



Coronavirus  
**COVID-19**



Riátas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

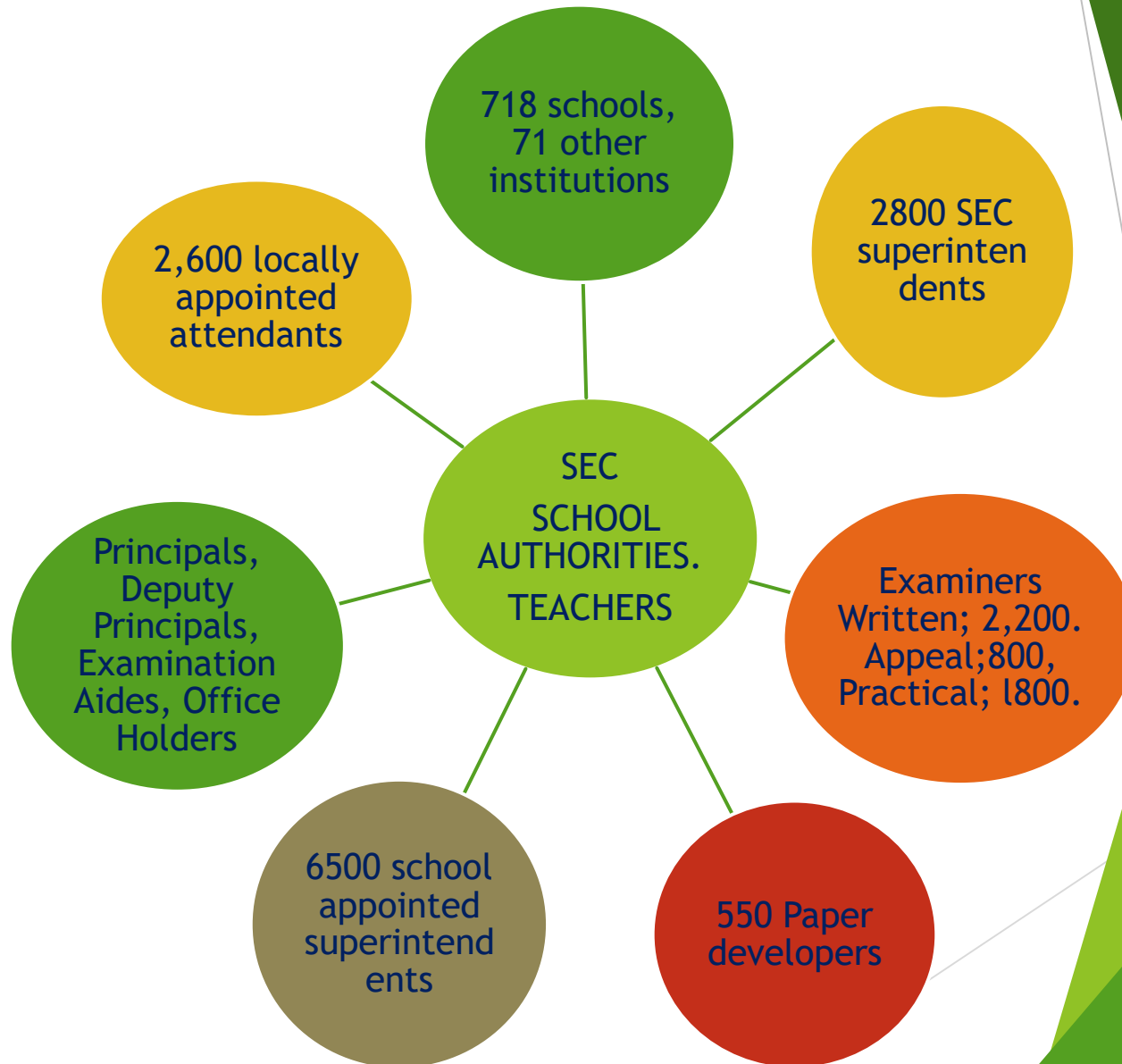


# Delivering the 2020 Leaving Certificate Examinations



**Advisory Group on Contingency Planning**  
**01/05/2020**

# The Leaving Certificate Network



# “As Close to Normal as Possible”

- ▶ Core Focus of SEC - To develop a model that will allow the 2020 Leaving Certificate to proceed in schools
- ▶ To protect the health and safety of students and all others involved in the arrangements - superintendents, school staff - teachers, SNAs, school management - exam attendants.
- ▶ To manage any threats to security and integrity arising from these new arrangements.

# Key Assumptions

- ▶ Public health authorities advise that it is safe to re-open schools.
- ▶ It is safe to conduct the examinations subject to the protective measures proposed.
- ▶ Opportunities for students to congregate must be severely curtailed at all times.

# Public Health Advice - Specific Measures

- ▶ Social distancing - 2 metres (6.5 feet). Before, During, Between, and After examinations. From when the student leaves home to when they return.
- ▶ No attendance by anyone who is ill; isolating; showing any respiratory symptoms.
- ▶ Hygiene and Sanitation

Other Measures that might be Necessary

Possibility of time limits in the exam centre

Taking temperatures at school; wearing face coverings

# Responsibility for Health and Safety

- ▶ Boards of Management. Education and Training Boards
  - ▶ Students
  - ▶ Employees
  - ▶ Those directly affected by work activities
  - ▶ Visitors to the school
  - ▶ Includes at examination time
- ▶ State Examinations Commission
  - ▶ Superintendents
  - ▶ Changing work patterns to ensure the delivery of the examinations does not in any way compromise the health and safety of others

# Towards a Model of Exams Delivery

1. Revised Timetable
2. Social Distancing Measures
  - Before - getting to school
  - Before, after and between examinations
  - During the Examinations
  - The Impact on Superintending including exam paper custody and security
  - Impact on students with additional needs
3. Ensuring non attendance by anyone at risk of Covid-19
4. Hygiene and Sanitation
5. Marking the Examinations
6. Questions and Challenges for Consideration and Reflection

# 1. Revised Exam Timetable

	Start Date	LCA Days	LCA End	LC Days	LC End	Results	Appeals
<b>Timetable 1. As is</b>	Wed 29 July	8 days	7 Aug	16 Days	19 Aug	6 Oct	10 Nov
<b>Timetable 2. One per day</b>	Wed 29 July	15 Days	14 Aug	32 Days	5 Sept	27 Oct	2 Dec

Both timetables incorporate the terminal examinations in May

Timetable 1. Uses August Bank Holiday

Timetable 2. Uses August Bank Holiday and Saturdays



## 2. Social Distancing - Before, During, After and Between Exams

# Before - Getting to School

Public health advice may be that students do not use school transport to get to the exams and public transport may be limited.

30% of students rely on bus transport to get to school. Average distance from home to secondary school;

- ▶ Nationally 3.8 Km.
- ▶ Galway city 1.7 km
- ▶ Galway county 6.5 km.
- ▶ Donegal 6.8km
- ▶ Dublin city 0.9km.

Students reliant on bus transport will need alternative transport over a potentially protracted exam period.

Some will be able to rely on parents. Distances mean that walking or cycling may not be viable alternatives.

Impact on rural students, disadvantaged students, those lacking parental support.

# Examination Centres

- ▶ 2300 LC Centres for 61,000 students. 4,600 special centres for 7,700 students
- ▶ Incl. JC 5200 main centres, 8900 special centres
- ▶ Space - 2.3m<sup>2</sup> per candidate. Max 40 LC candidates per centre.
- ▶ Single centre - a classroom. Multiple in a large area (gym or library etc.)
- ▶ No specific rules for special centres
- ▶ All centres- first five days of the examinations. Centres collapsed and students move to other centres in the school.
- ▶ All locally arranged - variety of approaches
- ▶ Max main centres 23.
- ▶ Max LC candidates - 514
  - ❑ 10 schools with 200-232 candidates
  - ❑ 40 with 150 - 199 candidates
  - ❑ 345 with 50 - 149 candidates
- ▶ Max Special Centres 43.
  - ❑ 100 schools with 20+
  - ❑ 300 school with 10 - 20.



# Arranging Centres

**Physical Distancing Rules Minimum of 4m<sup>2</sup>.** 10 Students in one centre in a classroom. 100 students plus in 4 centres in a PE Hall - in theory.

## Two Rules of Thumb proposed

### ▶ One Centre - One Room

- ▶ Max 10 students in a class room
- ▶ Max 40 students in a gym
- ▶ Mitigates demand for special centres. Getting students into centres more manageable.
- ▶ Increases centre footprint - accommodation required for main and special centres

### ▶ One Student - One Desk

- ▶ Same desk for the duration. No moving to other centres or for aural
- ▶ No collapsing of centres - centres remain open until the last exam for the last student
- ▶ Superintendents to be available for the duration

# Before - Avoiding Congregation

- ▶ Precise arrangements dictated by the internal and external environment of the school.
- ▶ Military Precision - queuing systems and movement patterns worked out in advance; 2 m distances marked out in the yard, or around the school perimeter. Routes to centres mapped out.
- ▶ Each student must know in advance;
  - ▶ Arrival time for each examination - Which gate they will use to enter the school - The outside location where they will line up and wait before going into the examinations - Which door to use to access their centre - The location of their centre - location of their desk within the centre - What to do when they leave the centre
- ▶ May require staggered start times for exams - Absolute Silence.
- ▶ Personnel required to manage assembly and escorting to and from the centre - Not the superintendent.
- ▶ Space required for managing students between exams for them to rest and eat observing strict physical distancing rules.

# During - Impact on Superintending

Exams integrity - Superintendents not assigned to own school or own town. Many travel outside own county or region.

Starts with Collecting the Box of Papers

Involves significant amount of movement in schools and physical Interactions -

- ▶ Collecting Papers each Day - at school or Garda Station
- ▶ Checking Papers - Superintendents Partnering system
- ▶ Giving papers and stationery to/collecting scripts from;
  - ▶ Special Centre Superintendents
  - ▶ Students

Attrition expected in current cohort due to age profile. Likely to be unwilling to travel.

Principals unlikely to want superintendents from other locations.

# During - New Model of Superintending

- ▶ Papers to be collected from post office or delivered to schools periodically/each day - No storage in Garda Stations. Secure storage needed locally, in the school.
- ▶ New role of Chief Superintendent to be SEC agent in schools working with the school authority -
  - ▶ Custody of papers
  - ▶ Responsible for paper distribution, script collection, posting to SEC
- ▶ All other superintendents to be locally appointed - main and special centres
- ▶ All superintendents - main and special - go to their centre and everything comes to them. Centre set up before students arrive - paper and stationery already on the desk.
- ▶ Script left on desk at end.
- ▶ Limits physical interaction and time in centre for students
- ▶ Changes to tried and tested model introduces significant risks

# Students with Additional Needs

- ▶ Time to get into centres for students with mobility issues or visual impairment
- ▶ Impact on students using extra time or Rest Breaks - if staggered start and end times. Even later finish times as a result. Overlaps between exams
- ▶ Setting up time for students using laptops/PCs and other equipment
- ▶ Increased levels of anxiety for students
  - ▶ with sensory, emotional or behavioural conditions
  - ▶ with learning, cognitive and processing difficulties

As the examinations are already a huge source of pressure
- ▶ Increased demands for special examination centres - possibly to unsustainable levels.



# 3. No Attendance by Anyone at risk of Covid-19

Absolutely no attendance by Students, Superintendents, Other School Staff who are;

- ▶ Ill
- ▶ Showing any symptoms - high temperature or any respiratory symptoms
- ▶ Self isolating or quarantining
- ▶ Living with a family member/person who ill, self isolating/quarantining, or symptomatic.
- ▶ Has been exposed to the virus

May require daily health self-declaration.

May require temperature checks or other testing.

# 4. Hygiene and Sanitation

- ▶ Virus may be spread to people who are nearby (within 2 metres)
- ▶ Current evidence suggests that COVID-19 may remain viable for hours to days on surfaces made from a variety of materials.
- ▶ Regular routine sanitising and cleaning will be required throughout the examination period to ensure that the venues are sanitary.
- ▶ Good governance and regulatory approach to health and safety
- ▶ SEC duty of care to superintendents to provide PPE (e.g. hand sanitiser, antiseptic wipes/sprays; masks, gloves).
- ▶ School authorities to put in place;
  - ▶ ready access to hand washing/hand sanitising facilities for students
  - ▶ a deep cleaning regimen before, between and after examinations each day
  - ▶ Any other measure to protect the health of staff and students in the school at examinations time (possibly a need for masks or visors, and gloves)

# 5. Marking the Examinations

- ▶ 2200 written examiners and 800 practical examiners
- ▶ Changes required to conferencing of examiners
- ▶ Potentially challenging to achieve quality standard setting to an acceptable level under new arrangements
- ▶ Examiners are teachers. Many are senior teachers/post holders in their schools.
- ▶ Marking requires full time attention
- ▶ Exams finish 19 Aug or 5 September - either date will impact the school system in the new school year
- ▶ Impact of the supervised viewing of marked scripts in schools
- ▶ Further teacher absence due to the appeals process.

# 6. Questions and Challenges - Consideration and Reflection

# Questions

- ▶ When can detailed planning be commenced - access to personnel, schools? Non school providers?
- ▶ Are the One Centre - One Room, One Student - One Desk, Rules of Thumb achievable in all contexts?
- ▶ Can demand for special centres be managed?
- ▶ What alternatives can be arranged so that all students get to school? What about the impact of the socio-economic divide - students in disadvantaged situations and those lacking parental support?
- ▶ Is it realistic to expect that students will not be meeting up before they get to school?
- ▶ Are the measures for avoiding congregation flashpoints achievable in all contexts? What happens if students are mingling or there is horseplay?
- ▶ Is the proposal to stagger start and end times achievable - maintaining silence; potential for very late start and end times?
- ▶ Is there a risk to exam paper security? Do all schools have the required facilities for secure storage?

# Questions.....contd.

- ▶ Are there enough willing personnel available for- superintending main centres, special centre superintending, supervising students? Over 16 days? Over 32 days?
- ▶ Are temperature checks and/or testing facilities required at schools? Should students wear masks?
- ▶ What happens if a student or superintendent falls ill after the examination has started? Can the session continue? What about remainder of the exams in that centre?
- ▶ Might any coughing or sneezing (e.g. hay fever) disrupt the session? What about the impact on anxiety levels?
- ▶ Providing opportunities for immunocompromised or at risk students - is this a realistic expectation?
- ▶ Will attendants be available or will they, or their parents, withdraw them from this role?
- ▶ What might the further impact be if public health advice is to limit the time spent in the examination centre each day?
- ▶ What arrangements will be possible for students unable to attend due to bereavement or illness ?

# Reflecting on the Challenges

- ▶ As Close to Normal as Possible is nothing close to normal.
  - ▶ Extremely challenging for students, school authorities and the SEC.
  - ▶ Challenge to deliver and sustain over a protracted time period - potential for diminishing attendance by students, superintendents and school staff.
  - ▶ Requires minute planning of all aspects for each student by school management based on local knowledge. A senior member of the school authority must be on hand each day, 16 or 32 days.
  - ▶ Requires a complete reengineering and reconfiguration of tried and tested methods for the secure distribution of exam papers to schools and students - minimises health risks but greatly increases security and integrity risks.
- Will increase levels of stress and anxiety for an already stressed student body.

