occur during the Easter holidays when the school was closed. Many maintained that the holidays provided plenty of time to prepare for the oral examinations as it was later in the year but also as they did not have to focus on other subjects and deadlines particularly in an overpacked Leaving Certificate year. The two weeks of the Easter holidays provides ample time to study and prepare in a quiet environment and without students having to miss class.

Because it's less stressful than having it after Easter and it gives you free time to study for the oral instead of being in school.

Student

A large number of students also referred to the school environment in their responses to this choice, they maintained that school would be much quieter, and thus more relaxed and less stressful during the Easter Break.

Less distraction. Avoid talking to others before going into exam and therefore less nervous.

Student

Tá atmaisféar staidéar sa scoil agus tá an láthair níos ciúine. Níl obair le haghaidh ábhair eile le déanamh agus tá tú dírithe ar an bhéaltrial.

Dalta

A small number of students referred to the fact that their teachers would not be available during term time as they will be examining in other schools which would impact their learning.

Teacher won't be available during school time if they are done in term.

Student

Teachers

338 teachers answered this element of the survey. Similar themes were noted as per the other cohorts. The most common theme that emerged related to the fact that examining the Leaving Certificate Orals during Easter was less disruptive for all. Teaching and learning in all subjects were less impacted and students missed less time in the run up to the oral examinations.

It does not affect teaching and learning when held outside term time. When orals are held during term time, the students are missing from class prior to their orals preparing for them.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

A large number of teachers also noted that when the orals occurred during the Easter break that this afforded them the opportunity to examine, something that would not have been possible during term time. This is linked closely to the lack of availability of substitute teachers within languages which prevents many teachers from examining the orals during term time.

There's a lot of disruption to classes when orals are taking place during term time. I have done the orals twice now during the holidays. I am not comfortable leaving school for a week. I have other classes to think about. There's so much disruption to classes, normal school activities etc. It is too much to take more time off.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Is múinteoir mé agus tá neart freagrachtaí agam lasmuigh den seomra ranga. Nuair a d'athraigh an CSS na scrúduithe cainte chuig na saoire Cásca, bhí deis agam den chéad uair tabhairt faoi na scrúduithe mar scrúdaitheoir. Le linn na dtrialacha, bíonn atmaisféar álainn sna scoileanna dírithe ar an dalta agus an scrúdú cainte agus is féidir leo barr a gcumais a bhaint amach. Chomh maith leis sin, is féidir le múinteoirí díograiseacha ar nós mé féin an post breise seo a dhéanamh gan faillí a dhéanamh ar ár ranganna féin.

Múinteoir/Scrúdaitheoir atá ag múineadh

A number of teachers also noted that the school environment was less stressful, quieter and created less anxiety for students. Students are able to focus on one exam at a time and stress levels are lower.

During school time - we struggle to find available quiet rooms/offices to hold orals, students stress levels are high as they are following their timetable & then doing their oral, also stress is contagious among students. During Easter the school is quiet & calm, students come to school 10/15mins before their assigned

time & are a whole lot more relaxed. During Easter schools are not under pressure to cover classes of teachers who are oral examiners - this is very difficult.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Non-teaching Examiners

15 people responded to this question from this cohort. The main themes were again very similar to those prior to this. The main theme once again was that during the Easter break there is less disruption to teaching and learning, students and teachers do not miss out on important teaching time in the lead up and during the examination period.

Less disruption to teaching and learning and loss of class contact time. No need to find/fund substitute cover for teachers doing oral exams.

Non-teaching SEC Examiner

It was also highlighted here that examining the orals during the Easter break resulted in less pressure on students, a quieter environment and more time to focus on the oral examinations for the students.

Bíonn cúrsaí níos ciúine sa scoil le níos lú tráchta/imeachtaí scoile ag cur isteach ar na hiarrthóirí.

Scrúdaitheoir leis an CSS nach bhfuil ag múineadh

Principals/Deputy Principals

Approximately 180 people responded to this choice within this question. Respondents overwhelmingly referred to the fact that holding the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during the Easter holidays meant far less disruption to schools. Within this they referred to less reduction in teaching time where teachers are not absent from class as they are examining students or even just supporting students during this time. Many respondents referred to the lack of availability of substitute teachers and that classes were not being left without a teacher for extended periods.

To avoid disruption to school contact hours for students and teachers who may be away examining.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Many respondents referred to the benefits to the students from having the Oral Examinations during the Easter holiday period. They referred to a student-centred environment which was calmer, less stressful and less pressurised. A small number of responses referred to the support that could be provided to the student from management, exam aides and even parents during this time.

Reduces stress on students as they come in from home half an hour before their allocated time and leave straight after. No large groups congregating. Quieter

school means less noise to disrupt the oral exam. Overall, a much calmer experience for the students when it is done during Easter holidays.

Principal/Deputy Principal

From a management point of view some mentioned that this timeframe was easier to organise in relation to exam centre availability and ran well with few challenges.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Logistically, makes it easier to accommodate examination centres. During a normal school day where accommodation is an issue it is challenging to find space for exams.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Other

68 people in this cohort engaged with this question. A majority emphasised the fact that there is less disruption of learning when the exams are conducted during the Easter break. Students miss less class time in preparation for the orals as they have more time to focus and prepare during the Easter holidays.

It gives the students more time to study as it is during the break but also there is not as much stress if it was during the term.

Other

A number of respondents referred to the school environment during the Easter break as being more conducive. It was noted by a few that the environment was quieter and thus there was less stress and pressure associated with the exam.

The school will be quieter with less distraction.

Other

A small number of respondents mentioned the impact that having the orals during term time has on student learning when teachers are employed as examiners in other examination centres. The difficulties with teacher supply at these times has a detrimental effect on student learning.

Nuair a bhíonn na béalscrúduithe ar siúl i rith an téarma, cuireann siad isteach ar na hábhair eile ar feadh coicíse le daltaí ag iarraidh cleachtadh a dhéanamh in ionad freastal ar na ranganna sna hábhair eile. Bíonn múinteoirí as láthair do na ranganna eile. Tá deacrachtaí ionadíochocht a eagrú. Mar sin, ní scaoileann roinnt phríomhoidí saor na múinteoirí chun na béaltrialacha a dhéanamh Caithfidh an Roinn íoc as an ionadaíocht.

Eile

In a very small number of cases Examination secretaries/aides noted that the oral examinations were easier to organise during the Easter break.

As Exam Secretary it is easier to organise.

Other

4.2.3 During Term Time After the Easter Holidays – Rationale

There were over 1900 responses which described the rationale behind choosing “During Term Time After the Easter Holidays”. Much of the rationale in this category was related closely to the rationale given in relation to hold the examinations prior to the Easter holidays. This included student wellbeing and stress levels, with many emphasising the need for students and their families to have a break over

the Easter period. Many noted that the added time would allow students to prepare adequately without the pressure of other deadlines such as practical examinations and projects. A number of respondents noted the changing date of Easter as a factor in their choice as they felt that when Easter was too early, as would be the case in 2024, students would be under pressure to be prepared for this element of the Leaving Certificate Examination. In light of this a few respondents asked that the date be set each year to ensure consistency and transparency for students and their families.

The following section describes the themes which emerged across the various respondent types.

Parents

580 parents engaged with this element of the survey. Once again, the most prominent theme which emerged within this section related to the wellbeing and mental health of students. By having the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations after Easter students would get the needed break and time to rest over Easter.

Students shouldn't have to do exams during a midterm.

Parent

They would also have time for holidays, religious celebrations, camps and other courses during Easter without the pressure of examinations and to support their learning in areas such as languages, revision courses for the HPAT and other such courses.

Camps for language improvement are available over Easter holidays.

Parent

The next most prominent theme which emerged from a large number of respondents was in relation to the added preparation time that having the oral examinations after Easter would provide.

Thabharfadh sé níos mó ama dóibh ullmhú.

Tuismitheoir

Students will have more time to prepare after mocks and can use some of the Easter holidays to prepare.

Parent

A small number of respondents mentioned that the second school term before Easter can often be too short if Easter falls early and that in that situation the orals should occur after the holidays to give adequate time for preparation.

Easter is early March this year and the pre-exams will only be over in early February. I feel if it was after the Easter holidays students will have more time to focus on language skills prior to the orals.

Parent

A very small number of respondents felt that the timing should be set to give students and families certainty in relation to the date from year to year.

The timing of the Easter holidays is different from year to year, it seems to me that a concrete date in which students can work towards with confidence would provide a better examination process.

Parent

Students

There were over 900 responses from students to this question and a vast majority referred to the benefit that the Easter holidays would be in relation to additional study time.

I believe the orals are better done after the Easter holidays as the students would in theory be able to focus on preparing for their oral exam(s) during this Easter break.

Student

Many students alluded to the fact that the pressure of practical exams, projects and mock examinations would mean that many would not have time to focus on studying for the Oral Examinations prior to the Easter break.

Gives students more time to focus on their oral material before the orals, while not putting pressure on continuing with coursework, homework, assignments and written material.

Student

Many felt that it would give time to focus on these components and to perfect and develop their oral language skills and thus reducing stress.

People would have time to study for their orals over the Easter holidays.

Student

A number of students mentioned that holding oral examinations during term time would ensure more support from their teachers and also provide access to transport and peers.

Being in school would allow me to ask teachers questions and it would give me the Easter break to prepare at home. Being in a running school environment will feel more familiar and less stressful.

Student

A large number of students noted that having Oral Examinations during the Easter break was unfair as it meant that they couldn't spend their holidays as they wished, revising, resting or working.

Some people in less fortunate areas may have jobs to go to during the Easter holidays which will result in them not showing up to their oral exams.

Student

A number also alluded to the added stress that having two orals close together during the Easter break had on students.

As I also study French, I know that come closer to the Oral Examination window, I will be overwhelmed with the pressure for having to study for two Oral exams. I would much prefer that they are split up, as it would relieve some of that pressure.

Student

Teachers/Teaching Examiners

375 teachers and teaching examiners responded to this question. The most common theme which emerged was the need for students and teachers to have a break over Easter.

Having the oral exams during term time allows the students to take a break during their Easter holidays. As Easter is sometimes quite early in the year, it would not be fair to have the orals before the break. The two-week break would allow students to prepare themselves while also recovering from the previous term and to prepare for the final school term.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Similar to the theme in the parental section teachers also noted that having the oral examinations after the Easter break allows for more time for students to prepare which alleviates stress.

Allows students longer to study and to prepare for the exam. Exam students should equally be entitled to two weeks of Easter holidays which would alleviate exam pressure and promote student wellbeing.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

A small number of teachers noted that term two is a very busy term with projects, mock exams and other commitments and that examining the orals after Easter would ensure that the curriculum is finished.

After Easter there is less disruption to class time and is when courses have been completed.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

A few teachers referred to the support which could be provided to students during term time from teachers and students alike and the importance of this for student achievement.

Students like to have the support of their teachers - and they like to be among their peers when undertaking any exams etc. The peer support and the support of teachers is vitally important for the security and comfort it provides.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

In a very small number of cases teachers referred to the difficulties which arose in the past while trying to organise oral examinations during a very short window. The pressure this placed on students and teachers during the Easter period was noted.

Tá sé de cheart ag daltaí agus ag múinteoirí sos ceart bheith acu le linn laethanta saoire na Cásca. Cuireann sé i bhfad iomarca brú ar dhaltaí nuair a mbíonn orthu na béaltrialacha sa Ghaeilge agus sna teangacha eile a dhéanamh ar an tseachtain céanna. Bíonn siad measctha suas in amanna, ní sé seo cóir.

Múinteoir/Scrúdaitheoir atá ag múineadh

Timetabling for up to 200 students for a number of different languages in the same week is very tricky. As in all situations regarding practical coursework or oral exams, the SEC are very slow to provide documentation and so deadlines become extremely tight. I would suggest that the SEC should provide schools with a timetabling template that can be populated automatically from lists of students.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

A small number of respondents in this cohort noted that either before or after Easter would be an appropriate time for the scheduling of the Leaving Certificate orals.

Bheadh díreach roimh laethanta saoire na Cásca nó díreach tar éis laethanta saoire na Cásca níos fearr.

Múinteoir/Scrúdaitheoir atá ag múineadh

Non-Teaching Examiners

In the 14 responses the main themes that emerged here are similar to those above. Added preparation time for students was the most prominent theme.

More time for students to prepare/ study over Easter.

Non-teaching Examiner

Teacher support was the next most common theme with a small number of respondents referring to the lack of support available during Easter time which would not be the case after the Easter Break.

Tá sé strusmhar béaltrialacha a dhéanamh i ndá theanga in aon seachtain amháin sna laethanta saoire.. Níl múinteoirí ar fáil chun cabhrú leo um cháisc. Cruthaíonn scrúduithe i rith na saoire fadhbanna do scoileanna - foireann a chur ar fáil &rl.

Scrúdaitheoir leis an CSS nach bhfuil ag múineadh

Principal/Deputy Principal

39 Principals/Deputy Principals responded to this question again with similar themes emerging. The most common theme was the need for students, teachers and management to have a break over Easter so that they are ready for the final school term of the year.

I feel for students' wellbeing they need the break at Easter, otherwise I worry they will burn out before their leaving certificate exams. I also think it is unfair to ask principals and deputies to be available during the Easter holidays.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Teacher and management support was the next most common theme where a number of respondents referred to the lack of support that was available when the oral examinations were held during the Easter break .

During school time helps to keep students calm. Less stressed.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Bíonn tacaíocht níos fearr ann do scoláirí agus an scoil ar oscailt.

Príomhoide/Príomhoide Tánaisteach

A small number of respondents referred to the specific impact that examining the oral examinations during Easter had on students in post primary schools with DEIS status.

The move to orals into holiday time is huge disadvantage for DEIS students. The decision to change the oral times made no consideration for the lengths DEIS schools go to to allow their students sit exams. Often the child has no parental support and little awareness of when their oral is even on. Schools play a huge role in getting the student to turn up. At least when they're in school, they can be supported, but during the holidays? Who gets them to school? Who even gets them out of bed? Who supports them before and after the exam? While in school, we can keep these students immersed in the language, it is unreasonable to think that they will suddenly turn up to school in their free time and be able to suddenly switch on their ability to speak Irish.

Principal/Deputy Principal

A small number of cases referred to the extra workload for principals which was created when the oral examinations occurred during Easter.

First and foremost, scheduling oral examinations during the Easter holidays creates a significant workload burden for principals and school staff. During this time, we are already tasked with managing a variety of administrative tasks, including preparing for the end-of-year exams and ensuring a smooth transition to the next school year. Adding the additional responsibility of organizing and

overseeing oral examinations during the holidays places an undue burden on our already stretched resources.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Other

There were 122 responses to this element of the question. Overwhelmingly the main theme which emerged was the added preparation time which would be available if the oral examinations were to be held after the Easter break.

Give pupils time to prepare for it. Doing it during Easter Holidays is crazy: children and teachers need their time to rest recharge reset. And as Easter can be in March at times, pre-Easter is just too early and this is too much stress and pressure on teachers and pupils to be prepared and ready.

Other

The next most prominent theme was the need for a break over Easter for the students and teachers to rest, recuperate and to engage in other activities.

The Easter holidays should be a break from school for students and having the oral exams after Easter gives them time during the Easter holiday to revise instead of having to make time with homework, study and other things outside of school in the evenings after school.

Other

Deis ag daltaí sul siar i rith saoire na Cásca. Bíonn rudaí pearsanta ag tarlú/ eagraithe i rith laethanta saoire m.sh pósadh, laethanta saoire thar lear.

Eile

Teacher support was also mentioned by a small number of respondents.

Many teachers and students are not in the position to participate during Easter time.

Other

4.3 Perceptions of Oral Examinations During Easter Holidays

Stakeholders who had experience of the Oral Examinations during 2022 and 2023 were then asked to describe their experiences. This section will report on these findings by cohort.

4.3.1 Parental experiences of Leaving Certificate oral examinations held during the Easter holidays in 2022 or 2023

Parents who had a young person who completed their Oral Examinations in 2022 or 2023 were asked through a series of both open and closed questions to report on their experience of the oral examinations happening during the Easter Holidays. The respondents were asked how satisfied or unsatisfied they were with the oral examinations being held over the Easter holiday period. Of the 319 respondents that engaged with this question 52% were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the timing of the examinations.

Figure 16: Parental Responses - How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter Holidays, for parents who had a young person who sat the orals during 2022 or 2023?

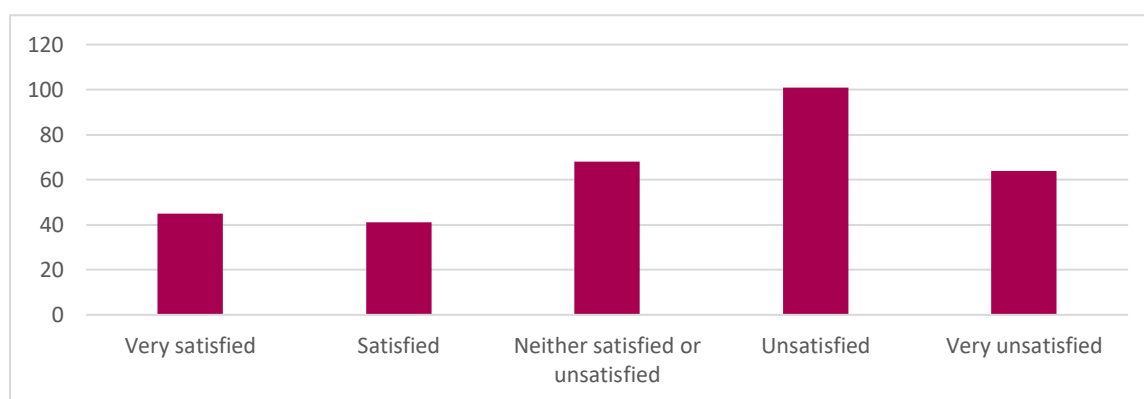


Table 19: Parental Perceptions - How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter Holidays, for parents who had a young person who sat the orals during 2022 or 2023?

	Count	Percentage
Very satisfied	45	14.11%
Satisfied	41	12.85%
Neither satisfied or unsatisfied	68	21.32%
Unsatisfied	101	31.66%
Very unsatisfied	64	20.06%
Total	319	100.00%

Parents were then asked to indicate their level of agreement with 7 different statements which described benefits and challenges of conducting the oral examinations during the Easter holidays. Respondents had an option of choosing True, False, Unsure, Not Applicable or not choosing any.

The impact of the timing of orals examinations on ease of attendance was addressed in two of the statements and the answers corresponded strongly. 191 respondents (63% of those that engaged with the statement) agreed that the timing made it harder to attend. 217 respondents (70% of those that engaged with the statement) disagreed that the timing made it easier to attend. The other statement that gathered a notable response was the one dealing with teacher availability. Of the 308 that engaged with that statement, 47% (n=145) believed that teacher's not being available to support students was a negative thing.

Figure 17: Responses from parents with a young person who completed the orals during the Easter holidays in 2022 or 2023

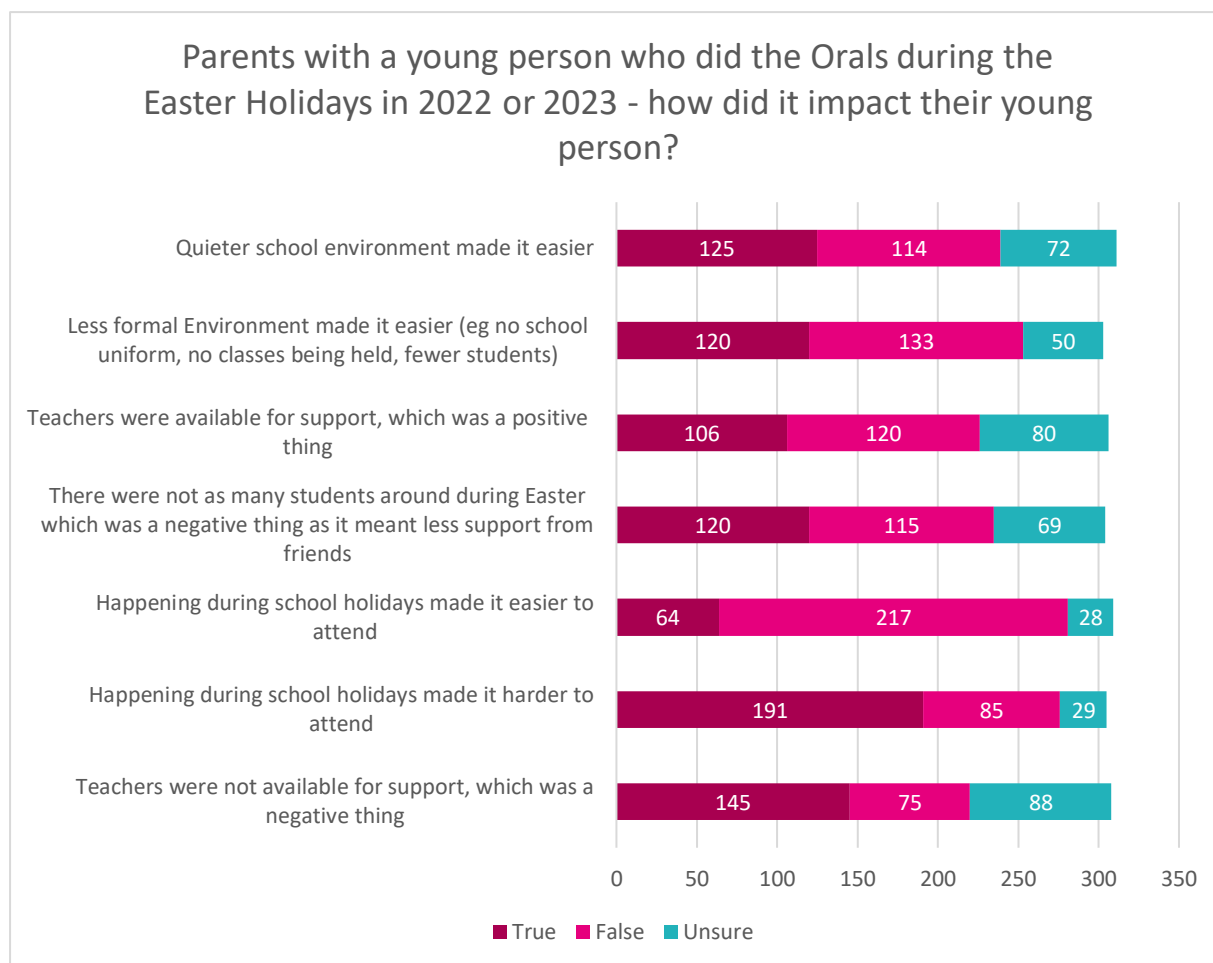


Table 20: Responses from parents with a young person who completed the orals during the Easter holidays in 2022 or 2023

Statement	True	False	Unsure	Overall
Quieter school environment made it easier	125	114	72	311
	40.19%	36.66%	23.15%	100.00%
Less formal Environment made it easier (e.g. no school uniform, no classes being held, fewer students)	120	133	50	303
	39.60%	43.89%	16.50%	100.00%
Teachers were available for support, which was a positive thing	106	120	80	306
	34.64%	39.22%	26.14%	100.00%
There were not as many students around during Easter which was a negative thing as it meant less support from friends	120	115	69	304
	39.47%	37.83%	22.70%	100.00%
Happening during school holidays made it easier to attend	64	217	28	309
	20.71%	70.23%	9.06%	100.00%
Happening during school holidays made it harder to attend	191	85	29	305
	62.62%	27.87%	9.51%	100.00%
Teachers were not available for support, which was a negative thing	145	75	88	308
	47.08%	24.35%	28.57%	100.00%

4.3.2. Student responses from those who completed the Leaving Certificate oral examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022 or 2023

Students who had completed the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during the Easter Holidays in 2022 or 2023 were asked similar questions as their parents. 3,081 students over the age of 18, and who completed their Leaving Certificate in 2022 or 2023, engaged with the survey.

Then the respondents were asked how satisfied or unsatisfied they were with the oral examinations being held over the Easter holiday period. Of the 2,786 respondents that engaged with this question 39% were either satisfied or very satisfied with the timing the examinations while 36% were either unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with the timing.

Figure 18: Student responses from those who completed their oral examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022-2023 to the question, “How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter Holidays?”

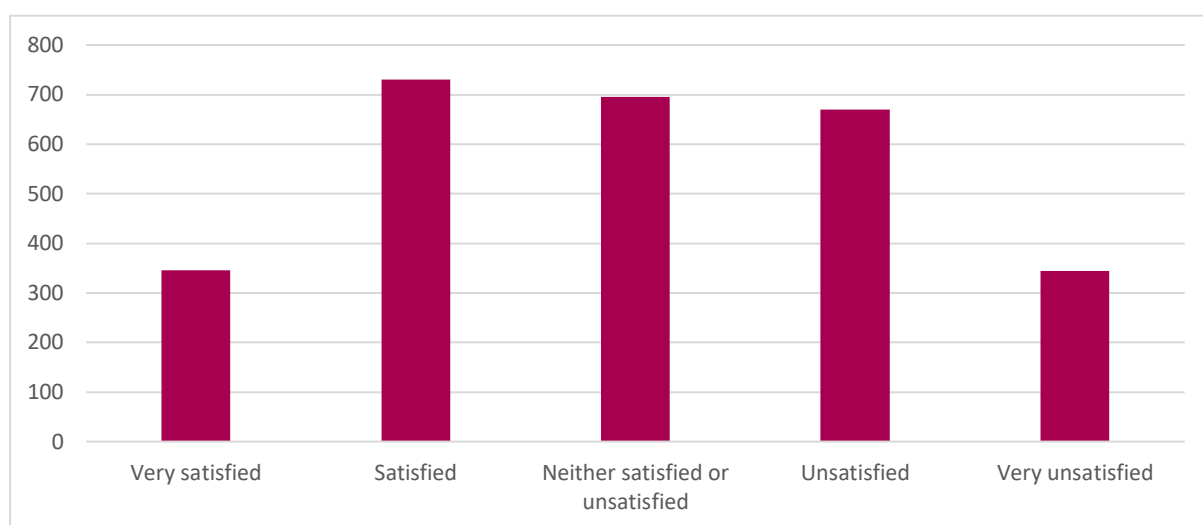


Table 21: Student responses from those who completed the Oral Examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022-2023 to the question “How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter Holidays?”

How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter Holidays?	Count	Percentage
Very satisfied	346	12.42%
Satisfied	730	26.20%
Neither satisfied or unsatisfied	696	24.98%
Unsatisfied	670	24.05%
Very unsatisfied	344	12.35%
Total	2786	100.00%

Students were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with various statements which described benefits and challenges of conducting the oral examinations during the Easter holidays.

Figure 19: Responses from students who completed the oral examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022 or 2023 to the question: “How did the oral examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022/23 impact you? Indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements”

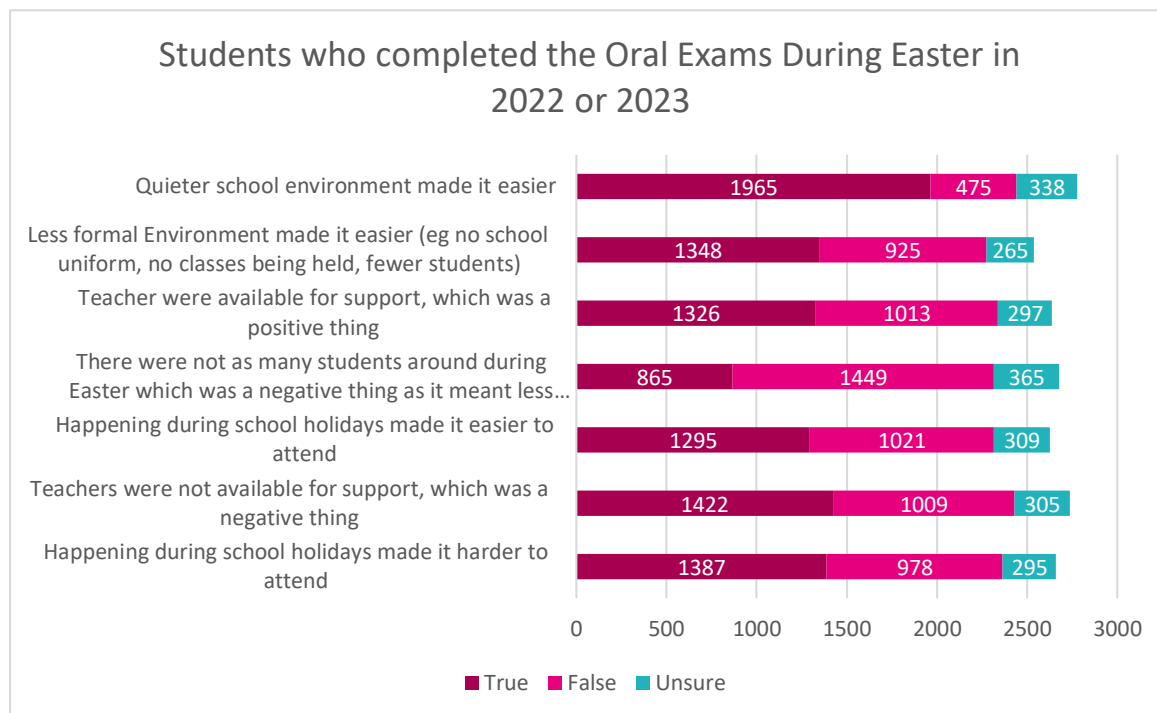


Table 22: Responses from students who completed the oral examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022 or 2023 to the question: “How did the oral examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022/2023 impact you? “

Statement	True	False	Unsure	Overall
Quieter school environment made it easier	1965	475	338	2822
	69.63%	16.83%	11.98%	100.00%
Less formal environment made it easier (e.g. no school uniform, no classes being held, fewer students)	1348	925	265	2817
	47.85%	32.84%	9.41%	100.00%
Teacher were available for support, which was a positive thing	1326	1013	297	2833
	46.81%	35.76%	10.48%	100.00%
There were not as many students around during Easter which was a negative thing as it meant less support from friends	865	1449	365	2823
	30.64%	51.33%	12.93%	100.00%
Happening during school holidays made it easier to attend	1295	1021	309	2823
	45.87%	36.17%	10.95%	100.00%
Teachers were not available for support, which was a negative thing	1422	1009	305	2816
	50.50%	35.83%	10.83%	100.00%
Happening during school holidays made it harder to attend	1387	978	295	2737
	50.68%	35.73%	10.78%	100.00%

The most noteworthy result was the response to the statement relating to a quieter school environment. 1,965 respondents (70% of those that engaged with the statement) believed that a quieter school environment was a positive thing during oral examinations.

4.3.3 Teachers and Teaching Examiners responses to questions of holding the oral examinations during the Eater holidays

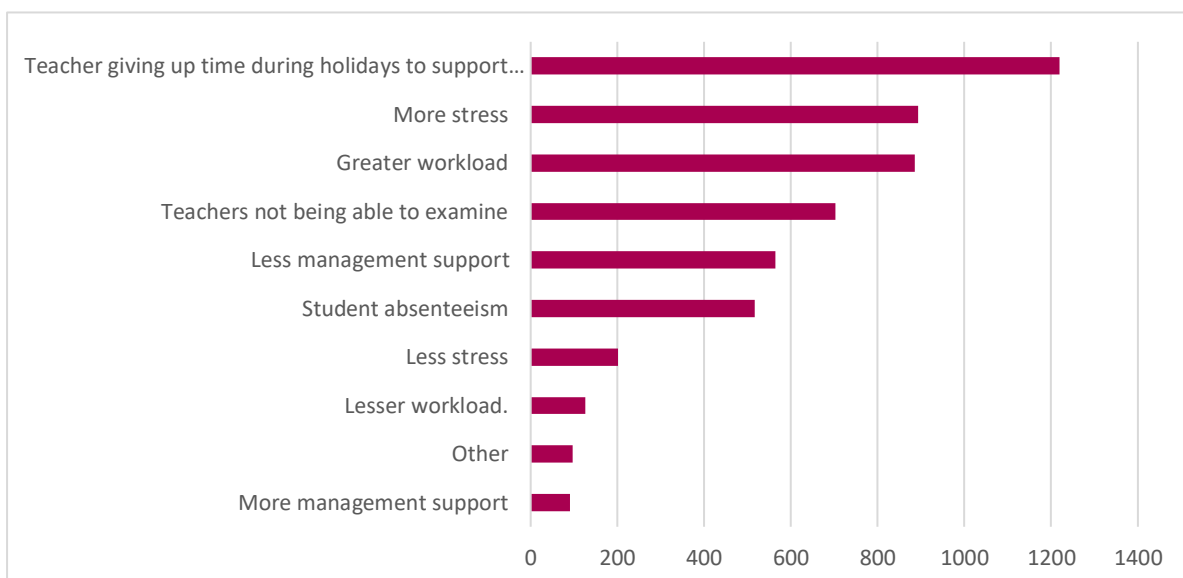
Teachers/teaching examiners were asked about the challenges and benefits of holding the oral examinations during the Easter holidays. 2,496 teachers engaged with the section of the survey focused on them. Respondents were asked what languages they are teaching and out of the 2,089 responses to this question the top three languages were French (n=565), Irish (n=507) and German (n=320).

Then the respondents were asked for their opinions on the main challenges and opportunities associated with the oral examinations taking place over the Easter Holidays. Respondents were presented with eight statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the number of options that could be chosen and there were 5,296 statements chosen. Teachers having to give up time during Easter Holidays was the option chosen most often (n= 1219 and 23% of total). More stress (n=894 or almost 17% of total) and greater workload (n=866 and just less than 17% of total) were the second and third most chosen statements.

Table 23: Teacher and Teaching Examiner Perceptions - What are the main challenges/opportunities for teachers with oral examinations taking place during the Easter Holidays? (Tick any that apply)

	Count	Percent
Teacher giving up time during holidays to support students	1219	23.02%
More stress	894	16.88%
Greater workload	886	16.73%
Teachers not being able to examine	703	13.27%
Less management support	564	10.65%
Student absenteeism	516	9.74%
Less stress	201	3.80%
Lesser workload.	126	2.38%
Other	96	1.81%
More management support	91	1.72%
Total	5296	100.00%

Figure 20: Teacher and Teaching Examiner Perceptions - What are the main challenges/opportunities for teachers with Oral examinations taking place during the Easter Holidays? (Tick any that apply)



Teachers were then offered the opportunity to state other challenges or opportunities were associated with the timing of the examinations. There were 96 responses to this section. Numerous themes emerged with many respondents returning to the statements above. One of the strongest themes noted was the importance of the respite for both teachers and students during the Easter Holidays.

Students aren't given sufficient time to balance studying and taking a break at a time of year that is very stressful for them.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Oral exams are tiring. Not fair on anyone to do them at a time when everyone needs a break.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Teachers and peers not being available for support was another prominent theme.

Teachers are not available to help students to prepare, to provide much needed support or answer questions students may have.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Níl an tacaíocht ann do na daltaí. Ní bhíonn múinteoirí ná an comhairleoir scoile ann. Tá sé i bhfad níos scanrúla dóibh freastal ar scoil iomlán folaimh in ionad scrúdú a dhéanamh mar chuid de ghnáth lá scoile. Tá sé deacair déileáil leis an tinrimh chomh maith.

Múinteoir/Scrúdaitheoir atá ag múineadh

Teacher availability, to support students and act as oral examiners was another prominent theme. This was linked with caring commitments and childcare costs. One respondent also referred to the discontinuation of the pre-exam meeting with the examiner.

I have small children and I am unable to go into school during the Easter holidays to support my students. There is also a disadvantage to the students. They no longer get to meet the examiner in a group setting before the exams begin. This was very important for them as they heard the examiner speak the target language and seeing him/her put many at ease.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Student absenteeism, especially in DEIS schools/disadvantaged areas, was also mentioned and this was linked with lack of school transport and employment.

I examined in a DEIS school and a lot of students missed the exam as they had no way in to school or were working in shops etc or did not have the motivation to come in outside normal school hours. It is very difficult for some students. No school buses etc.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

The survey also focused on the experiences of teachers who have at some stage acted as oral examiners. 905 respondents indicated that they had acted as examiners. They were asked what languages they acted as examiners for and of the 567 responses to this question the top three languages were Irish (n=395), French (n=208), and German (n=127).

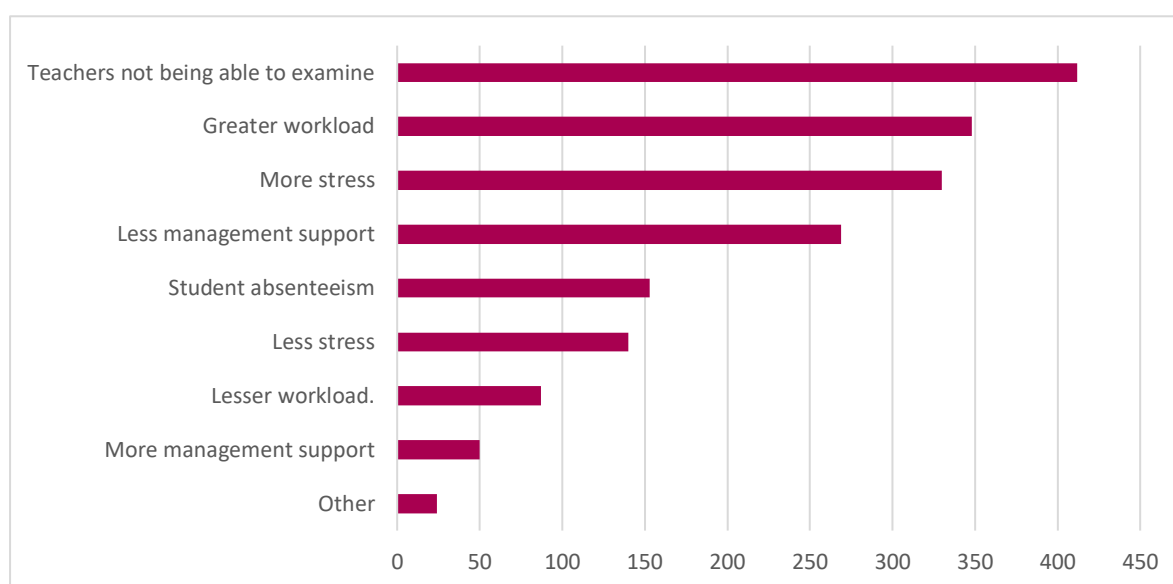
The respondents were then asked for their opinions on the main challenges and opportunities for examiners associated with the oral examinations taking place over the Easter holidays. Respondents were presented with various statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the number of options that could be chosen and there were 1,813 statements chosen. Not being able to examine due to other commitments was the statement chosen most often (n=412).

and almost 23% of the total). Greater workload was the second most chosen statement (n= 348 and 19% of the total).

Table 24: Main challenges and opportunities for examiners associated with the oral examinations taking place over the Easter Holidays (select all that apply)

	Count	Percentage
Teachers not being able to examine	412	22.72%
Greater workload	348	19.19%
More stress	330	18.20%
Less management support	269	14.84%
Student absenteeism	153	8.44%
Less stress	140	7.72%
Lesser workload.	87	4.80%
More management support	50	2.76%
Other	24	1.32%
Total	1813	100.00%

Figure 21: Main challenges and opportunities for examiners associated with the oral examinations taking place over the Easter Holidays



Teachers were then offered the opportunity to state other challenges or opportunities associated with the timing of the examinations during the Easter break. There were 24 responses in this section. These responses mentioned childcare issues, cost of accommodation during the Easter period and the infringement on holiday time.

As my own young children are off school during Easter break, I will be obliged to pay childcare costs if i am to examine orals.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

4.3.4 Non-Teaching Examiner for the SEC responses to questions of holding the oral examinations during the Eater holidays

Examiners who are not currently teaching were also asked about the challenges and benefits of holding the oral examinations during the Easter holidays. 62 respondents engaged with this section of the survey. 19 of them described themselves as being retired, 2 are on leave, 3 are not currently employed and there were 38 in the other category. The vast number of the other category seem to

be teachers currently employed who inadvertently engaged with this section. Respondents were asked what languages they have examined and out of the 37 responses to this question the top three languages were Irish (n=16), French (n=14), and German (n=4).

The respondents were then asked for their opinions about the main challenges and opportunities associated with the oral examinations taking place during the Easter holidays. Respondents were presented with various statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the number of options that could be chosen and there were 156 statements chosen. The statement relating to not being able to examine due to other commitments was the one that was chosen most often (n=31 and almost 20% of the total). The second most chosen statement related to greater workload (n=27 and 17% of total).

Table 25: Non-teaching examiners for the SEC: frequency of responses to challenges and opportunities associated with oral examinations taking place over the Easter Holidays.

	Count	Percent
Not being able to examine due to other commitments	31	19.87%
Greater workload	27	17.31%
Quieter school environment	23	14.74%
More difficult to access management	21	13.46%
Student absenteeism	21	13.46%
More relaxed environment	12	7.69%
Available to take on role of examiner	9	5.77%
Lesser workload.	4	2.56%
Easier to access management	4	2.56%
Other	4	2.56%
Total	156	100.00%

Teachers were then offered the opportunity to state other challenges or opportunities associated with the timing of the examinations. There were 4 responses for this section. Respondents referred to accommodation costs, personal commitments and infringement on holidays for students.

4.3.5. Principal/Deputy Principal responses to questions of holding the oral examinations during the Easter holidays

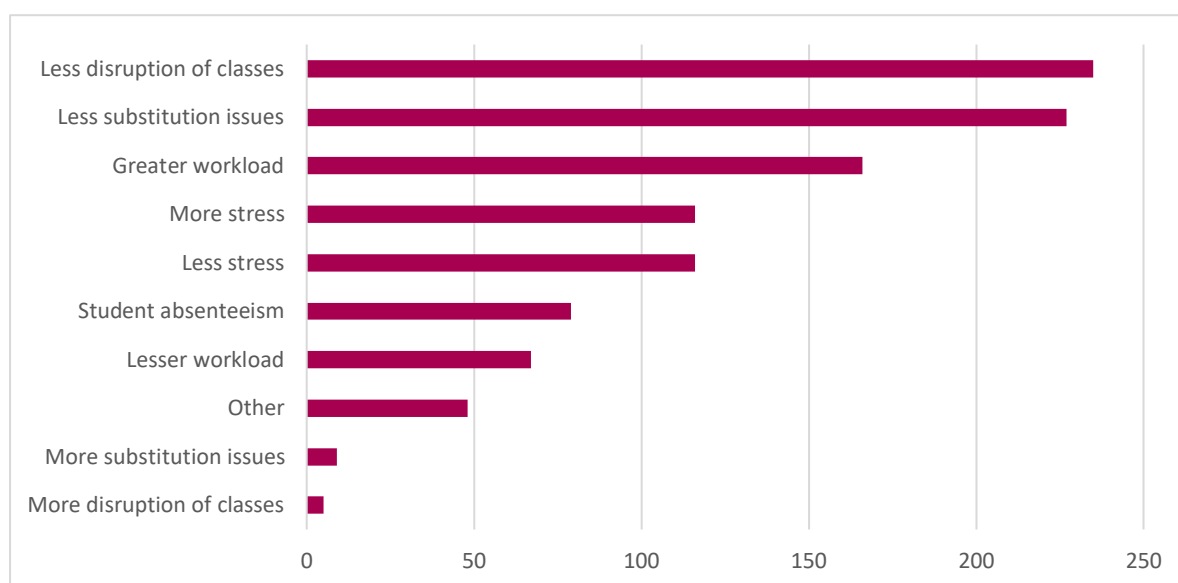
Principals and Deputy Principals were also asked about the challenges and benefits of holding the oral examinations during the Easter holidays. 174 Principals and 162 Deputy Principals responded to this section of the survey. These respondents were asked for their opinions on the main challenges and opportunities associated with the oral examinations taking place over the Easter holidays. Respondents were presented with various statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the number of options that could be chosen and there were 1068 statements chosen. Less disruption of classes (n=235 and 22% of total) and less substitution issues (n=227 and 21% of the total) were the options chosen most often.

Table 26: Principal/Deputy Principal Responses - What are the main challenges/opportunities for teachers with Oral examinations taking place during the Easter Holidays? (Tick any that apply)

	Count	Percent
Less disruption of classes	235	22.00%
Less substitution issues	227	21.25%
Greater workload	166	15.54%
Less stress	116	10.86%

More stress	116	10.86%
Student absenteeism	79	7.40%
Lesser workload	67	6.27%
Other	48	4.49%
More substitution issues	9	0.84%
More disruption of classes	5	0.47%
Total	1068	100%

Figure 22: Principal/Deputy Principal Responses - What are the main challenges/opportunities for teachers with Oral examinations taking place during the Easter Holidays? (Tick any that apply)



Respondents were then offered the opportunity to state other challenges or opportunities associated with the timing of the examinations. There were 48 responses in this section. Respondents referred to the challenge of attendance issues, issues with exam aides/caretakers, extra stress on students and the infringement on teachers' holidays, students' and principals' holidays.

Tinreamh daltaí níos measa, saoire eagraithe srl. Níor cheart srian a chur ar mhúinteoirí le linn na Cásca, tá sé de ceart acu gan a bheith ag plé leis/smaoineamh ar an obair le linn na Cásca.

Príomhoide/Príomhoide Tánaisteach

While it is stated that Principals or Deputies do not have to be in attendance - This is unfair. as a Principal I feel the need to be around or on call during this very important time for students. So less stress covering teachers out on orals but increased workload/more stress due to them taking part during holidays.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Respondents also referenced the calmer school environment and that there was less stress involved for students.

Stress levels of students are visibly reduced as they can come and go before and after the oral exams.

Principal/Deputy Principal

4.3.6 Other responses to questions of holding the oral examinations during the Eater holidays

The final section of the survey allowed those who did not fall into the categories of parent, student teacher etc. to express their opinions on the timing of the oral examinations. The composition of this

cohort has been discussed in section 4.1.7. Various themes came to the fore in this section with many respondents identifying both benefits and challenges to the timing. The most prominent theme was the issue of the examinations infringing on the holidays of students, parents and teachers.

Students can't enjoy their Easter holidays, and neither can examiners/teachers. Students will worry about the oral exam and will have to travel to complete it.

Other

Teachers/Management having their rest period eaten into by having to be present in school for the duration of the Orals!

Other

I feel students need to have some down time which in my opinion would be during school holidays, and I feel that when they go on their Easter holidays some get annoyed as they feel like their holidays are not a holiday as they are in school doing exams during this stage.

Other

Níl aon buntaiste don dalta. Na dúshláin - níl aon sos ag na daltaí. Bíonn orthu 2/3 béaltriail a dhéanamh l rith 6 lá. An chuid is mó den am - bíonn 2 scrudaithe i ndiaidh a chéile. Bhí dalta amháin agam anuraidh- bhí 2 scrudaithe in aon lá amháin. Bíonn seachtain iomlán imithe acu and mar sin níl am ceart acu, sos ceart a bheith acu mar mothaíonn siad agus caithfidh siad am a chaitheamh ar a n-ábhar eile.

Other

Teachers and other support staff not being available to support students was mentioned by a number of respondents.

Challenges - Teachers are on holidays and I feel if the student completes the oral exams before Easter during term time, then the teacher is there for moral support before and after. The Easter break is needed for students and teachers to switch off from the intense timetable of 9 -4. The Easter break offers a time for the students to focus on studying on other subjects.

Other

Challenges - not having support staff like Guidance Counsellor/Chaplain present to support student who may be particularly anxious/nervous or may have other issues. Students not getting an adequate break over the Easter holidays before the final run into LC exams.

Other

Students do not have the routine and scaffolds of the school, and this is leaving them less supported and causing greater anxiety. Students are not getting the full support as Students of the pre Covid LC years.

Other

Dúshlán - níl an tacaíocht céanna ar fáil dóibh nuair a bhíonn an pobal scoile ar saoire buntáiste - ní chím aon buntáiste, tá laethanta saoire/briseadh ag teastáil ó gach éinne.

Eile

The issue of teachers and students not missing out on class time was also mentioned.

Advantages: Students and teachers are not missing out on valuable tuition time in school. Language teachers in the classroom whilst their own students are

preparing for oral examinations. so teachers are int the classroom when students need them most. Teachers correct state exams and are paid for that during the summer holidays, so the same applies to Easter holidays. Challenges: Students / teachers are missing out on Easter break.

Other

It is less disruptive to school and less hype for students. Better for examiners too as won't be missing classes.

Other

Other respondents referenced the challenges of transport, absenteeism and getting accommodation during the Easter period in addition to the advantage of a quieter school environment.

It gives the students no rest during the holidays in order to face the written papers, LCVP, and projects, also difficult during Easter to get accommodation for examiners.

Other

Getting students into school. Many of my students are not familiar with state exams their parents being from other countries. My students often have babysitting responsibilities for younger siblings over Easter holidays as parents work. Also, student's benefit from having their teachers around to support them help them practice-this doesn't happen if exams are in holidays. I am not a French or Irish teacher but opted help kids prep & calm down before their orals when orals are in term time.

Other

Disadvantages- lack of school transport, pressure for teachers to give up free time, less school supports available Advantages-quiet environment, can focus just on oral work.

Other

The advantages are convenience to the administration of schools as the organisation of orals simultaneously with regular class time can be challenging. Also, some students will not turn up to school during holiday time.

Other

Advantages: less traffic, quieter schools, more money for examiners, disadvantages: kids are alone (anxiety, nobody to contact,) 1st weekend for examiners is exhausting.

Other

I think it's good cause there's no one in the school so very quiet and easier to concentrate.

Other

4.4 Perceptions of Oral Examinations Prior to or after Easter Holidays

Stakeholders who had experience of the Oral Examinations prior to 2020 were then asked to describe their experiences. This section will report on these findings by cohort.

4.4.1 Parental responses of young people who did oral exams prior to 2020 (i.e. during term time)

Parents who had a young person that completed the Leaving Certificate prior to 2020 were asked about the impacts on their child/children of holding the exams during school term. 192 parents engaged with this section of the survey. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with 6 different statements which described benefits and challenges of conducting the oral examinations during the Easter holidays.

134 respondents (80% of those that engaged with the statement) believed that the availability of teacher support was a positive thing. Another noteworthy response was that 124 respondents (75% of those that engaged with the statement) believed that fellow students being available to support them was a positive thing. To look at this subset of parental responses that had a young person who had completed the Leaving Certificate, see the below table and charts.

Figure 23: Parental responses for those with a young person who completed the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations prior to 2020



Table 27: Parental responses for those with a young person who completed the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations prior to 2020

Statement	True	False	Unsure	Overall
Having a normal school environment made it less stressful	120	25	22	167
	71.86%	14.97%	13.17%	100.00%
Classes going on as normal made it more stressful	26	100	41	167
	15.57%	59.88%	24.55%	100.00%
Their teacher was available to support them which was a positive thing	134	13	20	167
	80.24%	7.78%	11.98%	100.00%
Other students were there to support them, which was a positive thing	124	16	26	166
	74.70%	9.64%	15.66%	100.00%
Their stress levels increased as they missed classes	29	107	29	165
	17.58%	64.85%	17.58%	100.00%

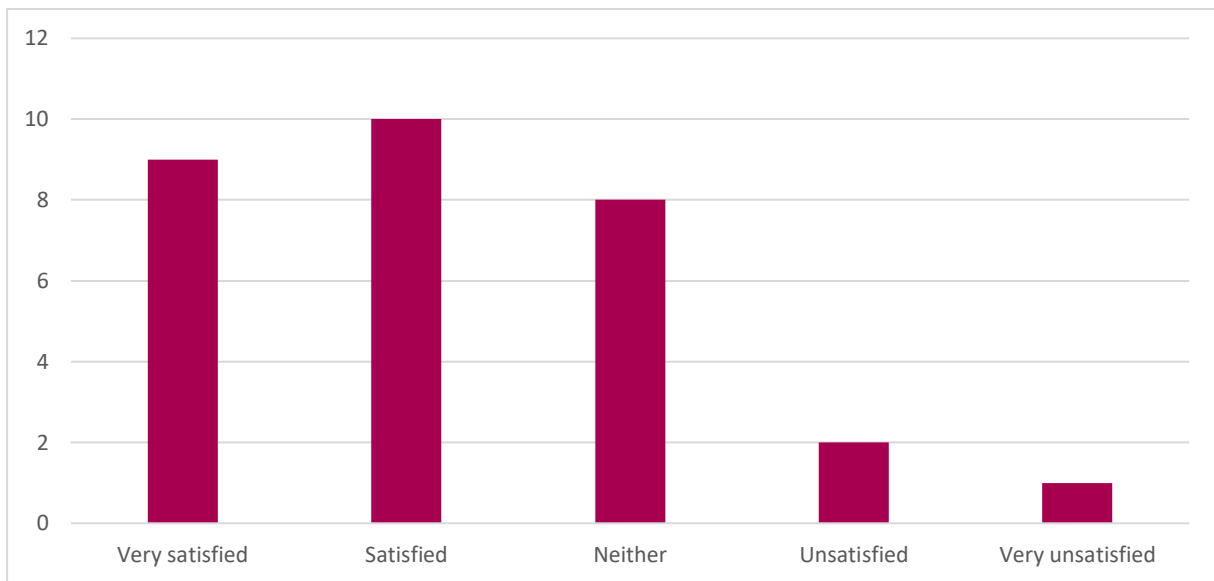
4.4.2. Student responses from those who completed the Leaving Certificate prior to 2020

Students who completed their Leaving Certificate prior to 2020 were asked about their experiences of undertaking oral examinations during term time. 30 former students engaged with this section of the survey. Initially they were asked their level of satisfaction with the timing of the examinations. 54% of students indicated that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with oral examinations being conducted during term time.

Table 28: Student responses from those who completed their leaving certificate oral exams prior to 2020

	Count	Percentage
Very satisfied	9	30.00%
Satisfied	10	33.33%
Neither	8	26.67%
Unsatisfied	2	6.67%
Very unsatisfied	1	3.33%
Total	30	100.00%

Figure 24 Student responses: How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the timing of the oral examinations during school time prior to 2020?



Respondents were then asked about the impacts on them of holding the exams during school term. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with various statements which described benefits and challenges of conducting the oral examinations during the Easter holidays. Respondents had an option of choosing True, False, Unsure, Not Applicable, or not choosing any. The two statements with the greatest degree of agreement or disagreement were the ones relating to teacher and student support. 28 respondents (88% of those that engaged with the statement) believe that teachers being available for support was a positive thing. 25 respondents (78% of those that engaged with the statement) believed that support being available from fellow students was a positive thing.

Figure 25: Student responses for those who completed the leaving certificate orals prior to 2020

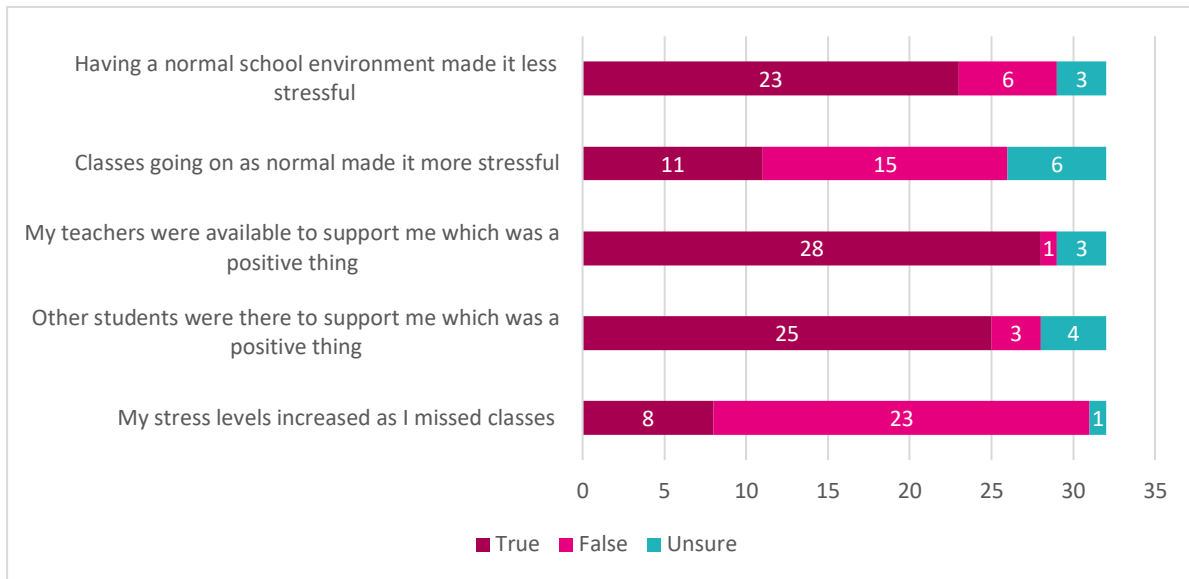


Table 29: Student responses for those who completed the Leaving Certificate orals prior to 2020

Statement	True	False	Unsure	Overall
Having a normal school environment made it less stressful	23	6	3	32
	71.88%	18.75%	9.38%	100.00%
Classes going on as normal made it more stressful	11	15	6	32
	34.38%	46.88%	18.75%	100.00%
My teachers were available to support me which was a positive thing	28	1	3	32
	87.50%	3.13%	9.38%	100.00%
Other students were there to support me which was a positive thing	25	3	4	32
	78.13%	9.38%	12.50%	100.00%
My stress levels increased as I missed classes	8	23	1	32
	25.00%	71.88%	3.13%	100.00%

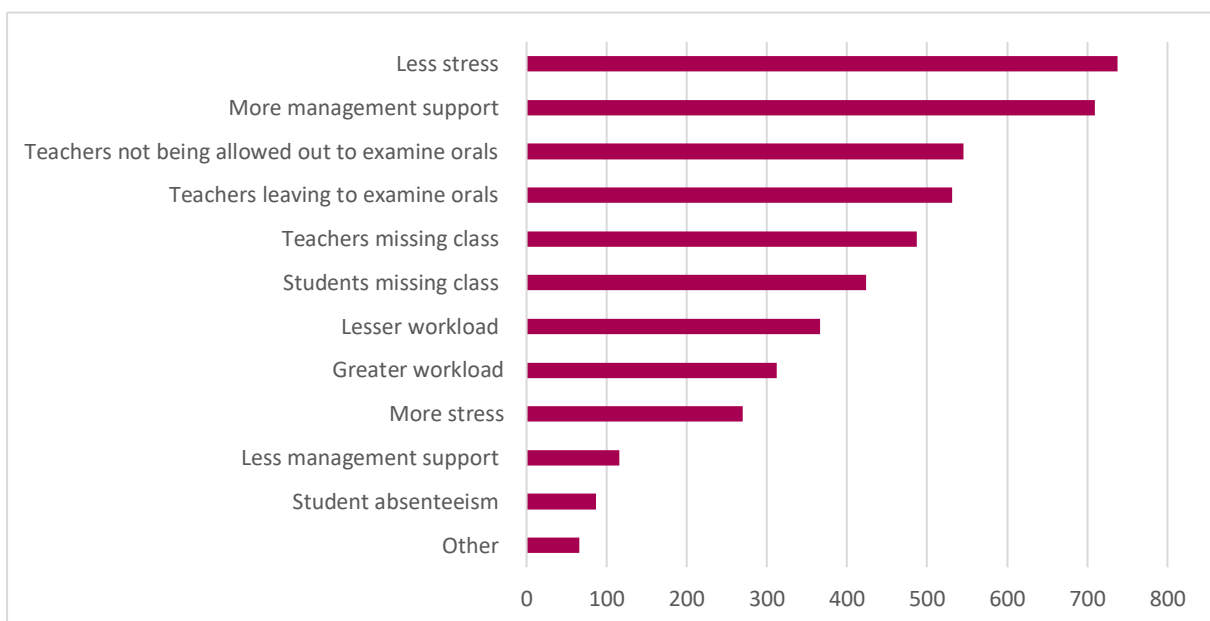
4.4.3 Teachers and Teaching Examiners responses to holding oral exams prior to or after the Easter holidays

Teachers were asked about the challenges and opportunities of holding the oral examinations prior to or after the Easter holidays. Respondents were presented various statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the number of options that could be chosen and there were 4,651 statements chosen. The statement chosen most often was the one relating to term time being less stressful (n= 738 or nearly 16% of total). The second most chosen statement was the one relating to more support being available from management (n=709 and 15% of total).

Table 30: Teacher and Teaching Examiners responses to what are the main challenges and opportunities of holding the oral examinations for teachers prior to or after the Easter holidays.

	Count	Percent
Less stress	738	15.87%
More management support	709	15.24%
Teachers not being allowed out to examine orals	545	11.72%
Teachers leaving to examine orals	531	11.42%
Teachers missing class	487	10.47%
Students missing class	424	9.12%
Lesser workload	366	7.87%
Greater workload	312	6.71%
More stress	270	5.81%
Less management support	116	2.49%
Student absenteeism	87	1.87%
Other	66	1.42%
Total	4651	100.00%

Figure 26: Teacher and Teaching Examiners responses to what are the main challenges and opportunities of holding the oral examinations for teachers prior to or after the Easter holidays



Respondents were then afforded the opportunity to discuss other challenges or opportunities. There were 66 responses in this section. The availability of teachers to support students was the most prominent theme in this section.

Language teachers are in the building available to help students. Guidance counsellors, year heads, chaplain, support teachers and SNA are all there to help.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

It is better for the students to have their teachers present when they are doing their oral exams. On a human level, they want to tell their teacher how the exam went and they can do that if the oral takes place during term time. If they are nervous, their teacher can calm them down before the exam if it takes place during term time. Doing an oral exam during the Easter holidays means that there is no pastoral support for the students, and this could have an impact on their mental well-being.

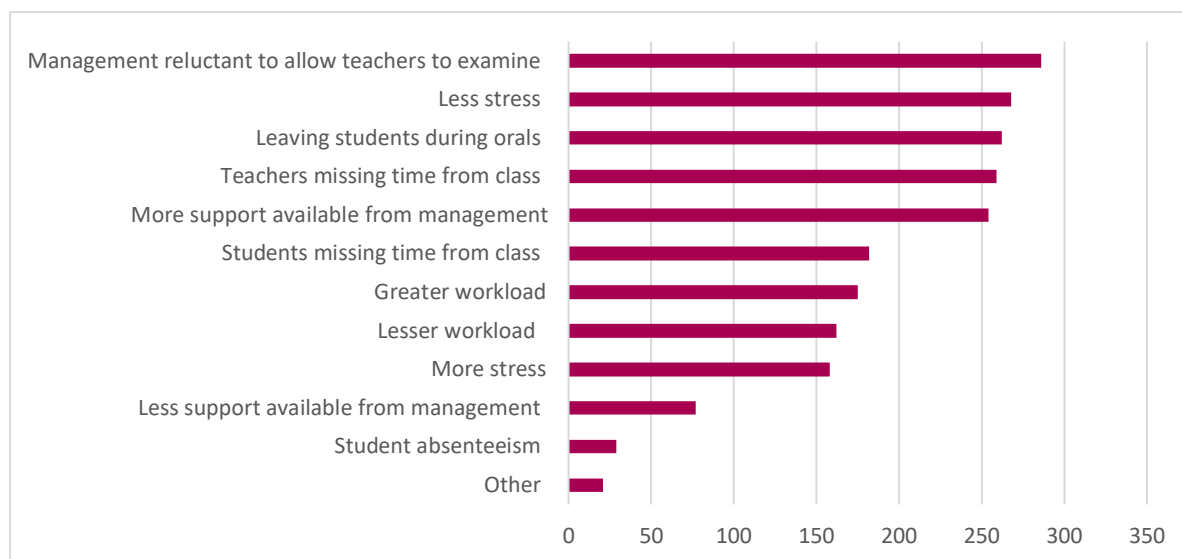
Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Teachers who have acted as oral examiners were asked their opinion about the impacts of oral examinations occurring during term time. Respondents were presented with various statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the number of options that could be chosen, and 2133 statements were chosen. The statement chosen most often was the one relating to the reluctance of management to release teachers (n=286 and just over 13% of total).

Table 31: Teachers who have acted as oral examiners asked about the impact of examinations occurring during term time.

	Count	Percent
Management reluctant to allow teachers to examine	286	13.41%
Less stress	268	12.57%
Leaving students during orals	262	12.29%
Teachers missing time from class	259	12.15%
More support available from management	254	11.91%
Students missing time from class	182	8.54%
Greater workload	175	8.21%
Lesser workload	162	7.60%
More stress	158	7.41%
Less support available from management	77	3.61%
Student absenteeism	29	1.36%
Other	21	0.98%
Total	2133	100%

Figure 27: Teachers who have acted as oral examiners asked about the impact of examinations occurring during term time.



Respondents were then given the opportunity to discuss other challenges and opportunities. There were 21 responses in this section. These responses mentioned accommodation costs during Easter, impact on holidays, substitution availability and management permission.

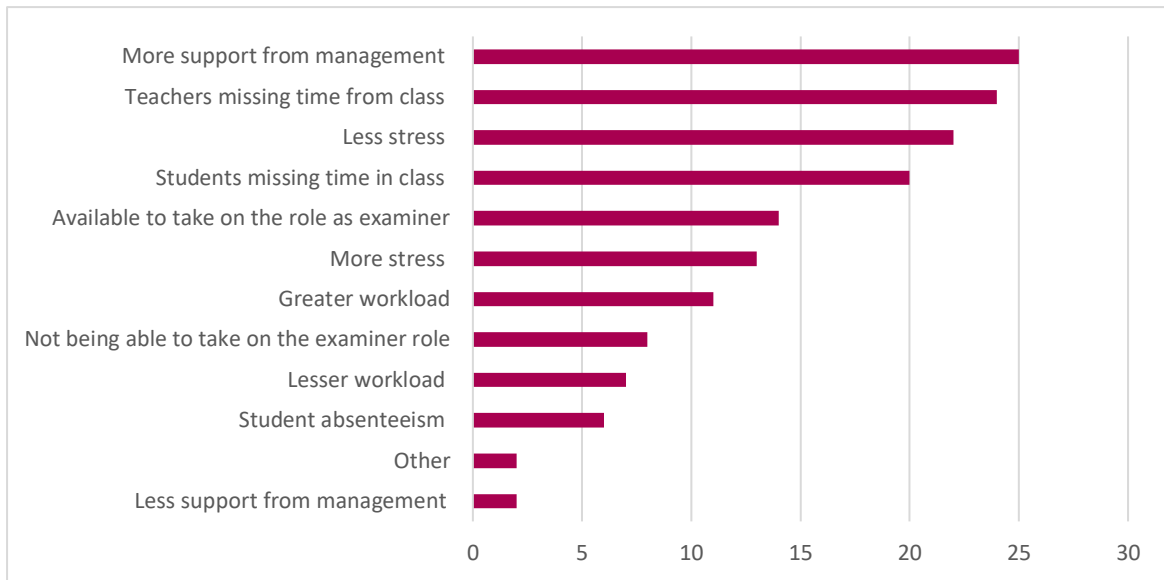
4.4.4 Non-Teaching Examiner for the SEC responses to holding oral exams prior to or after the Easter holidays

Examiners who are not currently teaching were also asked about the challenges and benefits of holding the oral examinations prior to or after the Easter holidays. Respondents were presented with eleven statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the amount of options that could be chosen and there were 154 statements chosen. The statement relating to more support being available from management was the statement chosen most often (n=25 and 16% of total). The second most chosen statement was the one that referenced teachers missing class (n=24 and 16% of total).

Table 32: Non-teaching Examiners for the SEC: reported challenges and benefits of holding the oral examinations prior to or after the Easter holidays

	Count	Percent
More support from management	25	16.23%
Teachers missing time from class	24	15.58%
Less stress	22	14.29%
Students missing time in class	20	12.99%
Available to take on the role as examiner	14	9.09%
More stress	13	8.44%
Greater workload	11	7.14%
Not being able to take on the examiner role	8	5.19%
Lesser workload	7	4.55%
Student absenteeism	6	3.90%
Less support from management	2	1.30%
Other	2	1.30%
Total	154	100.00%

Figure 28: Non-teaching Examiners for the SEC: reported challenges and benefits of holding the oral examinations prior to or after the Easter holidays



Teachers were then offered the opportunity to state other challenges or opportunities associated with the timing of the examinations. There were 2 responses for this section with respondents referring to infringement on holidays for students.

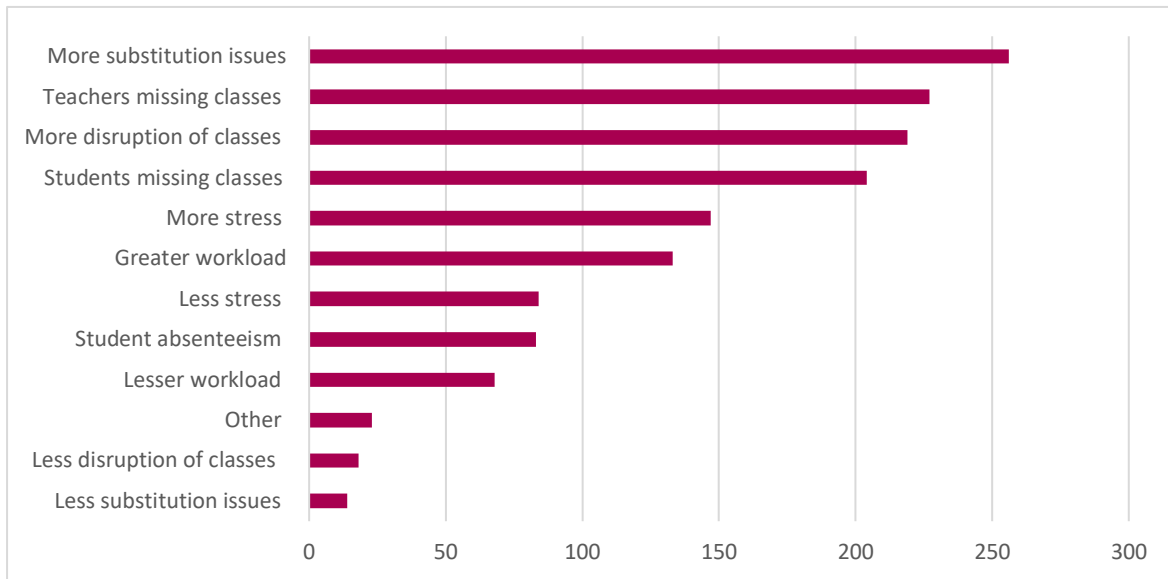
4.4.5. Principal/Deputy Principal responses to holding oral exams prior to or after the Easter holidays

Principals and Deputy Principals were asked about the challenges and opportunities of holding the oral examinations prior to or after the Easter holidays. 174 Principals and 162 Deputy Principals responded to this section of the survey. Respondents were presented with various statements and an option to add other challenges/opportunities. There was no limit to the number of options that could be chosen and there were 1476 statements chosen. More substitution issues (n=256 and 17% of total) and teachers missing classes (n=227 and 15% of total) were the two most chosen options.

Table 33: Principals and Deputy Principals responses when asked about the challenges and opportunities of holding the oral examinations prior to or after the Easter holidays

	Count	Percent
More substitution issues	256	17.34%
Teachers missing classes	227	15.38%
More disruption of classes	219	14.84%
Students missing classes	204	13.82%
More stress	147	9.96%
Greater workload	133	9.01%
Less stress	84	5.69%
Student absenteeism	83	5.62%
Lesser workload	68	4.61%
Other	23	1.56%
Less disruption of classes	18	1.22%
Less substitution issues	14	0.95%
Total	1476	100%

Figure 29: Principals and Deputy Principals responses



Respondents were then offered the opportunity to state other challenges or opportunities associated with the timing of the examinations. There were 23 responses in this section. Respondents referred to more support being available to students during school term, more disruption to school and other subjects and the benefit of the orals being spaced further apart.

Teachers, Counsellors, Chaplains etc all available to support during term time but not during holidays.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Students are free to use Easter holidays for revision and preparation for written exams. Oral exams can be spaced further apart.

Principal/Deputy Principal

4.4.6 Other responses to holding oral exams prior to or after the Easter holidays

The final section of the survey allowed those who did not fall into the categories of parent, student teacher etc. to express their opinions on the timing of the oral examinations. The composition of this cohort has been discussed in an earlier section. Various themes came to the fore in this section with many respondents identifying both benefits and challenges to the timing. One of the most prominent themes was once again the infringement on school holidays for staff, students and parents. There was also discussion of the difference between before and after Easter with after Easter allowing more study time.

Less stress for students and can relax during holidays

Other

Gives students time to relax and get more work done in preparation for the leaving cert during the holidays.

Other

Prior: Students may not be fully prepared if they don't have enough time to study due to still having normal leaving cert classes After: Students may not have

properly took advantage of the Easter holidays and may have fallen behind which can cause them to not be fully prepared for the orals

Other

Students get the two weeks while on break to relax and comprehensively go over their oral

Other

Prior to holidays: advantages: Students would be able to take a break after their orals are finished during their Easter holidays , challenges: Students will have to do their exams during school time After holidays: Not during their Easter holidays so can take a break during them, challenges: because the oral would be after their holiday this means students would have to take time during their holidays to study for their oral exam meaning they aren't getting a proper break from school

Other

Supports to students from teachers and other staff members was another prominent theme.

I think it is better to have the examinations during term time as it is less stressful as the school can also provide classes to practice and study with others.

Other

There is support from the teachers and guidance counsellors before and after the oral when during term time. Students don't feel like they are losing out on their Easter break, which at that stage is deserved.

Other

Students also have more support from teachers during orals if in term time- calming, encouraging, chasing the nervous people who balks and doesn't want to come in. the only upside is more teaching time and less need for substitution. if they are to continue to do this the language teachers should get an allowance to be there-but that doesn't solve the fact that school is a really hectic place and we all need a break

Other

Challenges with substitution and the impact on teaching and learning while teachers are out of class were mentioned by numerous respondents.

Advantages- student get more support both academically and holistically Gives opportunities for weaker students to succeed and get motivation off other students on the day Disadvantages - cover can be difficult for schools with examiners out.

Other

I can see no advantages. Disadvantages: Teachers out of school to carry out oral exams. Shortage of language teachers so students are supervised/ left to study. Students from 1st to 6th Year missing a week/ two weeks of tuition while their teacher is conducting orals. Students preparing for their own oral exams lose out on having their language teacher there to help them.

Other

Teachers needed to do the orals taking from teaching in their own schools

Other

Traffic, accommodation and transport issues were also discussed.

During term time will make it easier for students to get to the orals, such as by school bus. After Easter would mean that students would have the entirety of the Easter holidays to focus on the orals

Other

Yes, principals will need more cover but you can space out French & Irish etc., also, pupils & teachers get a proper break, traffic will be worse but if you need to stay overnight you'll have more chance of finding a B & B

Other

4.5 Further Comments and Suggestions

The final question of each branch of the survey asked respondents to give further feedback in relation to the survey, the timing of the orals or their experience in relation to the orals. The following themes emerged during analysis.

The general themes which emerged within this section related, mostly, to the respondents' choice in relation to the timing of the oral examinations. The vast majority of responses repeated the reasons as to why the oral examination should be at the particular time. Those who chose before and after Easter spoke again about student wellbeing, the need for a break for all, logistical issues and teacher support.

Students need a break, and the holidays are meant to be downtime from schoolwork.

Parent

Tionóladh na scrúduithe béil le linn laethanta saoire na Cásca den chéad uair cionn is go raibh paindéim faoi lán seoil. Práinn a bhí i gceist. Tá an phráinn sin thart anois. Caithfear smaoineamh ar fholláine na scoláirí Ardteiste. Bíonn a laethanta saoire ag teastáil gó géar uathu. Níl sé cóir go laghdaítear iad.

Tuismitheoir

Those who chose during Easter spoke of less disruption to class and learning time and a quieter less stressful environment.

The oral component was over by Easter for many years and this system allowed for less stress and the school system of care and support to be there without pressure.

Parent

A small number of Teacher/Examiners spoke about the opportunities that they had during Easter to examine the orals and the benefits that that brought for them and their students.

I enjoy doing orals. It helps me in my classroom with my students. It is really a great experience for teachers. I do not want to/nor would I be facilitated leaving school for a week.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

In my school, we have 3 MFL teachers. None of us were allowed out to examine before. Now 2 of us go each year. We also have around 3 or 4 Irish teachers who can now examine. This has been the best CPD we could have asked for. None of us will be allowed out in future if it goes back to term time.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

However, in contrast to this a small number of teachers also mentioned that the Easter period negated their opportunity to examine the orals due to other commitments.

I would like to examine LC French oral exam this year. With young children Easter holidays is not an option for me to examine.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

A few teacher/Examiners mentioned the financial reward relating to the job as examiner and that going forward this must be rewarding for the job to be worthwhile.

As outlined above, as a teacher with 20 years plus experience as well as being an SEC French Examiner for 18 Years, it really has to be worth our while giving up 5 days of our holidays. If, for example it was decided that the Oral Exams remain during the Easter Holidays, but the rate was reverted to the original during school rate I would just not be interested as it just is not worth the money.

Teacher/Teaching Examiner

A small number of Principals/Deputy Principals gave their opinion with regard to their own remuneration due to the increase in workload at Senior Management Level.

To be managed effectively and to secure the smooth running of the State Examinations Principals and/or Deputy Principals must be present daily (one per day). More and more work is being demanded of Senior Managers during term time, in the evening each week and now one week of the Easter is no longer available to SMT. There is a perception that SMT have long summer holidays but that is not the case, we are off, if we are lucky, in July. If Oral Examinations etc continue during Easter, then payment for SMT who attend daily must be improved.

Principal/Deputy Principal

There were quite a few respondents who mentioned that going forward ensuring a gap between the examinations was priority so that students would have an opportunity to have a break between languages or even a longer examining period to allow for teachers to be released and for less overlap with practical subjects.

Orals during the Easter break is ok as long as they are not too close together. It's very hard to do two orals in different languages the day after each other.

Student

I feel the whole assessment process needs to happen over a wider period of time. If you widened the assessment window for schools, then it might be easier to release teachers over a 4-week period instead of a two-week period. This window may also clash with music and Home ec for JC so I think a widening of the window may ease this on a few fronts.

Principal/Deputy Principal

A very small number of respondents also suggested in this section that the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations should be examined in-house, by the students' own teacher and that this would negate the need for teacher release during term time.

Teachers examining their own students, with external moderation would be an acceptable compromise, in my opinion.

Principal/Deputy Principal

This section saw a small number of other suggestions as to when the orals examinations could be held in the future. Afternoons, May or June, at the end of fifth year were some of the suggestions mooted by a small number of respondents.

I would have rather sat them at the end of 5th year. Easier to handle and less stress going into 6th year.

Student

B'fhéidir gur féidir na béal triallacha a chuir ar siúl tar éis am lón agus na gnáthranganna a chur ar ceal don tráthnóna ar an lá.

Tuismitheoir

A suggestion made by a very small number of respondents mentioned that the decision should be held off until next year so that communication to parents, students and teachers is clear and unambiguous to allow for proper planning and preparation.

Whatever arrangements are made for exam-year students, they should all be communicated clearly in advance of the beginning of the school year so that study time and preparation can align to the examination timetable. Last minute changes and announcements re. Examination schedules should be avoided as they cause unnecessary pressure for teachers, parents and students in a year which is already daunting enough for them.

Parent

There were a small number of unrelated themes which arose in this section also. One such theme related to the Irish language oral and its components. The Sraith Pictiúir was mentioned by a small number of respondents. Since 2021 the number of Sraith Pictiúir which students must study for the Irish Leaving Certificate Oral exam was reduced from twenty to ten. A small number of respondents and a separate submission which came in through the email address supplied with the survey referred to this.

Sraithpictures should be kept at 10 not 20

Student

NCCA has published two studies and COGG has published two studies over the past number of years, with each of them showing clearly that the current system in relation to the sraithphictiúir is failing. It is time to act on this research and reduce the number of sraithphictiúir to 10 sraithphictiúir permanently to reduce the unnecessary pressure that is being put on students in this regard. We ask the education authorities to listen to the student and teacher voice and to act on the research that has been conducted.

Submission

Under this theme there were also a small number of respondents who made suggestions for the Irish oral component, including increasing the weighting and changing the format of the exam and looking at the compulsory element of Leaving Certificate Irish.

Ba cheart go mbeadh an Béaltríail 80% do Scoileanna T2. Ba cheart go mbeadh pointí CAO breise go grádanna arda sa Ghaeilge.

Tuismitheoir

Ba cheart don dalta a bheith in ann comhrá nádúrtha a lámhseáil seachas eolas a fhoghlaim go glanmheabhair. Is féidir le gach dalta an t-eolas a fhoghlaim gan bheith in ann an Ghaeilge a labhairt go nádúrtha agus is trua sin.

Tuismitheoir

Ba cheart go mbeadh an tsraith phictiúr sa scrúdú Ghaeilge roghnach, tá sé ró shrianta agus ní thugann sé deis don dalta labhairt ar a gcumas.

Dalta

Is oral Irish exams necessary? the majority of students don't even like Irish not alone wanting to do exams in it either oral or written. I do think for the leaving cert Irish should be a choice subject.

Parent

A very small number of respondents spoke about the need for fundamental changes at Senior Cycle and the points system in general, with some calling for a wider skills-based assessment system which places more value on a variety of skills and abilities.

Tá athrú de dhíth ar na Sraithe Sinsearaí agus an córas pointe CAO go huile agus go hiomlán. Táimid ag freastail ar riachtanais na gcomhlachtaí móra in ionad freastail ar bhuanna pearsanta na ndaltaí agus na hinniúlachtaí atá acu. Tá siad brúite i dtreo an choláiste, agus anois cé go bhfuil béim mhór curtha ar printíseacht, fós caithfidh AT a bheith bainte amach acu. Béalghrá tugtha don fholláine, gan trácht ar an mbrú atá ar dhaltaí na hardteistiméireachta

Príomhoide/Príomhoide Tánaisteach

Finally, a small number of Principals and Deputy Principals spoke about the increasing workload of the SLT of schools and the need for increased consultation with management bodies to ensure that all of the issues are discussed openly.

The SEC must consult with all types of school stakeholders eg ETB, JMB. Preferably a focus group of examination secretaries and management to discuss the plans the SEC have for the JC and LC roll out including the issuing of results and the appeals Process. Stakeholders should be there to advise on how best to roll out these major events in schools. The SEC have made major changes recently and are working from a system that is not fit for purpose for schools. The SEC have majorly increased the workload on schools without consultation. Schools and in particular management, are already at breaking point.

Principal/ Deputy Principal

5. Summary of Survey Data

5.1 Overview

The principal aim of this phase of the study was to investigate perspectives from various stakeholders, including parents, students, teachers, examiners, school management, and others, regarding the optimal timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations going forward. The primary focus included:

1. Determining the most favourable timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations.
2. Analysing the rationales provided by different stakeholders in support of their preferred timing.
3. Assessing the perceived challenges and opportunities associated with conducting the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during the Easter period in 2022 and 2023, and the implications this had for students, teachers, schools, and other relevant parties.
4. Examining the perceived challenges and opportunities pertaining to the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations conducted within regular school time prior to 2020, and their impact on students, teachers, schools, and other stakeholders.

5.2 Summary of survey findings

The final sample ($N^2 = 11,220$) was comprised of parents (10%), parents with a student Under 18 (12%), students under 18 (6%), Students over 18 who have completed the Leaving Certificate (29%), Students over 18 who are yet to complete the Leaving Certificate (13%), teachers and teaching examiners (22%), examiners who are not currently teaching (1%), principals and deputy principals (3%) and others (4%).

Majority preference for Leaving Certificate Oral exams to take place prior to Easter and during term time

The rationale underlying this choice was grounded in the shared recognition of the need for a break from work and school among all stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and school management. It was deemed essential for the overall well-being and mental health of students, particularly in light of the considerable stress experienced throughout the final academic year.

A secondary but prominent theme that emerged pertained to the necessity of creating a distinct gap between the oral examinations and the written papers. Respondents consistently highlighted the importance of scheduling oral assessments prior to the Easter holidays, emphasising that this temporal separation of assessment components is crucial. Such scheduling provides students with a requisite interval between school terms, affording them valuable time for rest, relaxation and refocusing before entering the final term leading into the written examination period.

Furthermore, the role of school support emerged as a third influential factor. It was posited that teachers, guidance counsellors, and exam aides would be more readily available to assist and guide students during regular term time. In contrast, the Easter period might see a reduction in the availability of physical resources, such as transportation, study classes, and peer support, potentially impacting students' access to necessary support systems.

² N refers to the total number of respondents or responses to a particular question on the survey.

Preferences for Leaving Certificate Oral exams to take place outside of term time and during the Easter holidays

23% of respondents reported that they would prefer to have the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations outside term time during the Easter holidays.

The prevailing theme evident across the entire cohort pertained, once again, to the need to allocate time for focused study. It was proposed that the Easter holidays would afford an opportune period for concentrated and purposeful preparation for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. Respondents further cited advantages such as a more peaceful school environment, which would alleviate pressure and stress on students, while concurrently minimising disruptions to teaching and learning.

Notably, Principals and Deputy Principals emerged as the sole cohort favouring this particular timing. Their rationale centred on the significant benefit of limiting disruption to teaching and learning by having the examinations during the holiday period. They contended that, by aligning the oral examinations with the Easter holidays, the need for substitution for teachers acting as State Examination Commission (SEC) examiners would be obviated, and thus students would not miss out on crucial instructional time in their absence.

Preferences for after Easter during term time

Just less than 23% of respondents reported that their choice would be to have the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during term time but after the Easter holidays.

Reasons associated with this choice were aligned closely to those relating to the period before the Easter break and included: student wellbeing and the need for a break to rest, relax and focus on study for the orals. It was noted by many also that the students had more time to prepare and study for orals after Easter as it included the two weeks of the Easter break.

Furthermore, numerous respondents from various cohorts highlighted the availability of support within schools, including assistance from teachers, management, and peers. Lastly, a recurrent point was made regarding the advantage of scheduling the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations post-Easter, thereby avoiding potential conflicts with other components of the Leaving Certificate examination, such as projects, practical assessments, and written examinations.

Other

Less than 1% of respondents chose the other category with relation to the timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. Such themes that came from the 176 respondents who chose 'Other' as a response option stating various alternative preferences. These included holding these oral examinations before or after Easter depending on how it fell; before Christmas; at the end of fifth year in Senior Cycle; or at other varying points during Senior Cycle.

Perceptions of those who engaged with Leaving Certificate orals During Easter in 2022 and 2023

For those parents and students who completed their Leaving Certificate oral examinations during Easter in 2022 or 2023 satisfaction levels were equally distributed across the very satisfied and satisfied range in comparison to the unsatisfied or very unsatisfied options. When parents were asked to review a number of statements in relation to the impact of the Leaving Certificate orals during Easter and the main statements related to (i) the fact that it made it harder to attend the examination and (ii) teachers were not available to support the students at this time. On this matter the students were in agreement that the timing made it harder to attend but there was also an agreement that the quieter school environment made it easier for them.

When teachers were asked about the challenges and opportunities which the timing during Easter in 2022 and 2023 created for them the main themes selected here related to teachers giving up their

time to support students, more stress, greater workload, teachers not being able to examine, less management support and student absenteeism.

Examiners and non-teaching examiners who answered these questions also referred to teachers not being able to examine as the most common challenge, with greater workload, more stress and less management support the other challenges highlighted.

When Principals/Deputy Principals were asked about the opportunities relating to the orals during the Easter period in 2022 and in 2023 the most common themes highlighted were less distribution to classes, less substitution issues and greater workload.

In the Other section the open responses were similar to those encountered previously including the fact that the examinations impinged on a much-needed break for all, the lack of support available in schools during this time but also the fact that it meant less disruption to teaching and learning during term time.

Perceptions of those who engaged with Leaving Certificate orals in term time prior to 2020

Parents, upon reflecting on the experience of oral examinations during term time, highlighted the significant benefit of having access to teacher and peer support, along with the positive influence of the regular school environment.

Students displayed a high level of satisfaction with this time and also noted that the availability of teacher and student support impacted positively on their experience at this time.

Teachers and examiners observed that conducting oral examinations during term time was less stressful and offered increased support from management. Despite this, a significant number mentioned the inability for them to commit to examining during this period, with many also noting that teachers' absence due to exams posed additional challenges to all. When non-teaching examiners were asked the same question, they also pointed toward a more supportive management during this timeframe, they also highlighted the difficulties which arise when teachers are absent from classes but also emphasised that this timing resulted in reduced stress for all.

When Principals and Deputy Principals were asked similar questions, they noted challenges with substitution and teachers missing classes as well as the disruption of classes most commonly.

In the "Other" cohort the main challenges or opportunities in relation to having the Leaving Certificate Orals during term time related to the fact that students would have time to rest, recuperate and focus on the upcoming term during the break and then have the support which was available to students during school time.

Other Suggestions/Comments

The majority of respondents to this question reiterated their choice for the timing of the orals and repeated their reasons for this choice. There were a number of other unrelated themes that emerged also which included general comments about the administration of the oral examinations, remuneration of personnel connected to the oral examinations and more general topics such as the Irish language curriculum and the examinations process.

Section 2 Multisite Case Study - Opinions and Perspectives of Parents, Students, Teachers and School Management

6. Introduction and Methodology

6.1 Background to the Case Study

This section details the continuation of the above research phase completed in November 2024. The initial study surveyed parents, teachers, students, school leaders, examiners, and other stakeholders of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. Initiated by the State Examinations Commission (SEC) in cooperation with the School of Education, University of Galway, the survey aimed to determine the most appropriate timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations from 2024 onwards. This second report is based on a multisite case study of eight school communities, focusing on the experiences of these groups regarding the oral examinations conducted during Easter 2024. A circular was released in December 2024 which indicated that the Leaving Certificate Orals would remain during Easter until such time as this research was fully completed.

This multisite case study was completed after these contingency arrangements took place in March 2024. The research team collected responses from 8 school sites in relation to the impact of conducting the oral examinations during Easter time in 2024 and the preferred timing going forward. This case study aimed to achieve nuance and depth in relation to the opinions of the stakeholders within these sites.

6.2 Methodology

This section provides an outline of the data collection methods used in this research, together with an overview of the characteristics of the final sample of respondents. It also details the descriptive, inferential and qualitative analysis strategies that were employed to explore the data.

6.3 Multisite case study research

A multisite case study research design was utilized as the primary data collection method. Recognizing the impossibility of studying society in its entirety, the case study provides a focused lens to investigate phenomena within specific contexts (Heale & Twycross, 2017). Examining multiple cases enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of processes and outcomes, develop and test hypotheses, and form a clear picture of locally grounded causality (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Each case represents a complex entity within its unique situation, featuring distinct contexts or backgrounds. One of our research objectives is to illuminate these various contexts and the linkages between them (Stake, 1995). Evidence from multiple case studies is often more robust and reliable than from single-case research, facilitating a more comprehensive exploration of research questions and theory development (Heale & Twycross, 2017).

6.3.1 Limitations of the study

Due to the specific nature of case study research and the limited number of participant sites, it is challenging to generalize the findings to the entire population. Generalisability can be enhanced through multisite studies, as demonstrated in this research. When a finding consistently emerges across multiple heterogeneous sites, the results are likely to be more robust (Schofield, 2000). It is hoped that this research would seek to find depth and nuance in regard to the research objectives and to build on the findings of the previous section.

6.4 Ethical considerations

There were few anticipated risks associated with participation in the research for the adults and young people who participated in this part of the research. All respondents were over 18 and were provided with information sheets and asked to give informed consent to participate in the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. As indicated earlier ethical approval was received from the University of Galway, Research Ethics Committee on 11 October 2023 and this was complied with throughout the project.

6.5 Sampling strategy and procedure

Schools were recruited through convenience sampling. Schools which had links to the researchers were contacted via email and/or phone call initially. The schools were then provided with the information sheet regarding the research and asked to recruit participants for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Groups of 3-5 students were requested. Teachers came either individually, in pairs or in small groups. Parents were contacted through the school email address and were asked to come to the school on the day or make contact directly with the researchers.

6.6 Methodology: Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

6.6.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were primarily used in relation to the teachers, parents and school management groups within this study. Semi-structured interviews involve a set of predetermined questions but allow flexibility for the interviewer to explore topics in more depth based on the respondent's answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This method enables the collection of comparable data while also capturing rich, detailed insights (Roulston, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for exploring complex behaviours, experiences, and understandings and providing a balance between consistency and depth (Kvale, 1996). The researchers had an interview schedule with questions and prompts so that each could follow a similar line of enquiry. Interviews and focus groups were recorded for ease of analysis so that the interviewer could concentrate on the topic and the dynamics of the conversation (ibid).

Interviews and focus groups occurred over a six-week period after the Easter Break. An initial school was chosen as a pilot school where three of the research team engaged with the participants using a predetermined interviewing schedule, notes were taken during the interviews and the research team compared the initial themes emerging. Subsequently, the team worked separately at the different locations and the findings were housed on a University of Galway server in line with GDPR guidelines.

Thematic analysis was used to identify themes, concepts and meaning (Roulston, 2010) which facilitates the retrieval of what was said on each topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2012.) Each of the interviews and focus groups were coded by the team of researchers with regular check in meetings to compare emerging themes. The data is represented according to cohort in section 8.1.

6.6.2 Focus groups

Focus groups were also conducted during the course of this study. A focus group is a form of group interview where interaction between the participants is encouraged (Mertens, 2015). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015, p. 175) refer to it as a “nondirective style of interviewing” that may elicit more points of view that would be the case in an “researcher-dominated” (Mertens, 2015, p. 382) interview. The researcher endeavours to facilitate “lively collective interaction” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 175) between members of the focus group in order to probe areas of agreement/disagreement and to elicit more expressive and emotional views. In addition to inviting conflicting viewpoints the researcher also must manage these and maintain rapport. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 164) aver that that this form of

interviewing is most effective when the interviewees are “similar and cooperative” which was the case in this study.

6.7 Aggregate profile of schools and respondents

Eight schools participated in this phase of the research, encompassing a blend of urban and rural settings, mixed genders, and both DEIS and non-DEIS status. Two Irish Medium schools were also included in the sample (See Table 1??).

Table 35: Case study sites and participants

School Label	DEIS Status	Location	Rural vs Urban	Enrolment	Gender	Teachers	Students	Parents	Management
School 1	Non DEIS	West of Ireland	Rural	434	Girls	7	9	4	Principal & Deputy Principal
School 2	DEIS	West of Ireland	Rural	198	Mixed	3	9	0	Principal
School 3	Non DEIS	West of Ireland (Galway City)	Urban	660	Mixed	4	10	4	Principal
School 4	Non DEIS	East of Ireland (Dublin)	Urban	1014	Mixed	8	5	0	Principal & Deputy Principal
School 5	DEIS	East of Ireland (Dublin)	Urban	429	mixed	0	0	0	Principal
School 6	DEIS	West of Ireland	Rural	73	Mixed	1	3	1	Principal
School 7	DEIS	Midlands	Rural	604	Boys	3	6	0	Deputy Principal
School 8	DEIS	West of Ireland (Galway City)	Urban	985	Mixed	6	0	1	Deputy Principal (notes left)
Total						32	42	10	10

Participants from these schools included 42 students, 32 teachers, 10 parents, and 10 management personnel. The teacher count includes those who also serve as examiners and exam aides. Parents were the most difficult group to contact, resulting in the smallest subset in the study.

7. Multi-case study findings

This section will detail the themes which emerged throughout this phase of the research. As noted above, thematic analysis was used to code and categorise the findings. The general themes which emerged were similar to those which emerged in the earlier survey. However, the strength to which many felt about certain themes were less determined at times than those of the survey responses. These findings although similar across the cohorts will be presented separately and according to cohort below.

7.1 Students

42 students participated in focus groups or semi-structured interviews across seven of the eight schools. Students were chosen randomly, were over 18 and had all completed at least one oral examination during Easter 2024. The students were asked questions which aimed to explore their experiences during this period and to provide recommendations for future examinations.

7.1.1 General perception of the oral examinations in Easter this year

For the most part students didn't have very strong feelings in relation to their experience of the oral examinations this year. Comments such as "Didn't mind it", "it was okay", "not bad" and "it was grand" were common throughout the focus groups. Students noted that they just "got on with it" and "wanted to get it over with". Most noted that it didn't really "bother them one way or another".

I didn't mind it to be honest.

Student, Rural DEIS

It didn't bother me really.

Student, Rural DEIS

They felt that this was just how it was and they had no choice in the matter.

I did not know any different, we just went with the flow.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

Many were happy to get it out of the way, particularly if they were timetabled for early in the week and then they could return to work/study or rest afterwards.

I was happy to get it over with as mine were early in the week, I could then take a couple of days off after and then get back to study in the second week.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

There were a small minority of students who stated clearly that they "didn't like it".

Most of these students felt this as Easter was the last break before the end of school that it was needed to rest, recuperate and to focus on the written examinations.

I wasn't too big of a fan, as Easter is the last long break that we had and we had to basically sacrifice other subjects for the orals which you might not care that much about

Student, Rural DEIS

A small number were unhappy as the timing of the oral examinations impacted their lives in a particular way, part-time jobs and other external commitments were the main reason for this.

The sheep were lambing.

Student, Rural DEIS

I had to take time off work.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

One example was a student who missed a family wedding abroad and another had to miss a day of work due in part to the late scheduling of the oral examinations.

My auntie was getting married, and I wasn't able to go away with my family, I missed the wedding, I wasn't able to go away. I feel over Easter everyone goes away, or everyone has plans.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

7.1.2 School holidays

Some students noted the fact that it was school holidays was an advantage to them. They noted that this meant there was a dedicated time for the orals.

I thought it was good to be honest. I thought it was less stressful cos like we had mocks and stuff coming up and instead of it being in school time it was during when you had an extra bit of time to go in and do them you were less worried about them cos you didn't have to think about schoolwork on top of it.

Student, Rural DEIS

As such they had more time to study specifically for the oral examinations with no other distractions in terms of projects, homework and practicals in school.

Around the same time as the orals, you'd be doing your construction project and other stuff, so its handier in Easter cos you'd have more time for yourself out of school to learn off for your orals

Student, Rural DEIS

Many students liked that they could just come into the school for their time slot and go home again without the need to engage with other students or teachers.

I liked coming in and out, didn't want to talk to others

Student, Urban DEIS

Just go in and do it and go home

Student, Urban, Non-DEIS

Students noted that if school was running as normal that they might have to miss classes and other work, which would add to the stress.

You might have to miss classes

Student, Rural DEIS

In fact, some noted that if school was continuing as normal, they would not have wished to return to class as others would be asking how it went – particularly if it didn't go well.

Your brain is so exhausted, so when I was in here, I did not want to be talking about it after

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

A small number also noted that if the examinations were held during term time, they would not attend school that day, or would come and go, or might even take the day off before or after.

To be honest if it was in school time I would have taken the day off before it... and maybe a reward day after.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

7.1.3 School environment

The school environment was mentioned by a large number of students. The majority felt that the quieter, calm environment was conducive to the orals and a benefit to them.

Quieter, very calm, no hustle and bustle, relaxed, no distractions, people helping each other.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

Some schools had dedicated spaces for study and quiet time which they could use as they waited for their time slot.

Yeah, all the relevant teachers were there, and you got a room to study in beforehand for however long you were here before it.

Student, Rural DEIS

However, a small number of students didn't like the quietness of the empty school. They noted that it was "eerie", "scary", "awkward", "too quiet", or "teannasach" and "aisteach".

It was really strange

Student, Rural DEIS

7.1.4 School support

Most students were happy with the support provided within the school during the oral examinations. Most maintained that there were enough adults present, and many noted that they did not feel they needed much support.

Yeah, I'm the same, if the teacher was there, you could ask but it's not like you needed them to be there.

Student, Rural DEIS

The support provided varied between the contexts but also within the contexts. Some schools had a large number of adults present which included the examination aide or aides, members of the senior management team and in many cases language teachers were present.

In the case of one school, they also had a wellbeing lead who was present for the duration of the oral examinations to provide emotional support for the students.

The exam aide, the exam support and the wellbeing support, it was enough, they were always there trying to keep everyone calm.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

In some cases, it was noted that language teachers were not there, most felt there was no need for their language teacher to be present.

The work was done.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

In some cases, the language teacher was able to support the students if they were nervous.

My teacher was in, and she went to the examiner and told her I was very nervous, which was a big help

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

However, some students noted that they would have liked this to ask specific questions to their language teacher before the exam. One student compared it to the music practical where teachers were present and were available to alleviate the stress at that time.

The music was much better, as you had the teachers there to calm us down.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

In relation to student support most noted that there were enough students present to support and distract them.

Some of the other girls were in and they helped and distracted me.

Student, Rural Non- DEIS

Others noted that support from their friends would have been of benefit.

I'd have liked if my friends were there, it would have taken some of the stress away.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

In one case where there was a delay in the examination schedule the extra wait resulted in many students being present at the one-time which some found distracting.

There were lots of students who came in, everyone was stressing and talking over each other, it was hard to concentrate.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

7.1.5 Transport

The vast majority of students didn't have any issue with getting to and from their oral examination. Some walked, drove themselves or the vast majority got lifts from their parents,

My mam dropped me to school. She didn't have any work that day. I didn't have work either

Student, Rural DEIS

In the case of the lifts from their parents, there were some issues presented here. Working from home afforded many the opportunity to take their breaks at a time in line with the examination.

My father was working from home, so he just took a break.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

Many students said this wasn't an issue as it was a once off.

My mum drove me, she booked time off in advance.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

A small number of students noted that it did create a challenge. Due to a change of schedule, one parent had to be called out of work unexpectedly and had to come in a rush, which upset their working day.

I had to ring up my dad and get him to come to collect me... he wasn't happy as he was doing jobs in work and he had to leave.

Student, Rural Non DEIS

Another parent had to bring their laptop in the car so that they could work while they were waiting outside.

I didn't have work, but my mother was working from home, so she had to take a break from that to drop me in on the two days. It wasn't a big issue but kind of annoying for her to have to bring the laptop with her.

Student, Rural DEIS

7.1.6 Scheduling

For the most part students were happy with the scheduling of the examinations. Many noted that their exams were early in the week which was preferred by a majority so that they could:

Get it over with.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

It was done in the first week of Easter as well, so it wasn't like it took up the whole time, and we got a nice timetable for it in fairness.

Student, Rural DEIS

Many students noted that their examinations were spaced out with at least a day between each.

I didn't mind it, I did my Irish on the Sunday and then the French on the Wednesday.

Student, Rural DEIS

The spacing of the examinations was particularly important as they did not want to have languages on consecutive days, and this, for the most part was not an issue.

Mine were spaced out well.

Student, Rural DEIS

Many were finished by Wednesday of the first week of Easter which students felt gave them ample time to rest and recuperate before they returned to study, work or school.

It was nice to get them done early and still have a day or two to do other things.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

On this note many students maintained that it was important to have them in the first week of Easter only. That this gave them time to rest and recuperate in the second week.

But let's say if it was the second week of Easter it probably would have been worse.

Student, Rural DEIS

However, there were a number of students who were unhappy with the scheduling of the examinations. Some students felt having the exams on the Saturday and Sunday was a particular issue; they were tired at the end of term and had no break.

Straight from school into the orals.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

The weekend provided some with the opportunity to study and focus on the upcoming oral examinations.

I was glad mine weren't at the weekend as you had the two days to settle myself

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

A small minority were also unhappy with the spacing of their exams. This was particularly the case for students with more than two oral examinations. One student who had three oral examinations was examined in three consecutive days which caused added pressure.

I had French, Irish and Polish. I speak Polish at home. The switching between the languages was hard, I didn't even have a day's break between them and that was hard.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

I didn't really like it as it was really crammed for me, I had the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday all in one go.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

Another student felt that their examinations were too close together and that as a result they lost marks as they were speaking and thinking in the wrong language.

The actual was exam was ok, but when I went into the Irish exam, I started speaking French and I had to catch myself. I started thinking in French. I think I got docked loads of marks because I had to stop for a few minutes and I had to start thinking in the other language.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

On this note some students who only had one oral examination maintained that this meant that they were less stressed as the scheduling and timing of the examinations didn't matter as much to them.

Yeah, it was easier for me as I had only one exam.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

Also, those students who were not counting one of their languages disregarded the importance of the examination and thus where it was scheduled during the week.

I was only doing ordinary level, so it didn't matter really.

Student, Rural DEIS

One key area which was highlighted by students was in relation to the actual timetabling of the examinations. Many students noted that they were not informed of the date of their examinations until very close to the day. This created issues for many.

I think the time was good, the only thing is let the students know in advance.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

I was going on holidays and I kind of had to cancel it and wait another day. I knew two days before, so I had to cancel it. It was ok but if they were a bit more organised with the date, I would have been able to organise it better.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

The most common issue was in relation to the students who had a part-time job and were working over the Easter period. Many had to ask for a longer lunch break, take time off, or ring in to reschedule on the day.

I did my oral during my lunchbreak, I took a longer break.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

“Yeah, I work as well, and I had to take two days off cos I had French on at the same time as I started work. So, I got less money. Irish was Tuesday and I had to request an early oral so that I could work later. I just wrote a little note and they had to work around it” (Student, Urban Non-DEIS).

In one case the student had arranged to start later in the day, but their examiner was delayed by over an hour due to the inspector and thus the student had to cancel their work entirely for that day.

Yeah, I had to call up and say I would be late as I had my oral but then my oral was delayed by an hour so then I had to ring up again and then I couldn't go in cos it was too late.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

This created stress and upset for the student at the time, and they felt they did not perform as well in the exam.

I was going in after waiting an hour and I was annoyed cos I had been waiting an hour and then I couldn't get my head straight, so that wasn't good, you shouldn't be kept waiting.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

It also caused annoyance afterwards, particularly when their paycheque came through and they were docked money.

I was annoyed, and then I saw my pay cheque and I was annoyed.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

Another student noted that they could not plan for a family holiday as they did not know when the oral examination would take place.

Or even tell us way before as I was planning my holidays to Portugal, and I couldn't because I didn't know when my exam would be. I went after, I just went for a week.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

It resulted in this student missing the holiday and the wedding of their aunt abroad which the rest of their family attended without them.

My auntie was getting married, and I wasn't able to go away with my family, I missed the wedding, I wasn't able to go away. I feel over Easter everyone goes away, or everyone has plans. I think it should be in term time.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

In another case students had to miss or reschedule sports events and games.

I had to tell the team that I wouldn't be able to play the match on Sunday.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

In a small number of cases changes to the examination timetable during the examination period created stress and upset. As mentioned previously one student was delayed by an hour and had to call to cancel work. In other cases, the examiner running ahead or behind schedule created upset.

I thought mine was going to be later in the day and they had to ring me to come in, that was very stressful.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

In another case a student was waiting for two hours for their examination and so there were too many students in the area, and they found it hard to concentrate.

My oral was supposed to be at half twelve and I didn't go in until a quarter past two, so I was there for a long time, I was kind of annoyed as I could have taken more time to study.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

7.1.7 The examiner briefing

A number of students noted the uncertainty in relation to the examiners themselves. Those that were earlier in the first day felt that this was harder as they didn't know what the examiner would be like.

It was hard because I was first in the day so I had no idea what she would be like, then word spread over the day that she was nice.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

They noted that word spread as the week went on in relation to the examiner and the questions being asked.

It was hard to be the first person in the exam as we wouldn't know what the person was like – but then after that people are telling others what the examiner was like – word spreads about whether they are nice or not.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

In one case the examiner made a point of speaking to the students regularly throughout the day to put them at ease.

The French Examiner would come out every few hours and talk to the people there and everyone knew she was nice, that was really helpful.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

However, other examiners were less friendly and not as nice, and this made the students more nervous.

I think we should meet the examiner before we go in and at least then you'd know, like when I went into my French, I thought she would be really friendly like my Irish one, but she wasn't and that kind of freaked me out. And I think if you had an idea of what you were going into beforehand then it would be better.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

One student noted that they met the examiner before the music practical which helped to put them at ease. This opportunity for students to see the examiner before the exam was viewed by the teachers in particular as a negative factor in not having exams during school time (see section on teachers below).

We met the examiner before the music practical

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

7.1.8 After the examination

Many students were happy to go home straight after the examination and move on.

It was grand. I went home and mam said how was it and I said grand and that was it and we moved on with it, it went how it went. It's over.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

Some students went straight back to work.

I took off a longer lunchbreak and went back to work, it was grand.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

One student noted that there was a danger that if the examination had not gone well, that you may be going home on your own without any support.

If it goes badly, you're all on your own, there's nobody to talk to.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

A number of students noted that they were exhausted and overwhelmed after the oral examinations and needed to take time off.

After it I didn't touch a book, I wasn't able.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

Most students said that they took time off from study to rest and recuperate before they restarted their study. For some this was a day or two and for others it was the rest of the Easter break.

I took the rest of the week off and then I went back to study the week after.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

Many felt that the oral examinations impinged on important study time during Easter.

After the orals you were kind of like I'm kind of done now, whereas if I didn't do the orals during Easter I probably would have actually like studied earlier, cos you just kind of mentally felt I'm kind of finished, I had enough.

Student, Rural DEIS

However, most felt that they had enough time to rest and recharge before they returned to school after the Easter break.

There was loads of time to recharge before coming back to school.

Student, Rural DEIS

7.1.9 Future timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals

One student perceptively noted that the oral examinations would be disruptive no matter when it was held.

It's disruptive no matter where it is.

Student, Rural DEIS

A small majority of students noted that the oral examinations should return to term time in the future. The main reason for this was in relation to support that would be available in school. Students noted that teachers would be available and that they would be in the loop of school.

Because you could talk to the teacher on the day before or even on the day itself.

Student, Rural DEIS

I think it's better during term time as your teachers would be supporting you throughout the week and if you need to ask them then you know they'll be there.

Student, Rural DEIS

I think it's better during term time, even though I didn't have much trouble with it during Easter, I think it would incentivise students to work harder in school and like then have the choice of studying other subjects for the full two weeks or like taking a proper break if they want to.

Student, Rural DEIS

Before Easter was the most popular choice within this category of students, with the separation of oral examinations by a week.

A week between each.

Student, Rural DEIS

However, some students noted that the timing of Easter could determine when the examinations would be held, that some years Easter is too early and that students would not be prepared.

Yeah, unless Easter is early, otherwise I'd keep it the same. So they have more time to move from the orals to the actual exams. We had nearly two months.

Student, Rural DEIS

In other cases, Easter could be too late, and they would miss out on studying for other subjects when this was the case.

No, I don't think so, you would spend your whole of Easter studying for the orals so you wouldn't have an Easter.

Student, Rural DEIS

A significant group of students opted for the examinations to remain as they are during Easter. This was due to the fact that there would be less disruption during school time, and it was easier to focus solely on the oral examination material.

It's too disruptive during term time, you're missing out on other subjects, there's a lot less pressure over Easter, it's more relaxed. I felt like I had my preparation done and I went in there with ease.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

However, in most cases the caveat in relation to this was that the oral examinations would be early in the Easter, finished before the end of the first week and that the examinations would be well spaced out.

I think the best solution is to keep it how it is but as early as you can.

Student, Rural DEIS

Most students noted that after Easter would not be appropriate as it was too late and that there were too many projects and workload after Easter.

Not after Easter as there are too many projects and work to do after Easter.

Student, Rural DEIS

Also, it was noted that if the orals were after Easter the students would spend the Easter solely working on oral work, which would mean that they would get no break.

I think it would incentivise students to work harder in school and like then have the choice of studying other subjects for the full two weeks or like taking a proper break if they want to.

Student, Rural DEIS

7.1.10 Other timing options

A number of students noted other options in relation to the timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals going forward. The most common option mentioned by students was that the orals would be half in term time and half in Easter time. With this idea examinations could start at the end of the week before Easter and continue through the first week of Easter.

I think the last few days before Easter and the start of Easter and have it done early.

Student, Rural Non-DEIS

Other students wondered about the possibility of having the orals before Christmas.

Even if we had it at Christmas time, it would be nice, to get it out of the way. Then you can focus on what you are going to do in the written exam.

Student, Rural DEIS

Where other students disagreed with this as they felt they wouldn't be prepared enough.

"We had a new teacher, we had to do all of our oral work after Christmas.

Student, Rural DEIS

Midterm and mock time were also mooted by a small number of students.

Around mock time? End of February? Mocks aren't a big deal here.

Student, Rural DEIS

7.1.11 Other non-related comments

Students also made a number of non-related comments which included keeping the number of picture sequences in Irish at ten going forward.

They have changed it to ten which is much better. The sraith pictures are the hardest part.

Student, Rural DEIS

There was a concern in relation to dialects of the Portuguese language, one student who was from Portugal noted that Brazilian Portuguese was different to her own and was concerned that this was not clear in the examining of the subject.

Portuguese was my exam but there is two types of Portuguese, Portuguese from Portugal and from Brazil and I might have words that the examiner didn't understand and I could be marked down so you should be able to choose which type of Portuguese it is.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

Concern was expressed in relation to the number of scripts available during examinations.

There needs to be enough scripts, for the LCVP there weren't enough scripts.

Student, Urban Non-DEIS

It was noted that in some schools and contexts there was a marked difference between the preferences of students in relation to their academic ambitions and home support. Those who had mainly higher-level subjects and were looking toward university were more likely to want the orals during Easter going forward. These students were for the most part, well prepared and well supported both at home and school. Whereas those students who were taking languages at ordinary level and who had part-time jobs were more likely to want to see a return to term time where they would be more supported, and where examinations would be part of the normal school day.

7.2 Parents

In total 10 parents were interviewed or engaged with the research in relation to their experiences as parents during the oral examination period this year. As mentioned previously the parent group were the most difficult group to access for engagement as they were not on site on the days of the data gathering. The schools, for the most part, worked to engage parents via email and the research team were available to meet with parents, in person, online or on the phone. Of those parents who did engage with the research many of the themes emerged which were similar to those of the students.

The vast majority of these parents were unsatisfied with the timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals during Easter time.

7.2.1 Stress, anxiety and the need for a break

The most common reason cited by parents related to student wellbeing. As this was the last break before the written examinations many parents maintained that the students needed the break to rest, relax and refocus for the examinations.

“Stressful” was one of the most common adjectives used in relation to the experience of having the orals during Easter.

I found it frustrating and very stressful.

Parent, Urban Non-DEIS

The pressure of Leaving Certificate year on students and the pressure placed on students during term time was noted, the need for a complete break at Easter was mentioned by a number of parents.

They found it very stressful as the only down time they had that year to study. They are going from midterm to Easter studying and then they had a week of orals and then straight back into study. They had no down time.

Parent, Urban DEIS

One parent noted that the exhaustion after the exams left the students unable to study after it.

They definitely had loads of time to recover but Easter holidays, you would expect that they would get a lot of revision done and mine are good, but they didn't really, they were very very tired.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

Parents spoke about the nerves and anxiety which comes with sitting a state examination, which this year was compounded for many by that fact that this was the first state examination that they had ever done.

It was their first time ever doing a state exam as they didn't sit their Junior Cycle, so they were very very nervous.

Parent, Urban Non-DEIS

Interestingly, one parent noted that students who only had one oral examination, or who were only counting one language for points, were in a more advantageous position than those doing two or three as it was less stressful and less work for them.

The students who don't do a modern foreign language anymore and do Irish, that gives them an awful advantage over other students. MFL is an optional subject. Or they or not counting it for points, they are just doing it for entry requirements, there is a completely different attitude towards it, my son was doing ordinary level French and he just turned up, whereas for Irish he put everything into it. Whereas my daughter had both French and Irish and she was equally counting them and there was a serious difference in her workload and stress.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

7.2.2 Scheduling

Many of the parents cited the scheduling of the orals close together as being one of the main challenges with the Easter timing. Some students having two or three orals consecutively created added pressure and anxiety.

The other thing that I thought as a parent which was very unfair was that they had Irish on the Sunday and French on the Monday. At least when I did it, there was a week between them, I felt one day tá mé and the next day Je m'appelle was very unfair.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

And the way the orals fell this year for lots of students that I know in lots of different schools some of them fell back-to-back, they had Irish one day and German the next day.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

For my three other kids I would like to see the timetable spread out a little bit more and a little bit of care given to the wellbeing of the kids and a decent break between them, so they are not trying to study for one language and right into another. **Parent, Urban Non-DEIS**

The impact of additional educational needs was noted by one parent, saying that the move from one language to another in such a short time was very demanding.

She had three orals to do Irish, Spanish and French. They were all coming together, two of them were one day after another, very very hard to transfer from one to another. She found it very very tough as she has dyslexia on top of that, so it was very challenging.

Parent, Urban Non-DEIS

One parent noted that a schedule change during the examination period caused stress for them. The arrival of the inspector caused a delay of an hour where the students and the parent had to wait in their car for an hour prior to attending for their examination.

We were waiting an hour due to the inspector coming, and waiting outside, that was tough.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

One parent also noted that having orals on a Sunday was not ideal.

The Sunday morning was a bad idea really.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

7.2.3 School environment

Some parents mentioned the quietness of the building as a negative aspect of the experience.

When all of the school is together, there is an energy created and everyone can interact and teach each other and learn from each other. At Easter that couldn't happen.

Parent, Urban DEIS

There was no access to teachers this time and they were kind of isolated, going into the empty school, all of it was very difficult.

Parent, Urban Non-DEIS

However, there were some who felt the quiet school was a positive thing.

I thought the school being so quiet was really good.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

The fact that there were less students present and that the parent was there to support them was an advantage according to one parent.

When they came into the school there were no students here, they were able to be at home until the time came that they were able to do their exams. You could just drive them in, they didn't need to get stress with students in their ears or seeing other students.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

This was echoed by another parent who maintained that their student would not have attended school if it was in term time as it would be too chaotic for them.

I think it was easier that the others weren't coming out saying I got this sraith. Instead, she was able to go home and go back to bed...If she had been in school she would have been up to high doh thinking about. She would have stayed at home and not gone in for the exam.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

7.2.4 Student support

A small number of parents also mentioned the support that was available within the school.

There was someone there to give them water and to tell them they were next and that was nice. They didn't really need it but it was nice.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

One parent referred to the Irish teacher being present and engaging positively with the student as they were leaving, thus creating confidence and positivity around the experience.

Her Irish teacher was there, and she met her. She was on the first day of the Irish orals and the Irish teacher was there and met her when she came out, she had been listening and she reassured her and gave her great feedback and so she came out on a high. It was lovely to have her teacher there, it was a positive.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

It was noted that one school had an extra wellbeing lead present during the orals and that this was of huge benefit to students, in particular if they felt that the oral had not gone well.

I thought the system we had in the school here was brilliant for supporting the students. We had a student here who faltered after her French exam, she felt it didn't go well and she felt the support here was brilliant.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

7.2.5 Future timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals

The vast majority of parents wanted to see the orals return to term time. They felt that for the wellbeing of the students and the downtime that this break afforded, that it was important the orals were in term time.

I would prefer it to be during school time. For their wellbeing, so that they can have some downtime during Easter.

Parent, Urban DEIS

Back into term time definitely. It just frees them up over Easter, not that it frees them up, but they have no down time otherwise over Easter and they are wound up, like ticking time bombs and they have no..., there wasn't even a day over Easter where she could just down tools and relax. It was full throttle, and I found that very hard and its hard on them you know.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

One parent noted that if the exams were in term time that changes to the schedule would not impact as much.

If they were in school, they would be in class and they wouldn't be hanging around, word would come through that they were running later. You would continue as normal.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

One parent cited sports as a reason that it needed to return to term time. That their younger children were involved in swimming which have championships over Easter which they would find it difficult to miss.

Her younger sister plays a lot of sports and would have competitions during Easter, it would not suit her at all.

Parent, Rural Non-DEIS

However, there were a very small minority of parents who wanted to see it remain at Easter time as it was less disrupting and easier for the students.

One parent suggested that the orals could be help at Christmas or at Midterm in February to alleviate the stress later on in the year.

I don't know why they can't do it before Christmas to be honest, midterm break in February....They can learn as quick in November as they can in Easter and it would take all that stress off them at this time of year.

Teacher, Rural Non-DEIS

7.3 Teachers

32 teachers in total were interviewed for this research project. A majority of the teachers interviewed stated a preference for the oral examinations to return to term time. All the participants recognised the challenges and benefits of conducting the examination during the Easter break and term time. The following sections interrogate the various themes that arose in these discussions. Those teachers who also acted as exam aides or examiners are also discussed in this section.

7.3.1 School environment and supports

Many teachers, especially those who also acted as examiners, cited the quieter school environment as a fact that can have a positive or negative effect on student anxiety. A teacher in a Rural Non-DEIS school is “totally between two minds” on the timing but acknowledges that when the examinations happen during term the exam becomes “part of school life” and that students can find comfort in the crowd. Conversely, the same teacher also believes that students having to leave class and come back in brings its own pressures. The sense of being interrogated about the exam adds to the anxiety of students. Another teacher in Rural Non-DEIS school believes that conducting the examinations during term time help to “normalise” the whole experience and the school community can help them “bounce back” if they have a bad experience. A teacher in an Urban Non DEIS school was conflicted on this issue and spoke about “no hysteria from others” during Easter examinations but also no “feedback” from their peers. A teacher in an Urban DEIS setting referred to the support of the school community as a “safety net” for students. A teacher in a Rural DEIS setting was undecided about the best timing but did acknowledge that some students would benefit from the supports available during term time. A teacher in an Urban DEIS setting who is the Year Head for the 6 Year cohort decided to go into to school to check if everything was proceeding correctly. This teacher became involved in attendance issues (this is discussed further in the non-attendance section).

7.3.2 Support from language teachers

Many of the teachers mentioned that they felt a certain amount of personal responsibility to be present. A number of teachers felt there was pressure from the parents, students, management to be present. A teacher in a Rural Non-DEIS setting recounted coming into the school for a short period but subsequently stayed for half the day. This teacher felt the students needed the support of their language teacher and cited the example of the support they gave to one student who was very distressed after their exam. Another teacher in the same setting, who is a language teacher, believes that language teacher support during examinations is very important and felt “pressure from myself” to be available during the examinations and “guilt” when they were not there due to their own examining duties. A teacher in a Rural Non-DEIS setting believes that the students miss the “connection” when the language teacher is not available them before or after the exam. A teacher in a Rural DEIS school recalled anxious students calling to the door of their classroom when exams were

held in term time. They believe this availability gave the students great reassurance. This year they felt they were going in “alone”. A teacher in an Urban DEIS school mentioned that the language teachers could talk directly to the examiner if a student had a particular issue (severe anxiety etc.). Now this can only be done if they come to the school during their own holidays.

A teacher in an Urban Non-DEIS school was ill during the 2024 examinations and does not live close to the school which make it difficult for them to be available during the school break. Some teachers spoke about making themselves available through their schools' online platform and a teacher in a Rural DEIS school contacted all students via email. Numerous teachers also mentioned that the Easter break is an official school holiday and that there was a certain unfairness associated with being expected to attend school during their break.

7.3.3 Compacted time frame

Many of the teachers referenced the compacted time frame of the examinations. A teacher in an Urban DEIS setting believes this to be the biggest issue and they acknowledge the importance of the "wriggle room" the timetabling of the various examinations can supply but maintain that even having the exams one week apart is too close. Another teacher in a Rural DEIS school believes that this is a very important issue, and that the responsibility lies with the schools/teachers to schedule the exams as equitably as possible. A teacher in a Rural DEIS setting stated that even with the best of intentions it is unavoidable on occasion that students will be required to undergo two exams in two days, especially in cases where a student studies more than two languages. A teacher in an Urban DEIS setting spoke of the diverse school population in their school which results in students studying more than two languages; this adds extra pressure to the already compacted time frame. This theme is discussed in more detail within the exam aide and examiner cohort.

7.3.4 The need for a break and study time

Many of the teachers mentioned the need for a break, for both students and teachers. It is challenging for both cohorts to go "straight into it" (Teacher, Rural DEIS) at the end of term, particularly since the examinations start on the Saturday. A teacher in an Urban DEIS school believes the students "deserve" a break. A teacher in a Rural Non-DEIS setting believes the students were "burnt out" and that "they could barely lift their heads" and as such believes the students need the two weeks break. The same teacher firmly believes that the examinations should not occur on the Saturday and Sunday, a sentiment echoed by other teachers. A teacher in an Urban Non-DEIS setting expressed sympathy for students as they were trying to balance the orals and study in other subjects with the need to take a rest. To ameliorate this situation, this teacher, in consultation with their students, decided not to assign any written homework for the Easter break, something they would have normally done. However, a teacher in the same setting believes that the students accepted that the examinations were happening during a school break and compared it the Leaving Certificate itself which is conducted during school holidays. A teacher in a Rural DEIS school also acknowledged the challenge for students in losing out on a break but maintained that students, especially those who were very focused on the Leaving Certificate, would have been studying anyway and that they have the following week off. Many of the teachers also referenced how family holidays, in Ireland and abroad, were impacted; especially as these may have been booked many months in advance.

Many teachers referred to the Easter break as being a teacher holiday as well and there was an element of unfairness to put them in a position of having to choose to between student support and their own period of leave. Several teachers reported that they would not conduct oral examinations during the Easter break.

7.3.5 Advantages of Easter examinations

Many of the teachers discussed other advantages of Easter examinations. The disruption to classes caused by the oral examinations was cited by several teachers. A teacher in an Urban Non-DEIS setting believes that scheduling the examinations outside of school time takes the "pressure" off schools, particularly as they are so busy at that time of year. Another teacher in the same setting also likes the

lack of disruption the week before Easter where a language class is not disrupted by the oral in that language and other language(s). A teacher in a Rural DEIS setting reported that their students also favoured Easter exams for the same reason. An Urban Non-DEIS teacher maintained that the lack of classes during the Easter break gave the students the time and space to focus more clearly on the orals. Interestingly, this teacher noted that the students displayed dissatisfaction with the Easter timing prior to the oral but were much more satisfied subsequently. Numerous teachers made it clear that examinations after Easter would be very unsatisfactory as they would impinge greatly on preparation for the June exams.

7.3.6 Timetabling

A teacher in a Rural Non-DEIS setting expressed dissatisfaction with the extra workload around the timetabling of the oral examinations. In their school the onus was on the language teachers to compile the timetable. This teacher found the process very stressful with numerous meetings and communications. A teacher in Rural DEIS setting took on the responsibility for timetabling the exams even though they knew it was not their responsibility. They did this for their own “peace of mind” and to ensure an adequate gap between exams. A teacher in an Urban DEIS school stated that in their school the exam aide compiled the timetable but was put under increased pressure by receiving the examination dates so late. Timetabling is discussed further in the exam aide section.

7.3.7 Non-attendance

The non-attendance of students was also discussed. A teacher in a Rural DEIS setting stated that two students from their school did not attend examinations, this teacher believes that they would have attended if the exams had been conducted during term time as they would have been able to “cajole” them to come in. A teacher in an Urban DEIS school, who is the Year Head for the 6th Year cohort, visited the school and dealt with an issue where a student and their family had made an error around the time/date of the exam. It took several phone calls and a significant period of time to rectify the situation. The teacher believes this issue would not have arisen if the examinations were in term time. This teacher, and others, also noticed challenges around holidays and in this particular school they had some international students returning home for the break.

7.3.8 The timing of Easter

Some of the teachers referenced the timing of Easter. A teacher in an Urban Non-DEIS school mentioned that Easter was early in 2024 which allowed eight weeks of term after the Easter break. This teacher would be concerned about years where Easter would fall later and there might only be a few weeks of the school year left. A teacher in an Urban DEIS setting also referenced that Easter can be early or late and as such is open to the idea of examinations after the Easter break.

7.3.9 Student briefing

A number of teachers also cited the importance of the student briefing, a characteristic of the term time examinations. They argued that seeing and hearing the examiner put students at ease. In addition, it allowed the examiner to remind the students of the various procedures (no mobile phones, signing the register etc.). A teacher in an Urban DEIS school argued that the briefing was very “consoling” for the students and a teacher in an Urban DEIS school maintained that it ensured it was not a “stranger” in the room.

7.3.10 Extra exam aide

A number of teachers reported that their schools had not employed the wellbeing exam aide. None of teachers gave a reason for this but some believed it was an oversight on behalf of management. Others were not aware the position existed. A number of teachers in one particular school expressed

dissatisfaction with internal school communication around the role of exam aide and the appointment process.

7.3.11 Substitution and cost effectiveness

Many of the teachers fully recognised that conducting the examinations during the Easter break avoided the challenges of sourcing substitute teachers and that it was more cost effective.

7.3.12 Subject choice

Several teachers from an Urban Non-DEIS school discussed the impact that Easter examinations would have on the uptake of languages at Senior Cycle. They cited the increase in choice at that level and that no other subjects (apart from Gaeilge and MFL) are examined during a holiday period.

7.3.13 Part-time employment

A number of teachers spoke about how Easter examination impacted on the part-time employment of students. The students had to take time off work to attend the orals with a subsequent effect on income. This theme is explored further in the student section.

7.4 Exam aides

Four exam aides and an exam secretary were also interviewed in relation to the timing of the oral examinations. They had differing views on the most appropriate timing with all of them recognising the various challenges and benefits of both options.

7.4.1 Compacted time frame

The Exam aides acknowledged that the compacted time frame was very challenging for students. It was recognised that moving from one language to another (and in some cases a third) added to the stress and anxiety of students. An exam aide in a Non-DEIS Rural setting noted that one particular student had two oral examinations in one day and suggested that conducting the orals over two weeks would be an option. They recognised however, that this option would come with its own challenges as the school break would be impacted more.

7.4.2 Timetabling of examinations

With the students being on their Easter break during the examinations the timetabling of the examinations became an onerous, complicated, and vital task (in the previous section many of teachers mentioned the importance of a “gap” between examinations). An exam aide in an Urban Non-DEIS school described a cooperative approach where students were asked to indicate preferences/availability via the school’s online platform. The exam aide then endeavoured to give each student at least one day between exams. This was complicated by two examiners being in the school for the Irish exam and some students undertaking three oral examinations. The experience of this exam aide was that there was no flexibility/negotiation around examination dates. In addition, this exam aide experienced difficulties with students not adhering to their time slot or making a mistake around the time/date. An exam aide in an Urban Non-DEIS setting had 140 students in leaving certificate and there were 11 different languages being examined over four days. This was very challenging logistically and matters were not helped with examiners giving just a few days’ notice. This exam aide reported that these timetabling issues and communication around them caused anxiousness on behalf of students.

7.4.3 School environment

An exam aide in a Rural Non-DEIS setting believes that the quieter school environment added to student anxiety. They believed they had too much time to “mull over it” and some students began to “overthink it.” The exam aide believed that when the examinations occurred during term time they “just get on with it” and the school structure/community was “calming and helpful.” This school had two school refusals and these students completed 1 out the 4 exams they were scheduled for. The exam aide was unsure if the quieter school environment made a difference here but believes it could have. An exam aide in an Urban Non-DEIS school believes the quieter school environment was a positive factor and that there was only a small group of students together at any one time.

7.4.4 Support for students

An exam aide in a Rural Non-DEIS setting believes that the students were well supported. This teacher knew the girls well and believed they were able to help them when they were upset. This school also has a wellbeing lead and the exam aide mentioned that some of students might have thought there was too much support. The exam aide in an Urban Non-DEIS school spoke about the arrangements put in place in that school to support students during the examination period. An entire section of the school was taken over. This included the staff room where students were allowed to go to make tea/coffee and the deputy principal’s office where calls were made to parents/students. All the examinations also occurred in this section, the exam aide had an office where the students checked in with them, and classrooms were made available for study. In addition, the school canteen (in another section of the building) was made available to the students. This exam aide encountered two students this year who experienced very high levels of anxiety. In both cases the exam aide had to entice them into the building and the exam. This exam aide also recognised that the language teachers being available for students would be a positive thing.

7.5 Examiners

Teachers who also acted as examiners (n=8) expressed various opinions on the timing of the oral examinations. They had differing views on the most appropriate timing with all of them recognising the various challenges and benefits of both options.

7.5.1 School environment and student support

Some examiners referenced the quieter school environment. An examiner from a Rural Non-DEIS school found that the quieter school environment was very helpful for students and felt that the students were less stressed. The school this teacher examined in was running supervised study which resulted in many of the student being in the building. However, an examiner from the same school believed that the quieter school environment could be disconcerting for students and add to their anxiety.

The quieter school environment made the work of the examiner easier with a teacher from a Rural Non-DEIS setting maintaining that they had a better quality of room, and it was more peaceful with no distractions. An examiner from an Urban Non-DEIS school also enjoyed the quieter school environment, the lack of interruptions and interactions with language teachers enquiring about how students performed. However, a teacher from a Rural Non-DEIS school states that empty schools could be “soulless” and “unnerving” for the examiner.

An examiner from a Rural DEIS school is very cognisant of the importance of the “support system” within the schools for the students. This examiner believes that the principal, deputy principal and language teachers being available could be a positive thing. A teacher in a Rural DEIS setting mentioned that the language teachers not being available might not be as negative as it appears. In their experience as an examiner the last-minute support, advice etc. can be more about the teacher than

the student and it can prove to be counterproductive. Conversely, a teacher in another Rural DEIS school believes that language teachers not being there left certain students unprepared.

7.5.2 Timeframe of examinations

Many of the examiners referenced the compacted timeframe of the oral examination where students might have to do 2/3 oral examinations over a short period of time. An examiner from a Rural Non-DEIS setting believed there should be more of a “gap” between the examinations and another teacher in the same school believes the timeframe is grossly unfair on students. An examiner from an Urban Non-DEIS school experienced a situation where students came into the Irish oral and began speaking French.

In addition, the conducting of the examination over the course of the weekend was a significant issue. An examiner from a Rural Non-DEIS school felt that both students and teachers were exhausted and having students come in at 9.00am on a Sunday morning was detrimental to student wellbeing and contrary to the message of wellbeing at Junior Cycle. A teacher in an Urban Non-DEIS setting also believed the examinations should not start until Monday.

7.5.3 Workload

When discussing oral examinations during term time some of the examiners referenced the added workload of having to assign work for classes to be completed during their absence in addition to having to correct it when they returned. An examiner from an Urban Non-DEIS school believes it nearly “doubles the work” as there is so much correcting to do when they return. They mentioned being as “strategic” as possible with the work that they assign. An examiner from a Rural DEIS school found that it was a relief not to have to “worry” about what was happening in their classes in their absence.

7.5.4 Release from school

Some teachers cited difficulties with being released from school during term time. A teacher in an Urban Non-DEIS ETB school has found it challenging in the past to get released from the school. In recent years teachers have been required to source their own substitute cover. A teacher in a Rural DEIS school also recounted difficulties with being released from school. Under the previous system only one teacher was released for examining duties.

7.5.5 Need for a break

A number of examiners discussed how difficult it was to take on this work during what would be their Easter break, particularly as the work started on the Saturday and continued through the weekend. A teacher in a Rural DEIS school believes that starting at the weekend is a big issue especially for the those who are traveling. As a result, they begin this important work “exhausted.”

7.5.6 Role of exam aides

Some of the examiners mentioned the role of the exam aides. A teacher in a Rural Non-DEIS school felt that the support from the exam aide was lacking and this stemmed from them not knowing the students too well. They cited an incident where there was reluctance on the part of the student to attend the exam and it was the language teacher that enticed the student to attend. A teacher in an Urban Non-DEIS school stated that there is a great disparity between the efficiency of exam aides in different schools. A teacher in a Rural Non-DEIS setting believes that an exam aide does not have the requisite knowledge or authority to support the work of the oral examinations. This teacher also found it difficult to find school management when they were required i.e. their signature required on documentation.

An examiner from a Rural DEIS school reported no second exam aide being in attendance in 2024. This teacher found the exam aide that was there to be very efficient but was under extreme pressure as there were four languages being examined on a particular day. A teacher from an Urban DEIS school reported acting as an examiner in a DEIS school in Dublin where there was no exam aide. The principal was in attendance and this examiner reported that the principal visited the homes of students in order to entice/bring them into school. This examiner believes that term time examinations will benefit attendance in DEIS schools.

7.5.7 Negotiation with schools

Some examiners spoke about how it can be challenging to schedule their exam visits to schools. A teacher from a Rural Non-DEIS setting spoke about how an examiner colleague experienced severe pushback from a school in relation to what date the exam would occur. This teacher maintained that they have been informed by the SEC that it is the examiner's prerogative to choose the dates but endeavours to be as flexible as possible. An examiner from an Urban Non-DEIS school admitted that there is "discussion" with schools around the scheduling of the examinations and that they (the examiner) display as much flexibility as possible.

7.5.8 Student briefing

Many of the examiners cited the absence of the student briefing as a major disadvantage of the current timing. An examiner from a Rural Non-DEIS school Teacher 1 believe that student anxiety could be defused by meeting the examiner beforehand, as used to be the custom. An examiner from the same school believes that giving the students the opportunity to see the examiner and hear the accent "reassured" them. "At the moment they have no idea who is in the room until they go in". An examiner from a Rural DEIS school believes the briefing "puts students at ease."

7.5.9 Remuneration and recruitment

Many of the examiners cited the increase in examiner pay as being a positive development. Examiners from various setting believe that it has had a significant impact on the willingness of teachers to act as examiners. An examiner from a Rural Non-DEIS school stated that the SEC have made it "worth our while, they just have, so that's why it is hard to complain about it." An examiner from an Urban Non-DEIS school never acted as an oral examiner under the previous remuneration system but believes that the current remuneration is very generous. An examiner from a Rural DEIS school also expressed satisfaction with the level of remuneration but believes the current timing is more suited to retired teachers. However, many examiners expressed dissatisfaction with the expenses system, particularly the stipulation that overnight expenses are paid from an examiner's school as opposed to their home address. In addition, an examiner from a Rural DEIS school had a query in relation to payment for students that do not attend. In their case 8% of the students scheduled to be examined did not attend.

7.5.10 Caring commitments

Several examiners mentioned that extra arrangements had to be made around childcare when the oral examinations were conducted during the Easter break.

7.5.11 Student attendance

Some examiners noticed issues with attendance as students are on holiday or have a certain activity (competition etc.). One examiner stated that 8% of the students that were scheduled to be examined did not attend and another examiner had a non-attendance rate of 12%. This examiner was informed by the school that particular students were on holidays or "not around." One particular examiner believes this may indicate a change of mindset in relation to the importance of the oral examinations.

7.6 School management

In total 10 Principals and Deputy principals engaged with this element of the research, most of whom opted for an in person semi-structured interview. The main themes that emerged from this cohort are detailed in this section.

7.6.1 Easter Holiday Preference

All of the principals and most of the senior management teams expressed a strong preference for continuing to hold the orals during the Easter holidays. Views expressed focused on a more efficient, streamlined model that was far less disruptive than the previous term time model.

It runs quickly, it runs smoothly, and on the Saturday and Sunday, in a school this size and with our numbers doing Irish and their language we had it all over by the Tuesday. It's not onerous.

Principal, Urban DEIS

I am very happy with it during – it was very calm I happened to be in here during Easter – I was working I don't know how I was working but I was, one of the teachers looked after it and she was excellent there was no issues it was all very calm and no class time was eroded and we have so little class time I would hate to see it going back. I was only there because I had other work – I didn't have to do anything.

Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

From the kids point of view they can focus – they are not taken out of class to do the exam – at least they can focus on their oral there is nothing else going on – the other way is tiring going back to class.

Exam Secretary, Urban Non-DEIS

Leave it where it is – that statement comes from an operational perspective. On the basis that we are a small school and that everything had to be that bit more stretched. My rationale there is if we are to compare and contrast taking the orals during Easter with the written exam in June, I will say there is a like for like there – it's still holiday time. In both cases they still get holidays.

Principal, Rural DEIS

In my view they should stay during Easter firstly because there is no erosion of class contact time when you are releasing teachers to do them.

Principal, Rural Non-DEIS

In some cases, the timing of the orals has been discussed among senior management teams and other key exam personnel and again a preference to hold the exams during Easter prevails.

We have talked about it as a school, the exam aide and exam secretary both agree that if anything its smoother she also said that students seem more relaxed more prepared the school is quieter, the atmosphere in general is a more conducive.

Principal, Urban DEIS

...we have talked about it in friend groups with other school leaders and they don't want it to go back.

Deputy Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

7.6.2 Attendance issues

While there were views expressed that students who do not turn up might be greater during a holiday period, all of the principals in the follow up study did not report this as a factor – having systems in place to make sure that “no show” students were prevented and followed up on was clearly evident in all of the schools we visited. Students who fail to attend is not something new and was also a factor when exams were held during term time.

We have looked at the stats over the years – there was a little bit of confusion over COVID it has been messy for the past few years but over the years we would always have students who didn't show up for their oral, a few no shows – but this hasn't got any worse in the Easter, it might be a bit better.

Principal, Urban DEIS

School leaders focus on strategies to minimise this were identified in all discussions and having the exams during the Easter break facilitated the efficacy of these supports

...and I will tell you why you are dealing with nothing else – the hustle and bustle of the school isn't there, this is the one thing so you can focus on this – where are they, someone go and get them.

Principal, Urban DEIS

I'd be in anyway and I would say it was a great success- we would always have people in, the school completion, the exam aide, there might be an Easter camp – there are people around, and in a DEIS school like this you have a bit of activity so I'd always have people on hand to go and pick someone up or call to a house and say where are they? If you needed someone in particular, like your home school, you might not have them, they might be away but there's always people on hand – there's people in the place and stuff going on and a commitment to making sure someone is there help.

Principal, Urban DEIS

The view that failure to attend this might be more of a factor in DEIS schools was not supported by the findings in this part of the study. On the contrary it was directly disputed.

I think it might be worse in a non-DEIS school – we will always have someone who can ring their ma and see where they are and if they are up in the [local shopping centre] we can get someone to go up and get them.

Principal, Urban DEIS

7.6.3 Going back to term time oral examinations

There were mixed views about this as an option, generally the view was that this should not happen. If it had to go back keeping the exam aide in role would be essential, this was shared in one way or another by all principals because of the level of explicit focus needed on the oral examinations in order for them to run well. This role of the exam aide as de facto principal for the oral examinations as articulated by the SEC was viewed as vital.

The SEC said, they sent a document saying that that the exam aide was the de facto school principal for the orals, so I got my holidays.

Principal, Rural Non-DEIS

This would mean that substitution would have to be provided so that the exam aide was released from teaching.

...if it has to be done during term time that teacher would need to be freed up so a sub would need to be paid – she couldn't be teaching – if a teacher applies to be an exam aide, then she is released from teaching otherwise it will come back to me.

Principal, Urban DEIS

The exam aide has to take full responsibility, the principal can't be dealing with that – the brief of the exam aide is you make sure the child comes is – it has to be up to them.

Principal, Rural Non-DEIS

7.6.4 After Easter examination

There were very strong views that after Easter was not a viable alternative. Most expressed a view that the final term is very busy with a range of other assessments and practical examination. This is a busy period anyway and when coupled with a general sense of denouement of “off the boiliness”, particularly in DEIS schools, as the schools moves toward the end of the year, adds to the unsuitableness of this time of the year.

Easter is such a movable feast this year, after Easter you have 8 weeks next year you have 5 weeks and that's a lot of disruption with four or five weeks to go to the end of term with everything else going on, graduation, summer exams that “off the boiliness” happens especially in a DEIS school you can feel the summer coming schools feel different they operate differently at that time of the year.

Principal, Urban DEIS

Your mocks are always going to be a few days either side of Feb but with Easter it can be 4 or 5 weeks of a difference – you need to say they are always going to be in March but that can be Easter so if they say during the easter holidays then you know when they are and you can prepare for them.

Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

There were some more pragmatic views about a return to term time. It will work and it will happen, and exam times are anxious times anyway for the students

Back to term time – it will still work – testing brings about anxiety especially if you are worried about how it's going to affect your points no matter when it happens especially for Leaving Certificate and we put an awful lot of time in making sure they are well prepared, that there is somebody with them and put their mind at ease, and that will be happen here whenever the exam happens. There may be more staff in the school when it is not during the Easter holidays nothing's going to be a disaster.

Principal, Urban DEIS

7.6.5 Senior Cycle reform

The need to locate/position the discussion in a broader context was also emphasised. In doing this future proofing the timing of the orals would be an issue that requires a lot of consideration in the context of future senior cycle reform.

I don't think it should be the one and only argument used for moving the component out of the Easter break - in fairness the window of 6 days does provide for a break between languages and there is a break – before they could have had Irish on Thursday and Friday and French on Monday and Tuesday so the break can be very similar”.

Principal, Rural DEIS

Great thought needs to be given to revised senior cycle and how they are going to embed themselves into the subject specifications and are those assessment going to take place in Leaving Cert or 5th year – it's going to be a mirror image of the Junior Cert there is a very fine line between assessments and over assessing. If you are going to be lobbying in this 40% component in all your revised subject specifications it's going become phenomenally difficult trying to keep a rigid calendar of assessments between Senior Cycle and Junior Cycle you have the potential there for a logistical nightmare and if orals come back to term time and if they retain their structure in a similar way it could become very problematic in terms of facilitating them within term time.

Principal, Rural DEIS

7.6.6 May madness

While the busy-ness of school life is clearly a fact and a factor impacting a number of decisions from the timing of exams to the general availability of schools to take part in studies of this nature, it is

something that needs to be taken very seriously in terms of how a range of different imperatives, events and requirements combine at the level of the school. Various descriptions by participants as crazy, hectic, so much going on, May madness etc. are all pointing to a sense of a school year that gathers pace to an almost “out of control” level as the school year draws to a close. There is a lot of pressure building in schools and it is difficult to see how much capacity remains within schools to deal with a change. The impact on teaching and learning time arising from this busyness, including and arguably because of the range of assessment activities that take place within the school year is an important factor that is compounded by a DEIS context.

I would put more stuff during Easter, I think the erosion of the school year with all the messing with different exams can be a bit – where’s the teaching – you lose a music teacher for a whole week, LCA teachers all gone. It’s not just a fact that you’re losing a teacher, there’s disruption in a school, especially in a DEIS school you need things orderly and calm, predictability is important but ‘where’s such and such, I have to go up now because someone is having melt down because they are crying because they have to go in next and they don’t know what to do’ that affects everyone. I would put more stuff outside school – we get a lot of weeks off- you get teachers saying they would never give up June and yet they sign up for the state exams so they are giving up June.

Principal, Urban DEIS

“There is too much going on – the orals just don’t happen on their own – it’s a suite of things they don’t happen in a vacuum – if you look at this week here we have two out doing LCA examining since Easter, we have had one of the Home Ec. teachers gone for a week doing examining – we have the music, construction, Home Ec. teachers and put the orals into this”

Deputy Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

If they take it back out – after Easter is a no go - and we had 8 weeks this year and it was chock a block and it’s only five weeks next year – so that’s even more crazy that what we have experienced this year... But that’s not all for example there are practicals this week (mid-May) we have two thirds to three quarters engaged in assessments. We have to be mindful of how busy and how disruptive the final term is.

Principal, Rural DEIS

The issue of the availability of effective substitution cover compounds this sense of out of control.

Schools can’t manage as it is with cover and substitution and that’s with this lovely little bonus of not having to deal with all of that disruption of the orals, we would have kids potentially with free classes five or six free classes in a day and that’s crazy.

Deputy Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

7.6.7 Term time disruption

All leaders spoke of how disruptive the oral examinations were when held during terms time and these experiences significantly contribute to their preference not to return to this timing model.

When I was deputy in my previous school when they did them during school time – it used to do my head in; number one your teacher who is supposed to be teaching them is gone off somewhere else, the teacher you have in replacing them isn’t a teacher of the subject so they are just supervising the class so you are paying a person twice to not teach and to examine, you’re paying another person not to teach but to supervise and then you are paying travel – it was so expensive and such a disruption – whereas in the holiday, those three or four days, you are not paying for cover and the pay is good now and their teacher prepares them up to the holidays whereas before they were gone for a week leading up to it or they are gone during that whole pastoral thing is not as possible during schools – I think it much better.

Principal, Urban DEIS

From the perspective of covering the classes S and S, it was a nightmare, they are away for at least a week and then there are two or three training days, they you have repeats. In an ideal world you would replace an Irish teacher with an Irish teacher but that's not the reality so you have a PME or an unqualified teacher trying to man the classes even when teachers leave work its often not done so as far as we are concerned for the week it's on no teaching happens in those classes.

Deputy Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

There was two weeks in terms of teaching and learning for the Leaving Cert students that was always lost for the orals - two weeks of disruption....when you start having assessments during term time there is always going to be an impact on teaching and learning.

Principal, Rural DEIS

...the two weeks as it used to be – they are two weeks that in real terms that you could write off if you are a maths teacher or an option teacher for instance, because the focus is all on the orals – they take the day off beforehand and even if they are in and in the maths class they are not focused on the maths – the focus is on the orals and then the post mortem after – so a lot of time was lost.

Principal, Rural Non-DEIS

7.6.8 Student outcomes

In terms of making decisions about when to schedule these exams – one of the principals of a DEIS school emphasised the need to focus on what was best for the students and their outcomes as the primary, arguably only imperative that should influence the outcome of this current decision-making process.

The only thing that matters is how the students feel and their outcomes whether people like it or don't like it or it disrupts their lives is secondary to me.

Principal, Urban DEIS

The Easter holidays are more important for the more middle-class schools who tend to go away more – very few go here. The only thing is what is the best time for students, what will work for them – not inconvenience. This works much better during the Easter. The student focus is the only thing.

Principal, Urban DEIS

There was very little evidence amongst schools' management that this exam during the Easter was problematic for students.

None of the students ever complained about it and students nowadays are quite vocal. If there was any contention there at all they would have been to first to raise it.

Principal, Rural DEIS

In the past two-year parents have been in contact to say that they had a trip booked for Easter and could they do it another time and I say it doesn't work like that, so they cancel the trip or leave the student at home, and they follow later.

Principal, Urban DEIS

This came up in different ways amongst management. It illustrates the kind of management versus teachers divide that comes from two different perspectives on the same issue. Below we have a kind of “just get on with it – it's part of the gig and you are getting well paid” reality check behind the perspective outlined.

Also, the examiners are getting double pay – to be paid to do them and also get paid where you are meant to be teaching – what job would you get that in? It's amazing – it's absolutely mad. I know that people are very passionate about it, and they don't like it eating into their

holidays so you might have problems getting examiners, but I think that's part of the gig really, every subject has something that you have to give up time for, but they are getting handsomely paid.

Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

In one case the principal viewed the oral experience as a kind of rite of passage – a time where students had to demonstrate their ability to stand on their own two feet. A lot of teachers talk about the need to support the student throughout the whole process. In some ways this sense of pastoral care is a very strong message in the data from teachers and some leaders. This growing up time view is another way of looking at it.

I like the fact that they are standing on their own two feet coming in and it's the first time really that they see I am on my own here I haven't got my teacher propping me up – in two months' time they are ready for the big thing, and they are on their own then.

Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

It is also worth pointing out that in the case of this school, the exam aide was very effective and while the principal was in the school during the exams they did not have a direct role and were not called upon at all during the exam period.

I was only there because I had other work – I didn't have to do anything.

Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

I used to come out and see how they were – she based herself at the front door and this was a great place.

Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

She went the extra mile, gave her heart and soul to it. She counselled them, she rang them, she cajoled them, and I know because I watched her. What she did was way above.

Principal, Urban Non-DEIS

7.6.9 A measure of teacher commitment

Many interviewees in the different senior management groups spoke of the overall commitment of teachers to their students – going the extra mile was a regular sentiment that was expressed in discussions. In general, there seems to have been a very strong degree of commitment to ensuring that the oral examination experience was as positive as possible for students and all staff present during the oral examination were there to support if needed. A word of caution is needed in regard to this – it would be important that the support provided by those in exam support roles or the presence or lack of presence of the different language teachers was not taken as an overall measure of general commitment. They are not one and the same and the focus in discussions on over and above/ the extra mile may lead to a conflation of commitment and a requirement for teachers to be present during holiday time. In one case this conflation was already evident in the discussion.

It (language teachers in school during the oral examinations) is an indication of underlying commitment that each individual teacher has – I leave it open, but it does provide an insight into the interest each individual teacher has in their subject and more particularly in their students. Most teachers don't mind coming in for a day or in a bigger school share and support each other's students, there is a minority of teachers out there who are not pleased with the prospect of having to come in.

Principal, Rural DEIS

It is interesting to note that a number of schools in this follow up study did not avail of the wellbeing support person – it would seem from the discussions that schools were not aware that his support was available or possible so this may need to be addressed in future communication with schools. In this regard there would be a need to ensure role clarity for the different supports provided.

8. Summary of Phase 2 - The Multi-Site Case Study

8.1 Introduction

This part of the research study is a continuation of the initial survey on the Timing of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations, completed in November 2023. This segment of the research, which commenced in April 2024 after the Leaving Certificate orals during Easter, employed a multisite case study approach. The primary objective was to attain a deeper understanding and clarity regarding the experiences of parents, students, teachers, and school management following the completion of the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during Easter 2024. Additionally, the study aimed to assess opinions on the most appropriate timing for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations from 2025 onwards. The key areas we reported on were:

1. The experiences of the various stakeholders across the sites in relation to the oral examinations which took place in 2024.
2. The perceived challenges and opportunities which the Easter timing afforded to these stakeholders.
3. The most favourable time for Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations going forward.
4. The perceived challenges and opportunities in relation to this chosen time.

This section provided a summary and synthesis of the survey responses of the participating students, parents, teachers and school management. In some cases, teachers also held the role of examiner and their opinions were also noted.

Due to time constraints in relation to the gathering of data, a convenience sampling approach was used to engage schools in relation to the gathering of the data during April and May 2024. Eight schools in total engaged with the research with three researchers from the team. Schools were contacted through direct email, phone calls and text messaging. Focus groups and individual interviews were used to gather the data, primarily in person with the exception of two interviews which were conducted online via Zoom. In a small number of cases messages and emails were sent detailing some stakeholders opinions where they did not have the time to engage directly with the research. Interviews lasted between two and a half minutes to ten minutes where focus groups lasted between 10 and 22 minutes. All participants were given an information sheet and a consent form prior to engaging in the research. All students who took part were 18 years of age.

The final sample included 8 schools and 84 participants which consisted of students (n=42), teachers (n=32), school management team (n=10) and parents (n=10). As parents were not on site at the data gathering days it was more challenging to connect with them. Emails and messages were sent to encourage engagement, but this was limited. A limitation to this research approach relates to the generalisability of the case study result and as such this research aimed primarily at gaining depth and nuance in relation to the objectives of the study.

8.2 Main findings

Majority preference for Leaving Certificate Oral Exams to take place prior to Easter and during term time

In line with Section 1, but less definite in terms of clarity of preference, a small majority of participants reported that they would prefer the oral examinations to return to term time. Once again, in line with the results from Report 1 the only cohort to disagree unanimously with this were the principals and deputy principals who wished for the examinations to remain at Easter time. For those students, parents and teachers who opted for term time – wellbeing was the central reason mooted. The need for a break for all was reported by many. Nuance and depth were gathered in relation to the reasons for this. A number of students mentioned the impact the orals examinations during Easter had on their

part-time jobs or other commitments. Many talked about the sheer exhaustion felt after the examinations and the need for downtime before the return to the last hectic term. Parents too echoed these concerns, the stressful term and load placed on their students warrant a complete break.

Teachers were of the same opinion; student and teacher wellbeing was noted, both needing time off to rest and recuperate.

A key challenge for these cohorts related primarily to the scheduling of the examinations during Easter. Many teachers noted that they only received notice of the specific dates little more than a week prior to Easter. This left students and teachers waiting and wondering about whether they had to reschedule commitments such as work or holidays. Linked to this was the pressure on teachers/exam aides to ensure that students didn't have examinations on consecutive days. This scheduling was challenging, particularly in larger schools where there were a larger number of examinations. Efficient timetabling was heavily dependent on open communication between the various subject departments within the schools. The majority of students themselves noted the scheduling as a challenge, having too many examinations within a few days was exhausting for many, and yet many maintained that they wanted them finished early in Easter so that they could have a full break. Teachers were uncertain as to who's role it was to schedule these examinations, and many were unaware that a second exam aide could have been employed to help with the scheduling and the daily support of students.

Examiners were more divided about the timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals going forward. A recurrent theme here also was the perceived need for a break between school term and oral examinations. Many examiners noted that they themselves were exhausted leaving school on the Friday to head into a week of oral examinations; this resulted in a 12-day working week for some teachers which they believe is unsustainable. Some teachers and examiners were not happy with the oral examinations occurring on a weekend, particularly on a Sunday.

In line with Section 1, school management were, for the most part, opposed to the idea of the examinations returning to term time. This relates mainly to the lack of substitution cover for teachers who may be examining, and the disruption caused to class time and school life.

Preferences for Leaving Certificate Oral exams to take place outside of term time and during the Easter holidays

Although there was a small majority who noted that their preferred timing of the Leaving Certificate Orals going forward would be before Easter, this was more nuanced than in Section 1. A large minority of students, parents and teachers and examiners also mentioned the benefits of Easter time assessment. High achieving students, in particular, noted that the examinations during Easter time afforded them a chance for focused study with few distractions. They also discussed that the quietness and the calmness of the school was of benefit to them as it allowed them to attend in a less stressful environment. This timing also ensured that they didn't miss learning in other classes. A majority of the students were happy with the support they received in school at the time and felt that it wasn't necessary for their language teachers to be present. Access to school transport was not an issue for many, while not ideal, parents working from home were more flexible for this one-off occasion if the need arose.

Parents echoed many of the opinions of the students noting the quiet environment and limited distractions as an advantage to their students. Few were perturbed in relation to transport apart from a small number of cases where the examinations' schedule changed at the last minute.

A small number of teachers noted that there were advantages to the Easter timing which included less disruption to classes and the fact that they were finished before the last term, which facilitated a focused study period for the written papers. An issue which students, teachers and examiners noted

was in relation to the absence of the examiner briefing. Many participants maintained that this had been a very important part of the examination system as it calmed students' nerves and to put them at ease. With the current system there is a gap in the support provided to students. A number of examiners also noted the benefits to them of the Easter timing. Many noted that they would not be afforded this important CPD opportunity if the examinations were being held during Easter time due

to the challenges with substitution. Additionally, many noted that Easter time suited some due to childcare and school commitments, others reported the contrary.

Management were very strongly in favour of the oral examinations remaining during Easter time. This related to the lack of availability of substitutes to cover for those teachers who would be examining if it were to be held during term time. They also noted the calm environment and the lack of disruption to classes which resulted in the examinations being, for the most part, less stressful and less dramatic for most. Regarding the issue of students not attending for examination, it seemed that this issue was a challenge in all schools not solely in schools with DEIS status. However, in the majority of the schools within this study steps were taken to ensure that all students, particularly the more vulnerable, were contacted and collected, where need be, to ensure attendance. Indeed, it seemed that those in schools with DEIS status were more likely to be supported than their counterparts in non DEIS schools. The majority of those students who did not attend had been absent from school for lengthy periods during the previous term and it would have been unlikely they would have attended if the examinations were held during term time.

Very few preferences for after Easter

Very few of the participants across all of the cohorts were in favour of having the oral examinations after the Easter holidays. The exception for this was when Easter fell very early. Most noted that having the oral examinations during Easter meant that students had a natural break and were ready to focus on the written papers in the last term. Also, many noted the heavy workload of the last term which includes practicals and other examinations.

Other Timing Suggestions

A small number of respondents noted that oral examinations should be held at alternative times during Senior cycle. The end of fifth year, Christmas or February of Leaving Certificate Year were mentioned as alternatives by a number of participants.

Notable comments

Several other issues were noted by participants across the cohorts. This included the lack of understanding with regard to the extra examination aide which was granted by the Department of Education. Many of the teachers, examiners and management were unaware that such a role existed. Also, many teachers were uncertain about the duties of the primary examination aide in relation to the scheduling of the examinations within the schools. The lack of notice to schools regarding the days of examination also posed a challenge which impacted those organising the timetable and those students who were travelling home or on holidays.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

The decision to hold the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations during Easter was a response to the unparalleled circumstances that schools and the entire education system faced during the Covid-19 pandemic. As noted by many respondents this crisis period is now over and most, if not all, policies and procedures have returned to prior 2020 arrangements. Initially the survey was created to assess the thoughts and perspectives of all stakeholders in relation to the most appropriate timing for Leaving Certificate orals going forward. A follow-on, second phase, multi-site case study was then developed after the completion of the Oral Examinations during Easter in April 2024 to gain further insights and to delve into these perspectives further.

The responses to the survey indicate a clear preference for future Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations to take place prior to Easter and for them to return to during term time. The analysis identified some divergence between school leaders, teachers and students, on the strength of this preference but all concurred that it was in the best interests of students for these examinations not to take place after the Easter break.

Responses were less convincing in relation to the preference for future Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations in the second research phase when compared to phase one. Although a small majority of respondents across the cohort of students, parents, teachers, examiner opted for prior to Easter timing this was less clear than had been in the earlier phase of the study. Few students reported a very poor experience of the oral examinations during Easter, and many could see the benefits Easter time afforded them. The analysis of the case study data also identified strong divergence in relation to school leaders, many of whom could see the importance of the Easter break for student wellbeing but who at the same time maintained that the new arrangement was more beneficial to all.

The survey noted that most cohorts referred to the disruption which occurred when the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations were held during term time in relation to substitution/supervision and the disruption this had on teaching and learning. This has been compounded recently by the persistent shortage of teachers, specifically in the field of languages. Advocating for the continuation of examinations outside regular school hours, Harford and Fleming (2023) call a comprehensive strategy that (i) delineates a path for the resumption of in-school examination periods and (ii) provides a detailed plan for assisting school administrators in mitigating potential disruptions to the teaching and learning process, thereby ensuring minimal interference.

Insights from the survey from the periods of 2022 and 2023 were gleaned with regard to the oral examinations. Numerous respondents expressed positive sentiments regarding the significance of a peaceful school environment, wherein students could concentrate solely on their oral examinations, thereby mitigating the usual pressures and stress associated with a typical school day.

However, the responses of the survey clearly described the difficulties which were created from conducting the Leaving Certificate Orals during the Easter holidays which include the lack of a break or rest period, the lack of support available to students during the examination period from school staff and from their peers and also the difficulty students experienced in relation to transport and home support. The issue of student absenteeism, particularly in DEIS schools, is one which drew some concern. As such the case study phase was initiated to provide further insight into the lived experiences of students, parents, teachers and school management in relation to the Easter timing.

The case study phase of the research was completed after the 2024 Oral examination period where there were additional contingency arrangements in place to support student wellbeing (DE, 2023). There are a number of key learnings which emerged from the responses in relation to the oral examinations which took place during Easter 2024.

One of the key benefits of having the oral examinations during Easter time, highlighted by all cohorts, related to the quieter, less stressful environment; an environment which benefited both students and

examiners. If the oral examinations return to term time, it will be a challenge for all stakeholders to maintain this benefit. Some students maintained that they would miss school on examination days or that they wouldn't return to class after an examination. This would also need to be considered.

It appears that examiner recruitment was less of a challenge in Easter 2024 as examiners noted that there was a waiting list of additional examiners at Conference. Some examiners noted that their schools would only release one teacher per language if the examinations were held during term time. Many noted that having the orals over a two-week period in term allowed for the separation of languages for students and for many examiners as it allows them to examine elsewhere on the alternate week. Guidance from the Department of Education/State Exams Commission in relation to the release of teachers from school could help to maintain a system of fairness and equity across all schools.

Some of the issues which had been apparent from the survey data, such as student absenteeism and teacher support didn't emerge strongly in phase two of the study. Although some schools did not utilise the extra exam aide it seems that schools provided extra, valuable support to students, particularly those who were more vulnerable. Many examples of management contacting parents and in some cases collecting the students from their homes came to light. One school had a wellbeing lead within the school which would perhaps be an example of exemplary practice in relation to student support. Clearer information in relation to the role of the examination aide and the extra aide would be beneficial to schools going forward. There is also the question of what form these roles would take (if they were to exist at all) if the examinations returned to term time.

An area of challenge highlighted by many respondents related to the timeframe of the various examinations, particularly for those studying two or more languages. Although it seems that every effort had been made by schools within this sample to ensure that students did not have oral examinations on consecutive days, the short time frame of five days made this challenging. Some teachers also noted that students who only had one oral examination had more of an advantage than those studying two or three languages. Students also argued that if the examinations were to remain at Easter time then it was imperative that the examinations would happen earlier in the holiday rather than at the end of the first week or into the second week. However, in contrast to this many examiners noted the need for a break between finishing school and examining so that they could carry out their duties professionally. There is also a grey area in relation to the "wriggle room" around the dates of the examinations and the level of negotiation between the examiner, or multiple examiners and the school. This should be clarified, and the school should be afforded as much flexibility as possible. If the oral examinations are to remain during Easter time finding a time frame model that is suitable for students and examiners will be a major challenge.

The absence of the examiner briefing with students was a constant theme in the case study data. Students, teachers and examiners noted that this element of communication was missing. This was, in the past, key to settling nerves and preparing the students for the upcoming examination. If the oral examinations are to remain during the Easter period, this issue should be looked at more closely. It is an area which could be improved by providing an in person briefing as was the case in the past or a pre-recorded/ online version of the briefing.

The case study research also highlighted the main challenges with returning to Leaving Certificate Orals during school time including the difficulties which would arise in relation to substitution and supervision and the disruption to student learning due to teachers being released from school to examine elsewhere.

There is also a cautionary note as the system move towards Senior Cycle reform. This study highlighted the already packed timetable that characterises the end of term in schools. The link between teacher commitment and their willingness to sacrifice holiday time to support students is an issue the

Department of Education should consider, as it intends to increase the number of additional assessment components at Senior Cycle.

In summary and based on the findings of this study we conclude that:

While there is a preference for the pre-Easter option, overall, the timing of the LC oral examinations remains contested with the notable exception of the high level of agreement on avoiding an after Easter option. A plan should therefore be developed, in conjunction with stakeholders, to give further consideration to before Easter and during Easter options bearing in mind the following recommendations:

For the term-time option:

1. A strategic plan should be put in place to support school management with regard to substitution and supervision arrangements during the examination period.
1. Guidelines should be provided to school management to help ensure that teachers are released to examine the Leaving Certificate oral examinations and that the negative impact on teaching and learning is minimised during this time.
2. In line with advice from the Department of Education, schools should seek to ensuring that the school environment is conducive to examinations periods such as this with quieter, less stressful surroundings where students can access support from teachers and peers if needed. As part of this the role and responsibilities of the examination aide could be clarified further, particularly in relation to timetabling of students during the examinations period to avoid added stress on students and their families.

In the event of examinations remaining during Easter time :

3. Schools should be provided with clear guidelines to support all students to access support and to reduce absenteeism. This is particularly important in schools with DEIS status where students were less likely to have access to transportation, parental support and had other commitments such as part-time jobs during the Easter period. The continuation of the extra Examination aide, as provided for during the 2024 Easter Examination period, to ensure all students equal access and support should continue.
4. The student-examiner meeting should be reinstated so that students will have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the examiner. Potentially an online meeting could be considered prior to the Easter Break with all students.
5. Further guidance is needed in relation to the timetabling of the oral examinations. Questions arose about whose role it was to timetable the students so that languages were well spaced and that students were facilitated in relation to other commitments. On this note examiners should be encouraged to adhere to this timetable as far as is possible to avoid further stress for students and their families.
6. On a separate note, the issue of examinations and overburdening of students in the final weeks of Leaving Certificate year should be considered in relation to the redevelopment of Senior Cycle and the additional assessment components which are to be introduced.

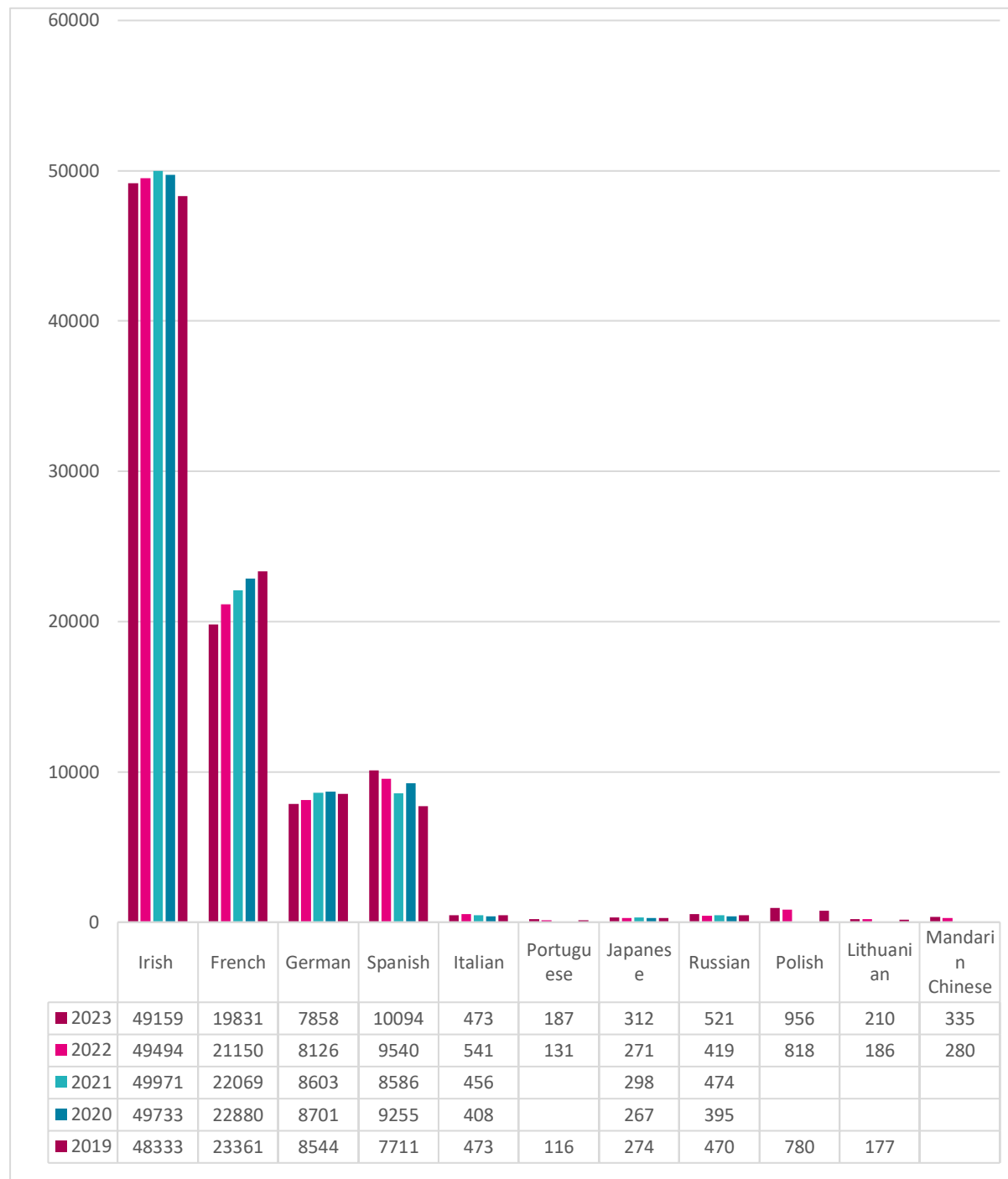
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Appendix 1

Languages with an Oral Examination Component

Table 34: Leaving Certificate Student Numbers by year and by Language which has an Oral Component



Appendix 2: Additional Survey Data

Detailed Profile of Respondent

Parents

Once partial responses were removed, the final parent sample comprised of 2526 parents who either clicked on the link for parent (43% N=1093) or parent with student U18 (57% N=1433). 95.7% of parents chose to complete the English language version of the survey with 4.3% choosing the Irish language version. The aggregate of these numbers are included here. Our analysis shows that a vast majority were female (84.5%) with 15% being male and 0.5% choosing other. The respondents indicated a wide locational distribution with the majority living in Dublin (25%), Cork (18%) and Donegal (7%).

(67%) of parents reported that their young person attended or attends a school of non-DEIS status, with (14%) parents reporting the school context had DEIS status whereas (19%) were unsure. Parents were also asked to report what year their child or children would or had completed the Leaving Certificate Examination. (2.8%) selected prior to 2020, (4%) in 2020 or 2021, (14.6%) selected 2022 or 2023, (54.6%) selected 2024 or 2025 and (23.6%) selected 2026 or after.

Students Under 18

The parents of students under 18 were asked to give consent prior to their young person completing the survey. Once assent was confirmed the final number for both the Irish (N=18) and English (N=603) language versions of the survey was 508. Students were asked to confirm their gender with 69% of respondents being female, 30% male and 1% other. The students were then asked to choose which year they would complete or had completed their Leaving Certificate. 1% chose 2022, 6% 2023, 44% 2024, 32% 2025, 8% 2026 and 9% after 2026. This determined the branches which each student would take in relation to reporting on their experience of Leaving Certificate Oral examinations if they had already had that experience.

Students Over 18

There were 4763 respondents to this section of the survey. 97% answered the English language version and 3% the Irish language version. 70% identified as Female, 29% as Male and 1% as Other. Students here were asked their age and 72.6% were 18, 24.6% were 19, 0.9% 20-22, 0.2% were between 23-29 and 1.7% were 30 or over. Students over 18 were from dispersed parts of the country with Dublin, Cork and Galway being the most common choices. Students were then asked to indicate the languages which they would or had studied at Leaving Certificate level with Irish, French, German and Spanish most widely chosen. 69% of the respondents had already completed their Leaving Certificate with 31% yet to complete their Leaving Certificate. At this point students were asked to branch according to the year they had or would complete the Leaving Certificate with 3.38% indicating 2025, 27.8% 2024, 67.1% 2022 or 2023, 0.3% 2020 or 2021 and 1.4% prior to 2020.

Teacher/ Teacher who is also a SEC Examiner

There were 2496 respondents to this section of the survey. 80.92% answered the Irish language version and 19.08% to the English language version. 84% identified as Female, 15.7% as Male and 0.3% as Other. Teachers indicated that they were from dispersed parts of the country with Dublin, Cork and Galway being the most common choices. Teachers were asked to indicate the years of teaching experience which they had with 11.76% reporting 0-5 years, 18.55 6-10 years, 18.35 11-15 years, 13.68 16-19 years, 36.46 20+ years and 1.2% indicating that they were teachers who were in initial teacher education. In the following question teachers were asked to indicate what role that had in the school with 67.94% choosing language teacher, 27.2% non-language teacher, 0.77% deputy

principal/principal, 4.07% other which included Guidance Counsellors, Assistant Principals, Exam Aides, SET/SENCO., HSCL and Year Heads. Those that chose Principal/Deputy Principal at this point were redirected to the section of questions relating to these roles specifically. Branching happened for the teachers at this point to gauge the responses of teachers in relation to their experiences of Oral Examinations procedures up to 2023.

Non-Teaching Examiner

There were 89 respondents to this section of the survey. 85.39% answered the Irish language version and 14.61% to the English language version. 74.19% identified as Female, 25.19% as Male and 0% as Other. The respondents were asked to indicate which described them most (30.64%) chose Retired registered teacher and (3.24%) Registered teacher on leave, (4.9%) Registered teacher currently not employed by the Department of Education and (5%) chose Other which included teachers on secondment, those working in other sectors and also teachers who inadvertently chose the incorrect description. Examiners indicated that they were from dispersed parts of the country with being the most common choice. Examiners were then asked to report on the languages which they examine or have examined in the past with French, Irish, and German being the most common answers. Examiners were asked then to indicate their perceptions on the facilitation of Oral Examinations both during term and during Easter holidays.

Deputy Principal/ Principal

There were 396 respondents to this section of the survey. 9.6% answered the Irish language version and 90.4 to the English language version. 52.9% identified as Female, 46.6% as Male and 0.59% as Other. Deputy Principals and Principals indicated that they were from dispersed parts of the country with Dublin, Cork and Tipperary being the most common choices. The respondents were then asked to clarify their role with 47.71% being Deputy Principals and 52.08% choosing Principal, one respondent chose the "other" field and described themselves as an Assistant Principal. This group were then asked to indicate the years within this role with 7.72% reporting 0-1 years, 21.07 2-3 years, 18.99% 4-5 years, 24.63% 6-10 years, 27.59% 10+ years. The follow up questions after this were in relation to their experiences of Oral Examination procedures up to 2023.

Other - Directors of Education Centres, Educational Experts, Support Service Employees, etc.

There were 450 respondents to this section of the survey. 91.86% answered the English language version and 8.14% to the Irish language version. 67.82% identified as Female, 30.10% as Male and 2.08% as Other. Respondents to this section indicated that they were from dispersed parts of the country with Dublin, Cork and Waterford being the most common choices. This cohort were then asked to describe their role or interest in this subject, a number of students completed this section as well as teachers and former teachers also to the fore. Other reasons given by respondents included other members of the school community including guidance counsellors, parents, exam secretaries, ASD co-coordinators, and assistant principals etc. Those students (8) who identified themselves as Under 18 in this section were removed due to ethical issues with consent. Also included here are educational advisors and those working in other areas of the education sector as well as youth workers and those with a general interest in the Irish language or in education in general.

Appendix 3: Survey Instrument

SEC Timing of Oral Exams- All Questions

Introduction

Through which language would you like to complete the survey? Ar mhaith leat an suirbhé a chomhlánú i nGaeilge nó i mBéarla

1. English
2. Gaeilge

Hello: You are invited to participate in our survey exploring opinions on the timing of the Oral Examinations for Leaving Certificate. Completion of the survey will take approximately 5 minutes of your time. Your participation is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you can withdraw from the survey at any point. It is very important for us to learn your opinions. Your survey responses will be treated in a confidential manner, and only aggregated analysed survey responses will be included in published reports. For students under 18 wishing to complete the survey they must do so with a parent or guardian present for consent purposes. The parent/guardian should start the survey and then hand the device to the young person. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact the team at the School of Education, University of Galway by email at soesurvey@universityofgalway.ie. This survey will remain open until midnight on Sunday 12th November. Thank you very much for your time and support. If you consent please start the survey now by clicking on the Next button below.

Q3. When do you think the Leaving Certificate oral examinations should take place in the future? (Select one response only)

1. During term time before the Easter Holidays
2. Outside term time during the Easter Holidays
3. During term time after the Easter Holidays
4. Other

Q4 Why?

Q5 Which best describes you?

1. Parent/Guardian
2. Parent /Guardian with Student (Under 18)
3. Student (Over 18) yet to complete Leaving Certificate
4. Student (Over 18) who already completed Leaving Certificate
5. Teacher / Teaching SEC Oral Examiner
6. Non-Teaching SEC Oral Examiner
7. Principal/Deputy Principal
8. Other

Q6. Are you:

1. Female
2. Male
3. Or do you describe yourself in another way

Parent/Guardian

Q7. Where do you live?

1. Antrim
2. Armagh
3. Carlow
4. Cavan
5. Clare
6. Cork

7. Derry
8. Donegal
9. Down
10. Dublin
11. Fermanagh
12. Galway
13. Kerry
14. Kildare
15. Kilkenny
16. Laois
17. Leitrim
18. Limerick
19. Longford
20. Louth
21. Mayo
22. Meath
23. Monaghan
24. Offaly
25. Roscommon
26. Sligo
27. Tipperary
28. Tyrone
29. Waterford
30. Westmeath
31. Wexford
32. Wicklow
33. Other _____

Q8 What type of school does/did your young person attend?

1. DEIS
2. Non-DEIS
3. Unsure
4. N/A

Q9 What year did/will your children complete the Leaving Certificate? (Select any that apply)

1. Before 2020
2. 2020 or 2021
3. 2022 or 2023
4. 2024 or 2025
5. 2026 or after

Q10 How many young people in your house will complete Leaving Certificate in 2024 or 2025?

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3+
4. NA

Q11 What languages will they do in their Leaving Certificate 2024 or 2025 (Tick any that apply)

1. Irish
2. French
3. German
4. Spanish
5. Italian
6. Russian

7. Mandarin Chinese
8. Lithuanian
9. Polish
10. Japanese
11. Portuguese
12. Other _____
13. NA

Q12 Do you have a young person who completed the Leaving Certificate Oral Examination in 2022 or 2023?

1. Yes
2. No

Q13 How many students in your household completed Leaving Certificate in 2022 or 2023?

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3+
4. NA

Q14 What languages did they do in their Leaving Certificate 2022 or 2023 (Tick any that apply)

1. Irish
2. French
3. German
4. Spanish
5. Italian
6. Russian
7. Mandarin Chinese
8. Lithuanian
9. Polish
10. Portuguese
11. Japanese
12. Other
13. NA

Q15 How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter Holidays?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
4. Unsatisfied
5. Very unsatisfied
6. Did not attend orals

Q16 How did the Orals during the Easter Holidays in 2022 or 2023 impact your young person?

	True	False	Unsure	N/A
Quieter school environment made it easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less formal Environment made it easier (eg no school uniform, no classes being held, fewer students)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers were available for support, which was a positive thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There were not as many students around during Easter which was a negative thing as it meant less support from friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happening during school holidays made it easier to attend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happening during school holidays made it harder to	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

attend				
Teachers were not available for support, which was a negative thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q17 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Q18 Do you have a young person who completed the Leaving Certificate prior to 2020?

1. Yes
2. No

Q19 How many completed of your children Leaving Certificate prior to 2020?

1. 1
2. 2
3. 3+
4. NA

Q20 How did having the oral examinations during school time impact your young person?

	True	False	Unsure	N/A
Having a normal school environment made it less stressful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classes going on as normal made it more stressful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Their teacher was available to support them which was a positive thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other students were there to support them, which was a positive thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Their stress levels increased as they missed classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did not attend oral examinations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q21 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Q22 Do you have a young person (under 18) who wishes to complete the survey?

1. Yes
2. No

Student U18

We now wish to ask very similar questions of your young person. If you have a young person who did or will complete Leaving Certificate in 2022/2023/2024/2025/2026 please hand the device to them (Under 18). Thank you for agreeing to participate in our survey. We are asking questions about the best date for the Leaving Certificate Oral Examinations. You can opt out of the survey at any point.

1. I agree
2. I disagree

Q23 Are you?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Or do you describe yourself in another way

Q24 What languages will you/did you complete in your Leaving Certificate (Tick any that apply)

1. Irish
2. French
3. German
4. Spanish

5. Italian
6. Russian
7. Mandarin Chinese
8. Lithuanian
9. Polish
10. Japanese
11. Portuguese
12. Other
13. NA

Q25 What year will you/did you complete your Leaving Certificate

1. 2022
2. 2023
3. 2024
4. 2025
5. 2026
6. After 2026

Q26 How satisfied or unsatisfied were you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter holidays?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
4. Unsatisfied
5. Very Unsatisfied
6. Did not attend the orals

Q27 How did the Oral examinations during Easter in 2022 or 2023 impact you?

	True	False	Unsure	N/A
Quieter school environment made it easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less formal Environment made it easier (eg no school uniform, no classes being held, fewer students)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers were available for support, which was a positive thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There were not as many students around during Easter which was a negative thing as it meant less support from friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happening during school holidays made it easier to attend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happening during school holidays made it harder to attend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers were not available for support, which was a negative thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not attend the orals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q28 When do you think the Leaving Certificate oral examinations should occur in the future?

1. During school time before the Easter Holidays
2. Outside school term during the Easter Break
3. During school time after the Easter Break
4. Other

Q29 Why?

Q30 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Student Over 18

Q31 Student over 18

Q32 Are you:

1. Female
2. Male
3. Or do you describe yourself in another way

Q33 What age are you?

1. 18
2. 19
3. 20-22
4. 23-29
5. 30+

Q34 Where do you live?

1. Antrim
2. Armagh
3. Carlow
4. Cavan
5. Clare
6. Cork
7. Derry
8. Donegal
9. Down
10. Dublin
11. Fermanagh
12. Galway
13. Kerry
14. Kildare
15. Kilkenny
16. Laois
17. Leitrim
18. Limerick
19. Longford
20. Louth
21. Mayo
22. Meath
23. Monaghan
24. Offaly
25. Roscommon
26. Sligo
27. Tipperary
28. Tyrone
29. Waterford
30. Westmeath
31. Wexford
32. Wicklow
33. Other

Q35 What languages will you/did you complete in your Leaving Certificate (Tick any that apply)

1. Irish
2. French
3. German
4. Spanish

5. Italian
6. Russian
7. Mandarin Chinese
8. Lithuanian
9. Polish
10. Japanese
11. Portuguese
12. Other
13. NA

Q36 What year will you/did you complete your Leaving Certificate?

1. 2025
2. 2024
3. 2022 or 2023
4. 2020 or 2021
5. Prior to 2020

Q37 How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the timing of oral examinations during the Easter Holidays?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied
4. Unsatisfied
5. Very unsatisfied
6. I did not attend the orals

Q38 How did the oral examinations during the Easter holidays in 2022/23 impact you?

	True	False	Unsure	N/A
Quieter school environment made it easier	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Less formal Environment made it easier (eg no school uniform, no classes being held, fewer students)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers were available for support, which was a positive thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There were not as many students around during Easter which was a negative thing as it meant less support from friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happening during school holidays made it easier to attend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Teachers were not available for support, which was a negative thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Happening during school holidays made it harder to attend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I did not attend the orals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q39 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Q40 How satisfied or unsatisfied are you with the timing of the oral examinations during school time prior to 2020?

1. Very satisfied
2. Satisfied
3. Neither satisfied not unsatisfied
4. Unsatisfied
5. Very unsatisfied
6. I did not attend the oral examinations.

Q41 How did the Oral examinations during school time impact you?

	True	False	Unsure	N/A
Having a normal school environment made it less stressful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Classes going on as normal made it more stressful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My teachers were available to support me which was a positive thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other students were there to support me which was a positive thing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My stress levels increased as I missed classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did not attend oral examinations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q42 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Teacher/ Teacher who is also a SEC Examiner

Q43 Teacher/Teaching Examiner

Q44 Are you:

1. Female
2. Male
3. Or do you describe yourself in another way

Q45 Where do you live?

1. Antrim
2. Armagh
3. Carlow
4. Cavan
5. Clare
6. Cork
7. Derry
8. Donegal
9. Down
10. Dublin
11. Fermanagh
12. Galway
13. Kerry
14. Kildare
15. Kilkenny
16. Laois
17. Leitrim
18. Limerick
19. Longford
20. Louth
21. Mayo
22. Meath
23. Monaghan
24. Offaly
25. Roscommon
26. Sligo
27. Tipperary
28. Tyrone
29. Waterford
30. Westmeath
31. Wexford

32. Wicklow
33. Other

Q46 Describe your school context (Tick all that apply)

1. Rural
2. Urban
3. DEIS
4. Non-DEIS
5. ETBI
6. Voluntary Secondary School
7. All Boys
8. All girls
9. Mixed
10. Boarding School
11. Scoil Ghaeltachta
12. Gaelcholáiste/Sruth/Aonad Lánghaeilge
13. Fee-paying/Private School
14. Tuition College
15. Alternative Education Setting - Youthreach, Home Schooling, Return to School, Independent Schools etc
16. Other
17. Community School/Comprehensive School
18. Educate Together

Q47 How many years teaching experience do you have?

1. 0-5 years
2. 6-10 years
3. 11-15 years
4. 16-19 years
5. 20+
6. I am a trainee teacher (eg PME/MGO student)

Q48 What role do you have in the school?

1. Language teacher
2. Teacher (non Languages)
3. Deputy Principal/Principal
4. Other _____

Q49 What languages do you teach? (Tick any that apply)

1. Irish
2. French
3. German
4. Spanish
5. Italian
6. Russian
7. Mandarin Chinese
8. Lithuanian
9. Polish
10. Japanese
11. Portuguese
12. Other
13. NA

Q50 What are the main challenges/opportunities for teachers with Oral examinations taking place during the Easter Holidays? (Tick any that apply)

1. Greater workload
2. Lesser workload
3. Less stress
4. More stress
5. Less management Support
6. More management Support
7. Teachers not being able to examine
8. Teachers giving up time during holidays to support students
9. Student absenteeism
10. Other _____

Q51 What are the main challenges/opportunities for teachers with Oral examinations taking place during term time prior to or after the Easter Holidays? (Tick any that apply)

1. Greater workload
2. Lesser workload
3. Less stress
4. More stress
5. Less management Support
6. More management Support
7. Students missing class
8. Teachers missing class
9. Teachers not being allowed out to examine orals
10. Teachers leaving to examine orals
11. Student absenteeism
12. Other _____

Q52. Have you/do you examine the oral examinations for the SEC?

1. Yes
2. No

Q53 What languages do you/have you examined for the SEC? (Tick any that apply)

1. Irish
2. French
3. German
4. Spanish
5. Italian
6. Russian
7. Mandarin Chinese
8. Lithuanian
9. Polish
10. Japanese
11. Portuguese
12. Other
13. NA

Q54 What are the main challenges/opportunities for examiners with examining Oral examinations during the Easter Holidays? (Tick any that apply)

1. Lesser workload
2. Greater workload
3. Less stress
4. More stress
5. Less support available from management
6. More support available from management
7. Available to take on the role as examiner
8. Not being able to examine due to other commitments

9. Student absenteeism
10. Other

Q55 What are the main challenges/opportunities with examining Oral examinations for the SEC prior to or after the Easter Holidays?

1. Lesser workload
2. Greater workload
3. Less stress
4. More stress
5. Less support available from management
6. More support available from management
7. Available to take on the role as examiner
8. Management reluctant to allow teachers to examine
9. Leaving students during orals
10. Students missing time from class
11. Teachers missing time from class
12. Student absenteeism
13. Other

Q56 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Non-Teaching Examiner for the SEC

Q57 Non-Teaching Examiner

Q58 Are you:

1. Female
2. Male
3. Or do you describe yourself in another way

Q59 Which of these applies most to you?

1. Retired registered teacher
2. Registered teacher on leave
3. Registered teacher currently not employed by the Department of Education
4. Other

Q60 Where do you live?

1. Antrim
2. Armagh
3. Carlow
4. Cavan
5. Clare
6. Cork
7. Derry
8. Donegal
9. Down
10. Dublin
11. Fermanagh
12. Galway
13. Kerry
14. Kildare
15. Kilkenny
16. Laois
17. Leitrim
18. Limerick

19. Longford
20. Louth
21. Mayo
22. Meath
23. Monaghan
24. Offaly
25. Roscommon
26. Sligo
27. Tipperary
28. Tyrone
29. Waterford
30. Westmeath
31. Wexford
32. Wicklow
33. Other

Q61 What languages do you/have you examined? (Tick any that apply)

1. Irish
2. French
3. German
4. Spanish
5. Italian
6. Russian
7. Mandarin Chinese
8. Lithuanian
9. Polish
10. Portuguese
11. Japanese
12. Other
13. NA

Q62 What are the main challenges/opportunities with examining Oral examinations during the Easter Holidays?

1. Lesser workload
2. Greater Workload
3. Quieter school environment
4. More relaxed environment
5. Easier to accessing management
6. More difficult to access management
7. Available to take on the role as examiner
8. Not being able to examine due to other commitments
9. Student absenteeism
10. Other

Q63 What are the main challenges/opportunities with examining Oral examinations during term time prior to or after the Easter Holidays?

1. Lesser workload
2. Greater workload
3. Less stress
4. More stress
5. Less support available from management
6. More support available from management
7. Available to take on the role as examiner
8. Not being available to take on the examiner role
9. Students missing time in class
10. Teachers missing time from class

11. Student absenteeism
12. Other

Q64 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Principal/Deputy Principal

Q65 Principal/Deputy Principal

Q66 Are you:

1. Female
2. Male
3. Or do you describe yourself in another way

Q67 Where do you live?

1. Antrim
2. Armagh
3. Carlow
4. Cavan
5. Clare
6. Cork
7. Derry
8. Donegal
9. Down
10. Dublin
11. Fermanagh
12. Galway
13. Kerry
14. Kildare
15. Kilkenny
16. Laois
17. Leitrim
18. Limerick
19. Longford
20. Louth
21. Mayo
22. Meath
23. Monaghan
24. Offaly
25. Roscommon
26. Sligo
27. Tipperary
28. Tyrone
29. Waterford
30. Westmeath
31. Wexford
32. Wicklow
33. Other

Q68 Describe your school context (Tick all that apply)

1. Rural
2. Urban
3. DEIS
4. Non-DEIS
5. ETBI
6. Voluntary Secondary School

7. All Boys
8. All girls
9. Mixed
10. Boarding School
11. Scoil Ghaeltachta
12. Gaelcholáiste/Sruth/Aonad Lánghaeilge
13. Fee-paying/Private School
14. Tuition College
15. Alternative Education Setting - Youthreach, Home schooling, Return to School,
16. Other
17. Community School/Comprehensive School
18. Educate Together

Q69 What role do you have in the school?

1. Principal
2. Deputy Principal
3. Other

Q70 How many years in this role?

1. 0-1 years
2. 2-3 years
3. 4-5 years
4. 6-10 years
5. 10+ years

Q71 What are the main challenges/opportunities with Oral examinations taking place during the Easter Holidays?

1. Lesser workload
2. Greater Workload
3. Less stress
4. More stress
5. Less substitution issues
6. More substitution issues
7. Less disruption to classes
8. More disruption to classes
9. Student Absenteeism
10. Other _____

Q72 What are the main challenges/opportunities Oral examinations taking place during term time prior to or after the Easter Holidays?

1. Lesser workload
2. Greater workload
3. Less stress
4. More stress
5. Less substitution issues
6. More substitution issues
7. Less disruption to classes
8. More disruption to classes
9. Students missing classes
10. Teachers missing classes
11. Student absenteeism
12. Other _____

Q73 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations. Further Comments/Suggestions:

Other - Directors of Education Centres, Educational Experts, Support Service Employees, etc.,

Q74 Directors of Education Centres, Educational Experts, Support Service Employees, etc.,

Q75 Are you:

1. Female
2. Male
3. Or do you describe yourself in another way

Q76 Where do you live?

1. Antrim
2. Armagh
3. Carlow
4. Cavan
5. Clare
6. Cork
7. Derry
8. Donegal
9. Down
10. Dublin
11. Fermanagh
12. Galway
13. Kerry
14. Kildare
15. Kilkenny
16. Laois
17. Leitrim
18. Limerick
19. Longford
20. Louth
21. Mayo
22. Meath
23. Monaghan
24. Offaly
25. Roscommon
26. Sligo
27. Tipperary
28. Tyrone
29. Waterford
30. Westmeath
31. Wexford
32. Wicklow
33. Other

Q77 Describe your role/interest in this subject.

Q78 What are the main advantages/challenges with having the oral examinations during the Easter Holidays?

Q79 What are the main advantages/challenges with having the oral examinations during term time prior to or after the Easter holidays?

Q80 Please share any additional comments or feedback you have about the timing of the Leaving Certificate oral examinations.

Appendix 4 Summary of Survey Qualitative Data

The following section provides a summary of the qualitative data broken down according to the cohorts of participants in the survey and their preferences for the timing of the Leaving Certificate orals.

Parents

<p style="text-align: center;">Before Easter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1300 respondents</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">After Easter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">580 respondents*</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*Very similar responses to those from before Easter</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">During Easter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">409 respondents</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students' need for a break, due to stress levels, wellbeing and the general mental health of students; • A break to rest, recuperate and prepare for the next term; • Spread the load, get it over with; • Orals after Easter mean that there isn't time for study and focus on the next step; • More support from teachers and peers; • Normal school day means more support, less stress, equity; • Less able to support their own children during Easter due to work commitments; • School refusal issues more challenging during Easter Holidays; • Other commitments during Easter e.g. holidays, courses, religious festivities, University entrance exams/interviews; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student wellbeing and mental health; • Needed a break and time to rest; • Other commitments during Easter – language camps, courses, University Interviews • Extra preparation time for orals over orals. • Easter can fall too early and not enough time to prepare when this happens. • Oral language central to the course for as long as possible; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time to study, particularly if Easter falls later; • No homework, other subjects; practical's in the way; • School environment quieter, calmer, less stressful; • Too much disruption during term time, teachers absent • It seemed to work well in recent years • Teachers available in class leading up to exam

The comments above in the summary table represent the typical type of responses from the parent group. In general those expressing a preference for oral examinations during school time (n = 1880) share similar views relating to students' need for a break during the holiday period, generally for mental health and general well-being purposes, as well as allowing for other pre-planned activities arranged during the holiday period. The main difference here between the group expressing a preference for an after Easter examination (n= 580) rather than the before Easter option is based on the impact of an early Easter on the time available to prepare for the oral exam. To some degree, if the scheduling of oral exams during the holidays were to continue, the practice of arranging other activities during the Easter break would likely change to align with the timing of the exams and new norms for activities during the Easter break would emerge. The issue of holidays providing a full break from school for students would continue to prevail. The number of parents opting for exams during the Easter period is notably smaller (n= 409) almost 18% of respondents. The reasons cited for this preference relate to the ability to concentrate on the orals in a more deliberate way because the other demands of school are paused. The disruption to teaching arising from teachers acting as examiners during school time is also evident in some comments, however, a factor here may be that not all parents would be aware of the implication for the disruption to teaching if they haven't had previous experience of oral examinations prior to 2020 when exams were last held during term time.

Students

<p style="text-align: center;">Before Easter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">2259 respondents</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">After Easter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">900 respondents</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">During Easter</p> <p style="text-align: center;">1330 respondents</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break, rest, time to destress; • Time to refocus, pivot towards next stage; • Clear break between orals and written examinations; • More teacher and peer support; • Parents have to take time off work • Other commitments e.g. religious festivities, travel, jobs; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra study time over Easter, which mean better results; • Practical's, projects, mock exams add to pressure before Easter; • Time to focus solely on the orals during Easter; • More support from teachers during term time, better transport and support from peers; • Other commitments during Easter – jobs, holidays • Two orals close together during Easter break was unfair and too stressful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to focus when school is closed, term time to busy; • Time to study and prepare with less distractions from other subjects • School environment quieter, less stressful • Teachers would not be available if Orals were within term time. • No need to miss class time. • Logistical difficulties e.g. no school bus;

A larger number of students i.e. 30% expressed a preference for oral examinations during the Easter holidays (n= 1330). This is a large minority of students indicating that there is a lack of agreement among students as to the timing of the oral exams in the data. Reasons for the Easter holiday preference are very similar to the views expressed by the parent group i.e. the holiday time provides a more focused time for the examinations, the disruption to teaching caused by exams during term time is also noted as a contributing rationale for this preference. Comments in relation to term time options share similar views to the parent group to some degree but they also provide a more nuanced picture of the before and after Easter options. In the case of the students there are very distinct reasons for the two options. Preference for after Easter provides more time, before Easter is busy with practical's, mock exams etc while before Easter creates a very clear delineation between the oral and written examinations. Having teacher support during term time is cited by both preference groups, however this is a questionable claim as in many cases teachers would not be available during the oral examinations as they would be acting as examiners in other schools. Combining the student before and after preference groups and comparing this total to those who opt for the Easter holiday option is more problematic than in the case of the parent group. What emerges from the data here to some is three distinct preference groups 30% expressing a preference for during the holiday period, 20% expressing a preference for after Easter and 50% choosing the before Easter option. There is some evidence of discrete preferences for either the before Easter option or the after Easter option, e.g. we cannot determine if those who expressed a preference for before Easter would opt for either their before or after Easter option if their expressed preferred option was not possible. What we do have with 70% of the student sample opting for a term time option is a strong message against holding the oral examinations during the Easter holidays option.

Teachers – Examiners

Before Easter	After Easter	During Easter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter is needed for break, rest, time off, holiday time, family time, free time, shouldn't be in Holy week, or on a Sat or Sun. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time to focus/prepare – Easter holidays can be used for revision, to focus on the orals, to prepare, for extra classes, Gaeltacht, school tours, and there will be a clear break between mocks and orals for focus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less stressful environment, quieter environment meant a more positive atmosphere, students were less anxious, calmer and more focused. Having an allocated time was a positive as students could come and go quickly, Standard was higher.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student wellbeing, mental health, not in the best interest of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break – Students and teachers deserve a break at Easter, rest, holidays, wellbeing of both students and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers could be released from schools easily, teacher who previously couldn't examine can now do so, they are not

	teachers, mental health	missing class, organising a sub, leaving work, less stressful for those teachers who examine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on next step, study for written exams during Easter, proper break between orals and written papers, attend camps, workshops to prepare for written exams. Get the orals over with before the last term. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers feel under pressure to examine or to be available during Easter holidays to provide support thus adding to the workload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less disruption to classes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support – Teacher support, counsellors, pastoral care team, school staff, year head, familiar environment, peer support (Empathy, collegiality, help available before Easter) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support would be available during term time – from teachers, management, normal school day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier process for examiners, less traffic, quieter, less stressful environment, recording quality is better
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress Too much pressure during Easter, stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exams during Easter are too close together, in term time they would be more spaced – return to one exam per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier for school management to organise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orals too close together during Easter – 2/3/4 orals too close together, before Easter there is a week between them, international students doing 4 languages are disadvantaged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter too early some years – students wouldn't be ready, too close to mocks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't interfere with other subjects/ timetabling etc
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Much needed break for teachers (and oral examiners) – teachers feel obliged to be in attendance during Easter but have other commitments, teachers coming back from oral examinations are exhausted – teachers under pressure to take on examining roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and other staff need a break during Easter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't interfere with other subjects/ timetabling etc

due to cost of living crisis		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal access for all during term time, unfair to students in DEIS schools, without parental support, students with other commitments such as PT job, no access (transport) to orals during Easter, student absenteeism an issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examiners recruited during term time would have more experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased remuneration is a positive for examiners

This cohort of teachers, who have experience as examiners, focus very clearly on students and their wellbeing and the level of student support available in expressing a preference of an outside holiday time option. One of the key positives for the before Easter option is getting the orals out of the way to enable a rest during Easter and focus on the written components in the final term. The main advantage to after Easter is that students have more time to prepare for the exam. There is much clearer coherence against a during Easter option from both groups who are expressing a preference for term time and a key factor here for both groups is the pressure on students resulting from the condensed examination timeframe in the during the Easter break option. The need for a break for teachers and students is a rationale for both before and after Easter options. Some other views could also apply to either before or after options. One key message from these preferences is shared sense of clear advantages for the students that in both term time options. Many of these views are shared by both the student and parent sample. The preference for the during Easter option a more focused on how this option is easier to organise, and less disruptive in terms of schools work and lost teaching time when teachers are working away from their school as examiners. One advantage of an Easter break time option is a the impact it has on allowing for the creation of a quieter, less stressful exam environment for students. The lack of the normal school routines created a discrete examination space that allowed students to focus specifically on the exam, away from normal school life.

Teachers –Non-Examiners

Before Easter	After Easter	During Easter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easter is needed for break, rest, holiday, to rest and recharge, to destress, to have family time, to go on school trips, exchanges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time off/ Break/ Holiday to rest, recover, recuperate after a long hard term which is stressful and exhausting. Students and teachers have other commitments during Easter eg holidays, language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less disruption to classes, students not leaving classes, teachers not missing, teaching and learning not impacted as much

	courses, childcare commitments for teachers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellbeing – students wellbeing, mental health, a stressful year the students need a break as they are suffering from burn out. Teacher wellbeing also noted by a number – need for a break to recuperate- 11 days with no day off is not healthy for those examining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time to prepare over the Easter holidays and in school time to get the course covered, particularly when Easter falls early. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students more focused, quieter, calmer, less stressful environment, less disruption and so students are less anxious and less stressed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need to focus on written papers over Easter, for revision, that there is a separation between orals and written papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When exams are held during Easter there are too many exams in a short period, during term time they are more spaced out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers allowed out to examine
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support – teachers available during term time, normal school environment, support from other peers, school community, management, buses available, noted in particular for families under stress and vulnerable students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support is available during term time from other students and from teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and exam aide are available to focus and support the students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfair – The word unfair in regards to orals at Easter was used by a number of respondents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unfair to have exams during Easter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier for schools to manage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orals too close together during Easter – During term there is a week between languages instead of 1 or 2 days, gap is needed by students, too many exams in a short period 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental health and wellbeing are damaged when orals are during Easter 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System worked well previously – works well in terms of other deadlines, other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure on teachers to be available to support students during Easter 	

practical's happen during term time.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers unavailable to examine during Easter due to other commitments, childcare issues • Teachers feel compelled to attend school during Easter to support students without being paid. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers available during term to facilitate the examiner 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance issues during Easter, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absenteeism an issue during Easter 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last term is too busy, needs to be before easter 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost saving measure from Department, 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was a Covid measure that was supposed to be temporary, 		

The key message from this set of data is the similarity between both cohort of teachers with respect to their views on the timing of the oral exams. Since both cohorts are in agreement and both share similar views on the timing, a shared view that emerges that, with the exception of a quieter calmer environment of the students during the Easter break option, the **terms times options are optimal for students** in terms of support etc and the Easter **break time options are better for the school** and the overall organisation of the examinations. The issue of a condensed exam period during easter emerges again from the data and the focus in this cohort of the lack of fairness of a Easter break option is interesting and was not a factor for those teachers with experience as examiners.